

**FAMILY** PLATFORM

**Existential Field 6:**  
**Transitions into Parenthood**  
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## **Working Reports**

Funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme and co-ordinated by Technical University Dortmund, FAMILYPLATFORM gathers a consortium of 12 organisations working together to articulate key questions about the family for the *European Social Science and Humanities Research Agenda 2012-2013*.

There are four key stages to the project. The first is to chart and review the major trends of comparative family research in the EU in 8 '*Existential Fields*' (EF). The second is to critically review existing research on the family, and the third is to build on our understanding of existing issues affecting families and predict future conditions and challenges facing them. The final stage is to bring the results and findings of the previous three stages together, and propose key scientific research questions about families to be tackled with future EU research funding.

This *Working Report* has been produced for the first stage of the project, and is part of a series of reports, as follows:

- EF1. Family Structures & Family Forms**
- EF2. a) Family Developmental Processes  
b) Transition into Parenthood**
- EF3. Major Trends of State Family Policies in Europe**
- EF4. a) Family and Living Environment  
b) Local Politics – Programmes and Best Practice Models**
- EF5. Patterns and Trends of Family Management in the European Union**
- EF6. a) Social Care and Social Services  
b) Development of Standards for Social Work and Social Care Services**
- EF7. Social Inequality and Diversity of Families**
- EF8. Media, Communication and Information Technologies in the European Family**
- CSO Civil Society Perspective: Three Case Studies**

## Contents

Working Reports .....	2
Abstract.....	4
Introduction: basic understanding of “transitions into parenthood” .....	5
A. Theoretical frameworks for comparison.....	8
B. Availability of studies focussing on negotiation and decision-making processes before and within transitions into parenthood (mostly in-depth studies) .....	13
1. Negotiation processes in couples about becoming parents: .....	14
2. Time use and time pressure as topics of negotiation .....	16
3. Inter-generational negotiation on transitions into parenthood.....	18
4. The meaning of social networks, friends – relevance of peers in early parenthood or first parenthood .....	19
5. The meaning of youth cultures as relevant symbolic frameworks for the decision-making processes of young parents .....	19
6. Early or postponed parenthood .....	19
7. Fathering and Fatherhoods – negotiating masculinities .....	22
8. Mothering and Motherhoods – negotiation femininities .....	23
Research gaps .....	24
C. Availability of studies focussing on an interplay of relevant strands of policies for young parents (mostly policy analysis) .....	26
Instead of research gaps: Outlook to Integrated Transition Policies as future challenges: .....	29
D. Availability of studies focussing on local/informal policies, initiatives and networks of young fathers, young mothers, young families (mostly in-depth studies) .....	31
1. Studies on informal policies:.....	32
2. Local policies.....	32
Research gaps .....	33
E. Availability of studies focussing on educational offers for young parents ..	34
1. Education/vocational training/higher education and parenthood .....	34
2. Research on educational offers for young parents with regard to parenting .....	35
Research (and policy) gaps:.....	36
F. Overall research gaps: recommendations for future research .....	37
G. View of expertise on key drivers of transitions into parenthood .....	40
References .....	41

## Abstract

This expertise provides an up-to-date review on new research literature and running studies on “transitions into parenthood” from a comparative perspective. It starts with a theoretical understanding of biographical transitions, characterised by reversibility, de-standardisation and re-standardisation, within which (non-reversible) transitions into parenthood have to be located. It then develops the concept of transition regimes as a heuristic framework for comparison. On the basis of these insights, it scans the panorama of studies focussing on negotiation and decision-making processes before and within transitions into parenthood, studies focussing on interplay of relevant strands of policies for young parents, studies focussing on local and informal policies, and studies focussing on educational offers for young parents.

Of course, comparative statistical data is the important and indispensable backbone: without knowing about the living and working conditions of young parents in Europe, about the structure of households and kin networks, about the availability of important resources such as childcare facilities and time use and many other aspects, this research strand would lose its ground. Therefore, an overview outlining sources of statistical data on a European level have been included in the annex of this expertise. The overview summarises what kind of data is relevant and available to “transitions into parenthood”, what level of comparability is achieved and which aspects are already covered by EU-funded research.

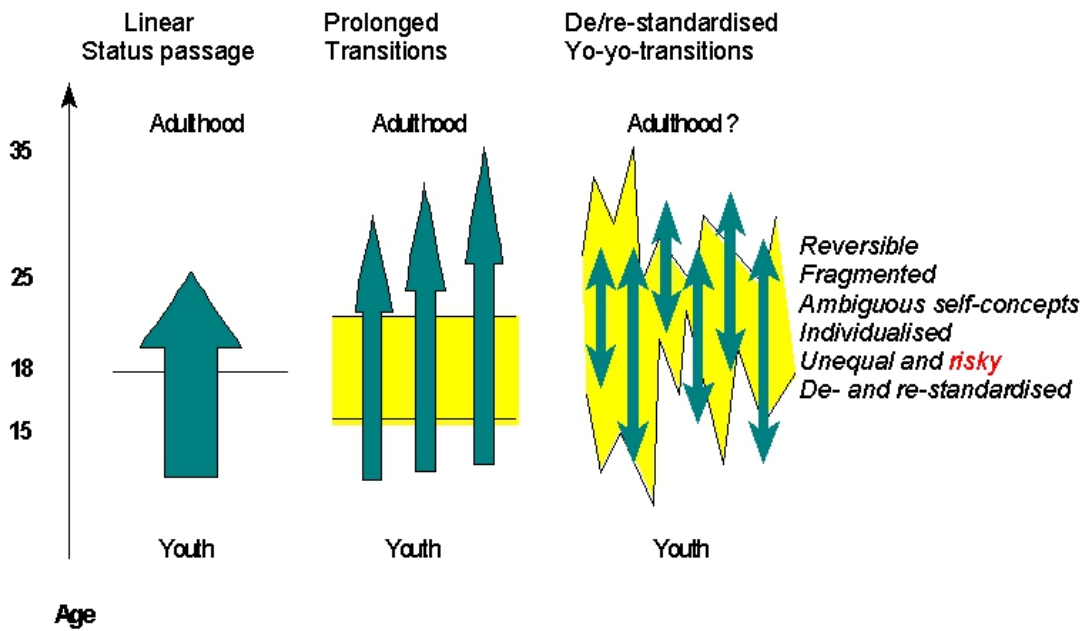
What is most striking is that although a lot of research has been done, there is so much of a need for more. Most importantly, as far as young parents are concerned, the interrelatedness between simultaneous yet different transitions and trajectories has to be studied. This would include time management, coping with planning paradoxes and negotiation processes in couples and among generations. Quantitative *and* qualitative approaches are needed, possibly in a process-oriented, longitudinal perspective that allows for the reconstruction of decision-making processes of individuals and couples, situated within multifaceted contexts. A lot of research is still needed on a comparative level, especially when we consider (old and new) intersecting social inequalities, namely regarding processes of (un)doing gender and transnationality.

As important, however, is a need for theoretical framing: the praxeological concept of “doing family” (Jurczyk) is stressing an *agency perspective* on transitions into parenthood – agency seen as a socially contextualised and temporally embedded ability to decide upon and perform the practices of everyday life (see Walther *et al.*, 2009). Whereas agency points to the agential drivers of social change, the young parents themselves, the concept of capabilities (Sen) as a real availability of opportunities points to drivers on a political and economic level, and to the necessity to create real options for (young) people in order to be a family according to their needs and ideals.

## Introduction: basic understanding of “transitions into parenthood”

“Transitions into parenthood” have to be regarded as an integral component of the general process of transition that young people go through in late modern societies. Transitions into parenthood are interrelated and intertwined with all the other transitional processes young people have to cope with in the same phase of life, most importantly, the highly demanding transition from school to work. The simultaneity of all these transitions, provokes a widespread sense of frantic rush and generates an enormous amount of stress. It is a period full of tension and contradictions, not just in terms of the use of time and the demand for adaptability, flexibility and mobility, but also in terms of gender construction and the achievement of autonomy towards parents. Such feelings - along with constituting warning signs that need to be addressed concretely - offer insights into the decision-making processes and coping strategies that young mothers and fathers deploy to deal with the tensions inherent to their new living conditions, many of which stem from the contradictions between their newly acquired role as parents and the demands of their educational and work environment.

This approach stems from the work that has been conducted on so-called “yo-yo” transitions (EGRIS, 2001): the potentially reversible (hence, metaphorically “yo-yo”) transitions that unfold in respect of the multiplicity of interlacing “strands” that in late modernity constitute the path to adulthood. Today young people find themselves having to negotiate transitional processes that are made up of a highly complex mixture of dependence and autonomy, not the least problematic aspect of which is a pervasive, underlying, ineluctable tendency for the processes themselves to be subject to reversal. This *reversibility* is characteristic for all the various aspects of the condition of young people: their transition from school to work (see Walther *et al.*, 2006), their relations with their family of origin (Biggart & Walther, 2006; Stauber & du Bois-Reymond, 2006), also with regard to leaving or (ever longer) staying (see Buber & Neuwirth, 2009), the development of their life styles, their emotional life and, last but not least, their life plans and their own family-building.



(Walther et al. 2006)

The adoption of the concept of “yo-yo” transitions offers insights into a series of important questions: how transitions into parenthood reflect the complexity of young people’s condition (the planning situation, insecurity in the transition from school to work and, above all, the multitude of contradictions between the various transition strands – see Leccardi & Ruspini, 2006); and crucially, if so, how the transition into parenthood brings the continual “yo-yo” movement to some sort of resting point within adulthood, or if the “yo-yo” movement - the insecurity, the contradictions, the reversibility - continues towards another form at a different level of the life-course.

Parenthood, in contrast to other transitional processes such as those relating to work, personal relationships, housing, etc., is distinguished by an indisputable *irreversibility*: becoming a mother or father inevitably involves becoming a parent until the end of one’s life (even after one’s child has her/himself become a parent). This characteristic as such, plays a fundamental role not just in the construction of identities but also in the construction of representations of reality and societal images of (good) parenthood. Thus, the link between reversibility (of life choices) and irreversibility (of parenthood) generates a considerable amount of ambivalence which young parents have to cope with. When investigating the ramifications of this ambivalence, it is important that young people themselves are considered as *agents* who not only react to social expectations and pressures but who also respond to them in an active and engaged way. It is in their agency, i.e. in the strategies and solutions that they themselves generate, that we expect to identify instances of social change, phenomena which might then be analysed in terms of cultural practices and representations as well as (new) learning obligations.

This expertise will provide an up-to-date review on new research literature and running studies on “transitions into parenthood” in a comparative

perspective. Of course, comparative statistical data are an important and indispensable basic requirement for social research on “transitions into parenthood”. Without knowing about the living and working conditions of young parents in Europe, about the structure of households and networks, about the availability of important resources such as childcare facilities and time use (and many more aspects,) this research strand would lose its ground. Therefore, an overview of sources of statistical data on a European level has been included in the annex to this report<sup>1</sup>. It outlines which kind of data is relevant for “transitions into parenthood”, what level of comparability is achieved and which aspects are already covered by EU-funded research (partly with very useful data compilations). However, the following pages will focus on those issues which also have been identified as “blind spots” within the thematic report on “Transitions into parenthood” from the FP6 project *UP2YOUTH – Youth as Actor of Social Change* (Bois-Reymond *et al.*, 2008).

These are:

- A. Theoretical frameworks for comparison;
- B. The availability of studies focussing on negotiation and decision-making processes before and within transitions into parenthood (mostly in-depth studies);
- C. The availability of studies focussing on an interplay of relevant strands of policies for young parents (mostly policy analysis);
- D. The availability of studies focussing on local/informal policies, initiatives and networks of young fathers, young mothers, young families (mostly in-depth studies);
- E. The availability of studies focussing on educational options for young parents.

In this expertise each of the chapters will be introduced with consideration of the relevance of the respective aspect for “transitions into parenthood”, followed by dimensions which would be important and need to be considered by research, and by an overview in how far these dimensions are already covered by research. Each chapter will end with a rough outline of research gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> The Annex to this report is available upon request to the author at [barbara.stauber@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:barbara.stauber@uni-tuebingen.de).

## A. Theoretical frameworks for comparison

The rationale of this sub-chapter is that each comparative work needs to develop a comparative framework for a repeatedly large body of information. With regard to this, an insight into the interrelatedness of different thematic issues not only on the level of subjective experience but also on a policy level is crucial.

Considering transitions into adulthood - and also transitions into parenthood - the EGRIS network developed a framework which takes the following into account:

- Structures of welfare in terms of state versus family responsibilities and the conditions and rules of individual access (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gallie & Paugam, 2000);
- Structures of education and training, especially in terms of the extent to which school systems allocate pupils to different educational pathways with unequal outcomes (stratification) (Allmendinger, 1989; Lasonen & Young, 1998; Shavit & Müller, 1998);
- Structures of labour markets and labour market entry – “open” versus “closed” – and the degree of flexibility regarding transitions within labour markets and careers (Smyth *et al.*, 2001; Müller & Gangl, 2003);
- Policies against youth unemployment (resulting from the relationship between education and training, welfare and labour market structures), including different explanations for youth unemployment as well as the different ways of interpreting “disadvantaged youth” as a structural phenomenon, resulting from labour market segmentation or as individual deficit (Walther, Stauber *et al.*, 2002; McNeish & Loncle, 2003; Walther & Pohl, 2005; Walther *et al.*, 2006; Pohl & Walther, 2007);
- Mechanisms of doing gender, which are a cross-cutting dimension allocating young men and women to the same or to different trajectories that in turn can be of equal or unequal status and perspective (Sainsbury, 1999);
- The dominant institutional representations of youth and the respective institutional demands and expectations addressed to young people (IARD, 2001; Walther, 2006);
- Levels and patterns of public expenditure for education, active labour market policy, family and children, which provide different possibilities for implementing transition infrastructure while also representing different levels of recognition of young people as members (and resources) of societies (Walther & Pohl, 2005);
- Different meanings and respective implementation of activation revealing both convergence and path dependency under conditions of global social change in general and European integration in particular (Lødemel & Trickey, 2001; van Berkel & Hornemann Møller, 2002; Harsløf, 2005; Pohl & Walther, 2007).



All these issues are regulating youth transitions. They have been considered by a model of *transition regimes* which distinguishes the ways in which socio-economic, institutional and cultural structures contribute to different “normalities” of being young and growing up (regulations and normalities). The model has been developed from typologies of welfare regimes of Esping-Andersen (1990) and Gallie & Paugam (2000) which distinguish social-democratic/universalistic, conservative/corporatist/employment-centred, liberal, and Mediterranean/sub-protective types of welfare states. In principle, the transition regimes stick to this typology but add a cluster of post-socialist countries. However, these countries are so different in their economic and welfare structures and the directions in which they develop (see for the differences of childcare patterns Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008), that they do not fit into one regime-cluster.

We therefore distinguish:

- The *liberal* transition regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries is best characterised by the notion of individual responsibility in which young people without work face major pressure to enter the workforce. Youth is regarded as a basically transitory life phase which should be turned into economic independence as soon as possible. The labour market is structured by a high degree of flexibility. While this provides multiple entry options it also implies a high level of insecurity. Although female employment is high, it tends to be of part-time nature and in low-skilled or unskilled service occupations. In the context of highly individualising policies young people face considerable risks of social exclusion (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).
- The *universalistic* transition regime of the Nordic countries is based on a comprehensive education system, in which general and vocational education is largely integrated and reflects the individualisation of life courses. Youth is first of all associated with individual personal development providing young people a status of “citizens in education”. This is reflected by an education allowance for all who are over 18 and still in the education system which contributes to a partial independence from their families. Also, in labour market oriented activation policies, individual choice is rather broad to secure individual motivation. Gendered career opportunities are highly balanced due to the integration of general and vocational education, the broad relevance of the public employment sector and the availability of child care (Bechmann Jensen & Mørch-Hejl, 2001; Os & Mørch, 2001).
- The Mediterranean countries transition regimes are *sub-protective* in a double sense. Due to a lack of reliable training pathways into the labour market, transitions often involve a waiting phase until the mid thirties, with unequal outcomes. As they are not entitled to any kind of social benefits, young men and women depend to a large extent on their families who are referred to as “social amortisator” for the socio-political vacuum. Long family dependency indicates that youth does not have a formal status and place in society – with consequences ranging from the positive pole of a lot of freedom for young people living with their parents to the quite negative pole of “forced harmony” (Leccardi *et*

- The *employment-centred regimes* of continental countries is characterised by a differentiated (and partly – or even highly – selective) school system connected to a rigidly standardised and gendered system of vocational training. Different tracks separate pupils from age ten or twelve according to performance. The dominant expectation towards youth is to socialise for a set occupational and social position – through training. This is reflected through the provision of a two-tiered division of social security, favouring those who have already been in regular training or employment, while others are entitled to stigmatised social assistance. This also accounts for those who fail to enter regular vocational training. They are referred to as “disadvantaged” from a deficit-oriented perspective and consequently, are channelled into pre-vocational measures, governed by the objective “first of all, they need to learn to know what work means”, in other terms: adaptation, reduction of aspiration, holding out.

It is obvious that this picture is limited inasmuch as it represents the so-called Western world. However, the pace of transformation and the diverse mixtures between an apparently uniform past and increasing heterogeneity do not allow for quick solutions such as subsuming Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries under the existing model or creating one post-socialist regime type.

- The *post-socialist* countries at first sight appear rather close to the sub-protective welfare states with public structures being experienced as totally unreliable. Yet differentiation is needed in a double sense: first, an increasingly sub-protective presence is still related to the (socialist) past in which life courses were structured in a mixture of a universalistic guarantee of social positions and an employment-centred logic (as these social positions were tied to employment, to which everyone was entitled and respectively obliged). Female employment was high and secured by availability of child care. According to Pascal and Manning (2000) the significant decline in this regard makes women the losers of transformation, at least as some countries are concerned, although high youth unemployment in some CEE countries does not differ significantly according to gender. A particularity is the situation of the Roma, especially in countries like Slovakia or Romania, who suffer from discrimination, social exclusion and poverty. According to Kovacheva (2001), one particular feature of youth transitions is that life conditions either leap from pre-modern constellations into post-modern fragmented ones, or, are a mixture of both” (Walther *et al.*, 2009: 19/20).

The term of regime refers to the power that such constellations have inasmuch as they explain both the rationales of institutions and policies but

also serve as markers of individuals' biographical orientation. A regime typology should not be misunderstood as descriptive. It clusters different groups of national transition systems which are similar in their *Gestalt* of constructing youth and youth transitions (Kaufmann, 2003). This implies that structural and institutional details may diverge considerably within one regime type while contributing to a similar rationale in regulating youth transitions<sup>2</sup>.

The topic of transitions into parenthood certainly has to include more specific dimensions: "Scholars dealing with gender relations have criticised the gender neutrality of the original welfare typology: Pfau-Effinger (1996) introduces her concept of gender arrangements, and later introduces care arrangements (Pfau-Effinger & Geissler, 2005); Walby (2004) talks about gender regimes; Anttonen & Sipilä (1996) introduce care regimes; and Bettino & Platenga (2004) and Lewis & Ostner discuss breadwinner-models (Lewis, 2006/2007). For a broad overview of work-care-typologies see Vassilev & Wallace (2007). Scholars preferring care regimes clustered countries on the basis of how responsibility for caring is organised in a given society between family, state and the market, which may or may not converge with the original welfare typology (Jönsson, 2003; Kay, 2003; Wallace, 2003; Pfau-Effinger, 2005). For example, Ackers (2003) has reason to place France and Sweden in one cluster because both have a closely integrated family and employment policy, but for another research interest these two countries would not be in one category. Kotowska (2004), discussing demographic and family trends in the CEE countries, makes again a different grouping while Georgas *et al.* (2004), in their 33-country research on family values, come to four clusters which overlap with the Esping-Andersen *et al.* typology, i.e., Western European countries, Eastern European and Socialist countries, Southern European countries, and Scandinavian countries, including the Netherlands (Kremer, 2007: 241): "Welfare state analysis is based on inadequate assumptions about the way mothers decide how much to work or to provide care".

The WORKCARE project on Work, Care and Welfare in Europe (Gstrein, *et al.*, 2007) on the basis of a macro EU country grouping resulted in four macro work-care country groups, plus the group "countries in between" and "outliers". Variables are female employment rates, gender gaps in employment, female part-time rates, gender gaps in part-time employment, childcare participation rates for 3, 4 and 5 year olds, total fertility rates, and share of the young population (0-14). The difficulties of groupings are testimony for the almost impossible task to construct coherent clusters with all important factors." (Bois-Reymond *et al.*, 2008: 10ff.).

Thus, one should be pragmatic and provisionally stick to the concept of transition regimes, which at least considers some crucial dimensions of the situation of young people – and enlarge it by issues relevant for transitions

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<sup>2</sup> The model has evolved over a series of studies on youth transitions with different methodological approaches (involving the analysis of institutional arrangements, document analysis of policy programmes, statistical analysis, expert interviews, case studies of projects for disadvantaged youth, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young people across different educational levels as well as with parents). See McNeish & Loncle, 2003; Walther & Pohl, 2005; Walther, 2006; Walther *et al.*, 2006; Pohl & Walther, 2007).

into parenthood. Besides the dominant elements in the composition of the welfare mix these are:

- care issues, which are not only statistics, but also *discourses*;
- the whole sector of childcare facilities;
- the dominant breadwinner model (also with regard to dominant *discourses*);
- flexibility of paid work;
- the dominant model of reconciliation and respective problems;
- parental leaves with a focus on leave options for fathers;
- the institutional level of gender equity. The latter is standing here as a combined indicator including the official level of institutionalised gender mainstreaming, i.e. the participation of women in all relevant societal fields, including paid work, politics, and official (public) cultural fields.

In *UP2YOUTH*, in order not to compare “loose” data, the comparative work in the field has been framed by combined indicators, which are referring to the above regime typologies, such as:

- Transition regime model;
- Welfare mix (above all with regard to the issue of child care);
- Dominant breadwinner model;
- Dominant family model;
- Model of reconciliation.

## **B. Availability of studies focussing on negotiation and decision-making processes before and within transitions into parenthood (mostly in-depth studies)**

Why is negotiation and decision-making so important for research on transitions into parenthood? Because it reveals that transitions into parenthood cannot be solely characterised as choices resulting from values and attitudes, nor as mere strategies for coping with structural conditions, but rather as young women's and men's complex engagement in shaping an important part of their lives (see Burkart, 2002).

Whereas a lot of youth research focuses on both the inputs for decision-making processes, which is documented by an over-representation of value studies and studies on attitudes of young people, and on the outcomes of such decision-making processes in terms of observable transition steps, the crucial part between input and outcome - the decision-making processes themselves - are still a black box. The agential aspects of transitions into parenthood are located exactly in the middle of this "in-between".

Looking at agency as procedural and temporally embedded within the present, past and future constitutes an effective tool to analyse how each individual parent in her/his own distinctive manner reworks past experiences (her/his own biographical experiences as well as normalities in relation to which she/he has to position herself/himself), elaborates future prospects (conceptions about how to live life as a young woman or man, about how to bring together all the various strands of family, career, (diverging) interests, etc., and about how to shape partnership, friendship, intergenerational relationships, etc.) and confronts the challenges of the present – including all the processes of negotiation that are necessary today (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Pohl *et al.*, 2007). These are negotiations with partners, with peers, with neighbours and last, but by no means least, with one's own parents, at least to the extent that they are available as potential child-carers and supporters. Issues to be confronted here most often deal with questions of "doing gender": the need to cope with gender-specific, existential demands; the invention of femininities and masculinities and motherhoods and fatherhoods; and the construction of family life from a subjective point of view.

What therefore would be relevant as dimensions for research on decision-making processes are the negotiation processes in couples around parenthood (around becoming parents as well as around being parents, including discrepancies between their original plans of parenting among partners and later realities), negotiation processes within an extended family, and negotiations about care issues. Time as a scarce resource is a crucial issue of negotiation, and so is the temporal dimension of life (planning-paradox, insecurities, etc.). As results of decision-making processes – the phenomenon of teenage-pregnancy as well as the postponement of parenthood, fatherhood as well as motherhood, youth cultural issues as

relevant symbolic frameworks for the decision-making processes of young parents would also be relevant.

For this review, far less than a comprehensive overview of available new studies can be given – therefore, the suggestion would be to regard this report as a starting point and to collect further studies according to the following scheme which has been applied in the appendix to this expertise:

Title of the study:
Authors:
(if completed): date of publication:
Relevance for Transitions into parenthood:
Research Question(s):
Methodology (Survey, secondary analysis, qualitative data, sample size):
Status (running, date for completion):
Results:
Publication(s):

## **1. Negotiation processes in couples about becoming parents:**

Only a few studies can be found on decision making processes. There is one interesting study from the Swedish context (Bergnéhr, 2008), which by a qualitative research design (focus group approach) has explored how young Swedish adults talk about intimate relationships and the transition to parenthood. Interestingly, a relevant part of the issues the partners are concerned with never would show up on the agenda of dominant discourses: issues such as the development of their sexual life after the birth of a child, issues such as bodily attractiveness, concerns on fecundity related with the question of age, etc.

Disa Bergnéhr's study stems from the research context of Eva Bernhardt, who together with Frances Goldscheider published an analysis of Swedish panel survey data on attitudes toward parenthood among young adults aged 22-30 in 1999, many of whom had become parents by a second wave of data collection in 2003 (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2006). The interesting result was that even in a country like Sweden, negotiating shared parenthood is still sufficiently difficult in that it depresses fertility, now too because of its impact on men.

In Germany, the Pairfam "Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics" (DFG-focus programme 1161) is carried out as a representative panel study for analysing close relationships and family relations in Germany. The first wave was conducted in 2008/2009 as a nationwide random sample

of 12,000 people which covered three age cohorts in equal groups (15-17, 25-27, and 35-37). In the first wave, the anchor person along with their partners, were interviewed. From the second wave onwards, parents and children of the anchor person complete the different perspectives on family dynamics. As the study applies to multidisciplinary standards, the aim is for a close and intense co-operation between psychology, economics and sociology.

The aim of analysing the conditions of childlessness and family formation and enlargement is split up into several sub-questions. Regarding decision-making processes, the following Pairfam sub-topics are especially relevant:

1. The Dynamics of the wish for children, whereby the project aims to differentiate between the “ideal” and the “realistic” desire to have children: there is a high plausibility for the assumption that the ideal number of children people want to have is rather stable over the life course, while the number of children people expect to have realistically is reduced when people face difficult conditions, e.g. in reconciling work and family. However, it is also possible that the ideal wish for children changes over time, e. g. due to processes of developmental regulation.
2. Timing of decisions about parenthood during the life course – here, Pairfam aims to highlight several important aspects such as interdependency of fertility decisions and other domains of the life course and Biographical uncertainty and decision to parenthood: “The results on the meaning of unemployment and other situations of biographical uncertainty are contradictions. Nevertheless, we assume that the effects of economic uncertainty on fertility decisions differ according to biographical circumstances. Thus we will especially analyse in which ways economic uncertainty (e. g. loss of income) interacts with educational level, social and institutional context factors and personal goals or life style preferences, respectively”<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding negotiation processes in young parenting couples, also Aim 4 of Pairfam on “Fertility decisions in the context of partnership” is relevant. Here, the existence but also the kind and the quality of partnership will be investigated in more detail. Besides, we will establish dyadic analysis, which can highlight how the orientations and behaviour of both partners interact with each other. With this kind of analysis we can answer to what extent the partners agree according to the number and the timing of births and what the consequences are if the partners do not (fully) agree? Other important questions are, does the quality of partnership play a role in family formation and enlargement? and does the male or the female partner have the biggest influence on the decision for parenthood?<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the Pairfam project follows a quantitative survey approach, there are also promising qualitative projects on the issue, how the division of housework

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from: <http://www.pairfam.uni-bremen.de/index.php?id=2&L=1>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.pairfam.uni-bremen.de/index.php?id=2&L=1>.

changes over the course of relationships. One recent study is the high-ranking (German Research Foundation) 2-year-project of the Ifb (Bavarian state institute for family research): The Household Division of Domestic Labor as a Process<sup>5</sup> (12/2008 - 11/2010), which pursues this topic by a qualitative longitudinal data set consists of 14 couples near the transition to parenthood, which first have been interviewed during the pregnancy. The couples were asked about their current private and occupational situation, about previous developments since the formation of the couple and about plans and wishes with regard to the combination of professional life, housework and childcare. Six months after the birth, the couples were interviewed again, but with an additional topic regarding the actual development and implementation of their expectations concerning division of household labour and childcare, combination of family and employment, hindering and supporting impacts as well as individual perceptions of their current situation. The spouses were interviewed separately in both waves, using techniques of qualitative interviewing.

In the Netherlands, Stephanie Wiesmann and others have carried out a qualitative study of 31 Dutch couples, by which they try to understand why the division of paid and unpaid work between women and men remains stubbornly unequal, despite women's gains in the workplace and rising educational levels. The study expands on other research by documenting daily implicit and explicit decision-making about the division of paid and domestic work by couples during a unique period of their lives: the formative years of their relationship, until they are expecting their first child (Wiesmann *et al.*, 2008). This study is also interesting because it points out the task of active and explicit negotiation among partners as an important prerequisite for more equal share of paid and unpaid work.

One of the older but still important longitudinal studies is the German study of Wassilios Fthenakis and colleagues (Fthenakis *et al.*, 2002), focussing on the development in 175 parental couples from pregnancy to 3 years after the birth of the first child. This study could show, how original ideas on partnership on how to manage parenting is undermined by the reality of parenting, above all by the (German) reality of a male breadwinner system with scarce part-time-options for men.

Negotiation processes are also dealt with in one strand of the Transition study (Nilsen & Brannen, 2005), based on interviews carried out with parents and contextualised by case studies on working places in seven European countries (see project description above, section A2). Also in this study, the links between topics of negotiation and how these transitions into parenthood are structured by labour markets and other regime-related issues are evident.

## **2. Time use and time pressure as topics of negotiation**

As *time* is a crucial issue of negotiation, some studies deal with coping with scarce time and with the blurred boundaries between work and family life. As

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.ifb.bayern.de/forschung/inapf-en.html>.



a group of researchers who have been immersed in this subject for years, Karin Jurczyk and colleagues have published a new study on the challenges which emerge in working and private life due to the blurring of their boundaries. The case study is based on an approach in two professional sectors: retail trade and the movie/TV-industry (Jurczyk *et al.*, 2009). This study contrasts the euphemistic connotation of “work-life-balance”, and shows through semi-structured interviews with 62 families (different family constellations, lone mothers/fathers included), in east and west Germany how topics such as organisation of everyday life, working hours, and childrens’ daily lives are dealt with. The study is not specifically directed towards the issue of transitions into parenthood, but relevant with regard to young parents. Some segments of the study consider the labour market with fixed-term contracts and a high level of flexibility, which are more and more characteristic for the entry level of young people in the labour market. It is theoretically relevant because of its high gender-sensitivity, because of an agency-perspective on “being a family” and because it points to late modern challenges regarding an interwoven structure of work-family.

Time-use always has a strong gender dimension. This is explicitly considered in the study of Vera Dyck and Kerry Daly (Dyck & Daly, 2006), who have focussed on the relationship negotiations within families – an issue that is poorly considered in time use literature. The authors were particularly interested in the way men in families negotiate couple time with their partners, and have looked at the role that men play in the negotiation of couple time in analysing 14 dual earner couples with young children (3-12 years old). The study shows that in creating couple time, participants face many challenges including uncertain social support, the stressful demands of daily living, unclear couple time preferences and meanings, and ambivalence regarding their desire for traditional courtship in the context of egalitarian parenting. Fathers play an important role in instigating couple time whereas mothers play a significant role in its implementation; the discussion also explores various power dynamics at play in this ‘co-construction’ of couple time.

The comprehensive and longitudinal “Timescape-study” (*Work and Family Lives: The Changing Experiences of Young Families*) aims to explore the ways in which families reconcile their work and family lives over time by drawing on the changing experiences and perceptions of a sample of ten low-income and ten affluent families with children of primary school age. *Timescapes* is the first major qualitative longitudinal study to be funded in the United Kingdom. Its research questions are: How do parents and children understand, negotiate and reconcile the timetables and rhythms of their work and family lives and what does this mean for their relationships and identities over time? How might processes of negotiation and individual family members’ contributions to the family-work project be understood within the moral discursive contexts of parenting and childhood and what are the tensions that may exist between family practices and such discourses? What are the macro- and micro-level drivers of change within the family-work project and how do these processes interact with one another and become manifest in children’s and parents’ lives? In focus are relationships with significant others: parents, grandparents, siblings, children, partners, friends

and lovers. An innovative set of qualitative methods is used by 'walking alongside' people to document their growing up, relationships, having children, living in families and growing older, including in-depth interviews, oral narratives, photographs and other visual documents which are collected for the *Timescapes* archive and which will be available for current and future generations of researchers to reuse this resource<sup>6</sup>.

The issues of (time) pressure and the dimension of stress are also dealt with in a few studies (Borchard *et al.*, 2008). One highlight is a Swedish study (Moller *et al.*, 2008) which, from a sample of 251 men and women, clearly showed that in a society with a high level of equality between men and women, household work and stress appeared to be indicators of relationship happiness for new parents. The more general issue of biographical insecurity and sketching life plans within an uncertain future is discussed in the work of Julia Brannen and Ann Nilsen (2002 & 2007). It is based on empirical data from the *Transition* project, and most prominently in Carmen Leccardi's theorising (e.g. Leccardi, 2005), based on empirical work carried out in Calabria in the 1990s and on the results of a recently concluded Italian research on the subject of contemporary transformations of temporality among young people.

*Research gaps* are the most prominent question; if different demands and challenges on different strands of biographical transitions are to be coped with simultaneously, which interferences and contradictions emerge? And to what extent are mechanisms of being a certain gender (re-)produced? What are the consequences of considerable changes within the time-structure of transitions into parenthood (recursive patterns, yoyo's)? How do young people cope with the fact that this is diametrically contrasting to the demand of "planning one's life", how do they cope with the "Paradox of Planning"? What does the 'rush-hour of life' mean for women and men? What would the options be to choke its velocity? How is the gendered topic of family foundation intermingled with the gendered topic of transitions into work? What are alternative gender concepts in young women and men? Would more explicit negotiation among partners about these difficult topics be an educational task for young parents?

### **3. Inter-generational negotiation on transitions into parenthood**

A big research gap can also be identified in negotiation processes on transitions into parenthood within an extended family context (inter-generational negotiation). The only research strand found on intergenerational relationships and material and non-material transfers between generations was in the Pairfam-context.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/work-family-lives.php>.

#### **4. The meaning of social networks, friends – relevance of peers in early parenthood or first parenthood**

Also regarding the meaning of social networks, much more research is needed. Again, one strand on social embeddedness of intimate relationships and family dynamics is to be found in the Pairfam project (see Aim 7 -The meaning of social networks: “According to the effects of social networks on the decision for parenthood we have to differentiate between different dimensions. The first questions are, to what extent is the decision for or against children influenced by people in the social network and which people in the network (parents, friends, relatives) exercise the most influence. In addition we want to investigate in which ways the people in the network affect fertility decisions: through family related norms or resources or role models or social learning or ‘social infection’”). With regard to meaning-making and decision-making processes, in-depth studies with a qualitative, reconstructive methodology would be especially appropriate for analysing the topic of peer influence and modelling. Here, *an enquiry among the partners of FAMILYPLATFORM seems to be promising* (see scheme for collection of studies).

#### **5. The meaning of youth cultures as relevant symbolic frameworks for the decision-making processes of young parents**

As we know from transition and youth research, the level of symbolic representation is crucial for young adults who at the same time feel young and refer to youthful consumption and lifestyles, and try to meet the demands of their transitions into adulthood. Astonishingly, there are no studies on the meaning of youth cultures as relevant symbolic frameworks for the decision-making processes of young parents available in the European context. Beyond Europe, one study on punk fathers in Chile can be found (Rohler, 2008), which tries to show by an ethnographic approach on how concepts of fatherhood and gender constructions develop through tension between local traditions and global (youth) cultures. Hoggart’s (2006) approach explores whether the decision-making-processes within transitions into parenthood could be situated in the context of youthful risk-taking – which only partly appears as an appropriate analytical approach. Instead, Hoggart could show that these decision-making processes have much more to do with taking over a responsible attitude towards life.

In order to achieve a more specific picture of the concerns and worries of young people and how to develop relative solutions, more studies on youth cultural studies and family research are needed.

#### **6. Early or postponed parenthood**

An especially important thematic strand for decision-making processes towards parenthood is the timing of becoming a parent(s) – i.e. the

postponement of parenthood and the decision for early parenthood as the two “extremes” in terms of results of decision-making. Regarding postponement of parenthood, issues such as prolonged transitions into intimate relationships and negotiation on the reconciliation of family and work are assumingly crucial topics (respectively: the question if and when young women and men consider their transitions into work as stable enough in order to allow for family plans), regarding early parenthood, (risky) transitions within training and into work are the crucial topics, with reconciliation problems of parenting, education and training.

### **Teenage parenthood**

After a period of moral panic about the topic of teenage pregnancy, the current discourse - at least on a scientific level - now seems to focus on resources related to an early entry into parenthood. The earliest works in this sense are to be found with Ann Phoenix (1991 ff.), who took over an agency perspective on young mothers. Until recently scholars were engaged in de-constructing the “problem” of teenage pregnancy (Arai, 2009). In a research overview, Simon Duncan (2007) looks behind the problem ascription to teenage parents and finds that - at least according to recent research in Britain - many fathers seek to remain connected with their children. For both mothers and fathers alike, parenting seems to provide an impetus to take up education, training and employment. Teenage parenting may be more of an opportunity than a catastrophe, and often makes sense in the living environments of young mothers. Long running recent studies are consequently ignoring the group phenomenon of young mothers and fathers who intentionally and very consciously have become parents (Coleman/Cater, 2006). By a qualitative approach, Coleman and Cater can show that a part of their interviewed young fathers and mothers clearly relate parenthood with an idea of “leading a different life”, with different ways of fathering and mothering than they have experienced in their families of origin.

Julia Hirst and her colleagues also try to de-dramatise the issue of teenage parenthood by investigating three generations of teenage mothers and fathers in a highly inventive qualitative research design, including diaries, photo-elicitation, video-clips, etc. (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). This study highlights that it is above all the negative ascriptions towards teen mothers and fathers, which are making their lives so complicated. Whereas the title of Hirst and colleagues (“Pathways into Parenthood: Reflections from three generations of teenage mothers and fathers”) suggests a longitudinal approach, this is not the case, rather three different cohorts of (former or present) teen parents are compared.

A longitudinal design has been realised by Smithbattle (2008), who carried out a multigenerational longitudinal study of teen mothering provided prospective data on the intergenerational continuities and discontinuities in parenting traditions and care giving legacies. Families that included a teen mother were first interviewed intensively in 1988–1989 and were re-interviewed in 1993, 1997, 2001, and 2005. All studies in the series were based on the phenomenology of everyday practices and the assumption that the self is

constituted by practical, historical, and embodied understandings. Smithbattle singles out which benefit young parents take from their own experiences or the ones of their partners: if own experiences of successful parenting are not there, young parents could also benefit from more successful experiences of their partners/peers.

On important finding, here as in other studies on the topic, is the issue of responsibility, which very often is denied to these very young parents, but with a close look appears to be an important field of learning and competence building. In Germany, Friedrich & Rehberg (2005) carried out a qualitative study on young mothers and fathers. They highlight, that early parenthood could have a catalytic effect on the development of social competencies and in the coping with developmental tasks:

- a sense of responsibility of young mothers and fathers;
- strong efforts to reconcile parenting with the demands of vocational qualifications;
- big investment in the development of future perspectives for themselves and for their children;
- big investment in the development of family networks and social networks;
- struggling against old and for new concepts of femininities /motherhoods – masculinities/fatherhoods;
- depending on their own experiences: partly a strong wish to “make it different” with regard to the education of their child (see also SmithBattle, 2008);
- a strong wish to become a role-model for their children, also with regard to training and work (see Friese, 2008) – an engagement that without a child would probably not have been set into motion;
- a strong need to play a different role as a consumer (reduced youth consumption, extended family consumption).

In the same direction, the qualitative interview study of Rolfe (2008) underlines that the ways young mothers are talking about motherhood present a different picture of teenage motherhood from that of dominant discourses. These interviewed young women talk about motherhood in three main ways: as ‘hardship and reward’, ‘growing up and responsibility’ and ‘doing things differently’. Furthermore, there is a clear notion on young mothers’ *agency*: the young women are active in negotiating and constructing their own identities as mothers, carers and women.

An unusual way of quantifying qualitative data was carried out by Whitehead (2008), but a search for exploring not only teen mothers, which traditionally are in the focus of these studies, but on their relationships with and expectations towards fathers (with the plea for more future research on this topic). Anke Spies (2008) has carried out an interesting qualitative study on the implementation of baby simulators into pedagogical practice (as a strategy to prevent teenage pregnancy) with a critical perspective on their disempowering effects. She also starts by questioning the public discourse which reproaches and dramatises the issue of teenage pregnancy, which - in

terms of numbers - is no big topic at all in Germany (moreover, an increase in numbers in 2004 is a mere statistical artefact).

### **Postponed Parenthood**

Whereas parents - according to public discourses - should not be too young, they also should not be too old: the issue of postponed parenthood, although clearly documented statistically, astonishingly is almost a non-topic for other more qualitative research approaches. Some studies are to be found in the context of gendered decision-making processes – e.g. Henwood *et al.* (in press) (see also next section on young fathers). And, the German Pairfam project is directed to explore permanent childlessness:

*“Aside from the group of people who cannot have children for medical reasons, there are two main types of permanent childlessness: early decision against parenthood in combination with low child orientation on the one hand, postponement of the realization of a wish for children on the other hand. Against this background we want to explore the main causes for permanent childlessness. We want to answer the question what are the differences between “late mothers” and women who do not realize their wish for children. Besides, it is not yet clear how many young adults do not want to have children at all. What are the reasons that people decide against parenthood early in the life course and does the experience of their own childhood matter? On the other hand we have to ask how many people are involuntarily childless, to what extent they use methods of reproductive medicine and in which circumstances they would consider adopting a child”<sup>7</sup>.*

## **7. Fathering and Fatherhoods – negotiating masculinities**

A flourishing research field is research on fathering and fatherhoods – an expanding literature concerning fathering and concepts of fatherhood is currently filling in a long gap in “fatherless” family research. Some works are directed towards decision-making (Fthenakis, 2002 & 2006; BZgA, 2005b, Tölke, 2008; DJI, 2008), others are focussed on concepts of fatherhood (Wall *et al.*, 2007; Zerle/Krok, 2008). Zerle’s study is starting from the deviations in transitions into training, work and partnership, which are a common experience of today’s young adults. For young men, the orientation towards the German normalcy of the “male breadwinner” is getting difficult, but at the same time alternative role concepts (leading to an equal share of care and professional work) are missing: there is no new role model of the “new, active father”. Therefore, the quantitative study (based on CATI-interviews) is based on perceptions regarding fatherhood and reconciliation of work and family, including first experiences as fathers, in 4 groups of young men (boys and young men still living in their parent’s home, boys and young men still living in

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pairfam.de>.

an own flat, boys and young men living in a partnership in an own flat, and young fathers).

Examples of biographical research on the topic are the studies of Brannen and Nilsen (2006), and the running project of Julia Brannen (2009-2011) who is carrying out a biographical approach across three family generations in Polish, Irish and UK origin white families, and is focussing on changing concepts of fatherhoods in the context of migration. The relation between Fatherhoods and social policies is explored by Hobson (2007) and also by Knijn *et al.*, (2006) in a comparative perspective. Kim-Patrick Sabla's study focuses on fatherhood in the context of public youth aid in Germany (Sabla, 2009).

On a similar strand is the study of Reeves (2007) on young (teenage) fathers in statutory social services, based on narrative interviews. The topic of a qualitative study (semi-structured interviews) by Deave & Johnson (2008) looks at how often fathers are addressed by healthcare provider organisations and involved in antenatal provision and information given in the antenatal period on parenting, baby care and relationships. They have come to the conclusion that adequately preparing new fathers for parenthood in advance of the birth of their baby is important, and healthcare professionals can contribute to this by involving and supporting new fathers. They also see a need for further study to explore the role of fathers (of different backgrounds) in antenatal education and the types of interventions that are effective in improving their early experiences of parenthood.

The issue of imagination, symbolic representation and identity work is dealt with by Finn & Henwood (2009), and also within the *Timescapes* project on "Masculinities, Identities and Risk: Transition in the Lives of Men as Fathers"; this longitudinal ESRC-project will explore ways in which men come to terms with becoming a first-time father and any effect this has on their identities, relationships and lives over time.

For the Italian context, Elisabetta Ruspini (Ruspini, 2009) works on historical and emergent factors in the contemporary pluralisation of Italian gender identities, specifically the current penetration of alternative models of masculinity more adaptive to contemporary social change. She discusses the concept of familism, which encompasses a cultural value system involving strong attachment and loyalty to one's family, including a strong reliance on family for material and emotional support. Her discussion also involves good practices concerning men, as well as a brief reflection on the future of Italian gender studies.

## **8. Mothering and Motherhoods – negotiation femininities**

Whereas the father-topic seems to be booming, there is less recent research on mothering and motherhoods. Tina Miller had worked out in a narrative approach an important study on how women try to make sense of, and narrate their experiences of, first-time motherhood in an industrialised society.

The study charts the social, cultural and moral contours of contemporary motherhood and engages with sociological and feminist debates on how selves are constructed, maintained and narrated (Miller, 2005). Again, in the United Kingdom the *Timescapes* project has one interesting strand on “The Dynamics of Motherhood: An Intergenerational Project”, which builds on the study “*the making of modern motherhoods* (MoMM)” and uses a combination of interviews and cultural analysis. The questions are: How do contemporary women imagine motherhood in comparison to its reality, and, what is influencing women's expectations and experiences of motherhood (such as advice books, magazines, friends, partners and relatives)? The current project (Dynamics of Motherhood) has extended and deepened the MoMM project (Thomson *et al.*, 2008) over a further two years (Jan 2008-Dec 2009), drawing on six of the original case studies for detailed investigation in a long-term study approach across generations.

Issues which currently are discussed are images and imageries about motherhood (an issue to which Ann Phoenix made an early contribution) and the role of the media (Hadfield *et al.*, 2007 for UK; Villa & Thiessen, 2009 and Hannover & Birkenstock 2005 for Germany). Single mothers still are a big issue, not only in UK research, but also in Italy (Ruspini, 2006) and in Germany (BMFSFJ, 2008 a & b). This report's discussion regarding that issue is consciously short, due to the fact that there is an in-depth discussion on the topic in existential field No 8<sup>8</sup>.

Comparative work on reconciliation issues was carried out by Sümer *et al.* (2008), comparing Norway, the UK, and Portugal, and asking, how different national and organisational welfare policies and cultural norms on national, organisational, and familial levels influence the reconciliation of paid work and family work for mothers. By a case study approach (based on interview data gathered through a large European study of parenthood and organisations), experiences of transition to motherhood in three organisations in the three countries are compared. They show that having a child is still conceptualised as a predominantly ‘private problem’ in the UK and Portugal, while it has come closer to having the status of a ‘public issue’ in Norway. The contributions in Blossfeld & Hofmeister (2006) with a focus on globalised labour markets are extensively dealing with the issue of uncertainty in women's careers.

## Research gaps

Because the transitions to parenthood themselves still seem to be a white spot, future research should concentrate on illuminating and reconstructing the decision-making-processes, including practices and self concepts of young women and men in the process of becoming (or not) mothers and fathers. This means to *explore the simultaneity of different transitions and trajectories* and how they intersect: educational trajectories, transitions into parenthood, youth cultural transitions, gender transitions (finding and

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.familyplatform.eu/en/1-major-trends/reports/8-media-family-education>.



developing an own concept of being a young man – and a father, a young woman – and a mother), developments in important policy contexts, etc. – all these transitional strands (and maybe others) have to be studied in their interrelatedness as well as in comparative perspective. Hence, the biggest research gaps are to be identified in

- negotiation processes in couples about parenthood (*about becoming parents* as well as being parents, including discrepancies between their original plans of parenting between partners and later realities);
- negotiations about professional uncertainty, coping with the planning paradox, etc.;
- *negotiation processes within an extended family*;
- negotiations about care issues;
- time use and planning questions;
- early and *postponed parenthood*;
- fatherhoods and motherhoods;
- *peer and youth cultural issues*.

On a methodological level, this includes qualitative approaches, possibly in a process-oriented, longitudinal perspective which allows for the reconstruction of decision-making processes of individuals and couples, situated within multifaceted contexts. Obviously, this calls for interdisciplinary approaches, as well as for a perspective on intersecting social inequalities according to gender, ethnicity, educational levels, etc. Whereas some studies are available on the national level, comparative research is missing.

### **C. Availability of studies focussing on an interplay of relevant strands of policies for young parents (mostly policy analysis)**

One general insight of European research on transitions into adulthood is that young people depend to a large extent on facilitating structures, such as socio-economic resources and opportunity spaces, in order to negotiate, shape and cope with uncertain transitions to family, work and citizenship, especially where they are structured by precariousness. However, the success of these facilitating structures in turn cannot secure predictable trajectories. Policies are required that let young people perceive such structures as accessible, relevant and manageable and in consequence accept and use them.

This implies that measures and policies need to allow for individual ways of using them according to subjective needs and priorities. Research on this issue (see Walther *et al.*, 2009; Misleading Trajectories, Walther *et al.*, 2002; Youth Policy and Participation, Walther *et al.*, 2006) brought up the concept of *Integrated Transitions Policies* (López-Blasco *et al.*, 2003), which are characterised by co-ordinating different policies affecting young people's lives starting from their biographical perspective. Special attention was given to the analysis of research on young parenthood which revealed that this is not yet the case for many young women and men – there is still a severe lack of resources and opportunities needed to reconcile work, studies and family.

This relevance of integrated transition policies as necessity to respond to interrelated needs within transitions into parenthood is also stressed by Bertram *et al.* (2005). In their expertise for the 7th German Family report it's shown as an interplay of monetary policy, infrastructure and time policy. According to this - international comparative expertise - time is extremely scarce in an employment centred regime context such as Germany, due to the way in which the living environment is institutionalised. Whereas liberal or universalistic transition regimes are much more permeable, allowing for family formation *within* educational trajectories, the "rush-hour of life" is extremely intense in the employment centred, as well as in the sub-institutionalised regime, and above all on higher educational levels. This Rush-Hour of life is a result of a development in which transitions into work have prolonged extremely without any institutional response (such as secure alimentation for young adults). It is the paradoxical side-effect of time-policies which does not actively connect the longer period of education with policies of independency, but with policies of longer economic dependency.

This section, on the availability of studies focussing on this interplay of policies, will be short because of overlaps with other existential fields. It concentrates only on those works which focus on interwoven policies. These are often studies which approach via a gender policy angle, taking into account the cross-cutting character of gender policies:

Pariteia (*Promoting gender equality in active European citizenship*) is a European project funded by the Fifth Community Action Programme *Towards a Community Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)* of the EU, aimed at establishing a European citizenship based on the active participation of women and men in all social, political and professional activities in five territorial contexts (Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain). The final report offers an analysis of the in-depth interviews which the project partners carried out in their own countries with a group of married and single working fathers.

A comparative study on “emancipatory policies” is done by Kröhnert and Klingholz (2008), who compared the social conditions for different fertility rates in western European countries based on an array of socio-economic indicators. The analysis clearly shows that the traditionally negative correlation between wealth and social development on the one hand and fertility on the other no longer holds once a society has reached a certain level of development. Today more children are born in the countries with the most advanced social systems with regard to gender equality. Based on this result, the authors propose to discuss the problem of low-fertility countries from a different point of view. Neither child benefits nor other sources of financial aid appear to motivate people in modern industrial societies to have more children. What is far more crucial is equality of men and women in society (see also the recent intention to construct a *European Union Gender Equality Index*, composed on the four dimensions equal sharing of paid work, money, decision-making power and time, Plantega *et al.*, 2010).

Also the work of Knijn *et al.* (2009) points to the fact that a gender-neutral social policy on reconciliation of work and family life means stagnation. New social policy paradigms have developed since the 1990s, each having particular assumptions on risk-sharing, public and private responsibility and the position of the individual towards the state and the community, paradigms which are analysed in relation to the European Union’s policies regarding reconciliation of work and family life. The authors detect some traces of these paradigms in the Lisbon agreements and its amendments, and conclude that the gender-equality agenda, as well as family life, has been submitted to the new convention of the competitive knowledge based economy. The social investment paradigm is the most prominent of the three paradigms in this new agenda, however, it is mixed up with elements from the other paradigms and therefore current policies agendas lack coherence.

Eva Bernhardt *et al.* (2008) can show in their comparison between Norway and Sweden on the topic of a gendered share of household chores the young couple’s in Sweden clearly benefit from Sweden’s longer history of gender equality norms, which are more institutionalised in public policies. The work of Lohmann *et al.* (2009) aims at providing a set of indicators for holistic family policies by which the authors “hope to foster international discussion about the most important elements of family policy, and the contexts and outcome dimensions that should be used to measure them. For this purpose, their framework provides a set of cross-nationally comparable indicators on contexts, policies, and outcomes, organised on a systematic basis”. Their

indicators build upon, among others, previous work by the OECD in various studies on family-friendly policies carried out on a cross-national basis using different sets of indicators, and have been selected according to their importance and relevance for three overall policy goals: child wellbeing, gender equality, and balancing work and family life.

Country portraits on policies targeting families, above all, women as (to be) parents and workers are presented in Ostner & Schmitt (2008), a volume comparing experiences made in Nordic countries during the last 20 years. These countries, which have become paragons for policies that apparently work in favour of improving the work-life balance, equal employment opportunities and public child care, are contrasted with the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Leave policies and related research are compared in a volume of Moss & Wall (2007), and a literature overview on the costs of raising children and the effectiveness of policies to support parenthood in European Countries is given by Letablier *et al.* (2009). This comprehensive and in-depth review is discussing the underestimation of support to families/children with ESSPROS “family/children” expenditure data<sup>9</sup> and the fact that many social benefits to families/children are classified under other social protection functions (overlapping classifications). It also notes that other support to families and/or children, not within the scope of the core of ESSPROS, is not regarded as social protection. This illustrates the major underestimation of public support to families with ESSPROS data, and concludes that data on expenditure cannot help analyse and compare the targeting or the redistributive effects of family policies. It includes a preliminary typology (the Nordic countries with their substantial support for families with small children, Denmark with its model of comprehensive family policy, the Anglo-Saxon countries with their support targeted on preschool-age children and poor households and a work/family balance based on labour-market flexibility, Southern Europe with more limited assistance, and Eastern Europe at the crossroads of diversity), and also recommendations for the analysis of family policies and regarding the improvement of available ESSPROS data on social protection expenditure for families. Within the Pairfam project, institutional determinants of fertility decisions in Germany are evaluated.

On a European comparative level *UP2YOUTH* has on the one hand identified a general lack of studies on the interplay of transition policies (in education, training and work), gender, family and social policies for young people, and on the other hand has tried to interrelate those policy strands which are necessarily to be taken into account when we are talking about “transitions into parenthood”: A core concern for such policies should be not reducing young men’s and women’s choices about the timing of parenthood (too early or too late). Policies that aim to support young people in the shaping of their transitions into parenthood need to be aware of the young people’s subjective interpretation of parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, and of being a family.

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<sup>9</sup> ESSPROS: European system of integrated social protection statistics, see [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/European\\_system\\_of\\_integrated\\_social\\_protection\\_statistics\\_%28ESSPROS%29](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/European_system_of_integrated_social_protection_statistics_%28ESSPROS%29).

Biographical dilemmas resulting from the difficulties in reconciling different transition demands need to be recognised. Policies addressing core problems in transitions to parenthood therefore should contribute to:

- The solving the difficulties in reconciling young parenthood with training;
- The reconciliation of young parenthood with the demands of the workplace and career development, including an influencing enterprises such as implementing family-friendly work cultures so as to encourage active fathering;
- The reconciliation of young parenthood with youth life.

This includes time policies, such as access to part-time education, an access to public childcare facilities and accommodation, and the support of innovative ideas around childcare which allow for flexible use based upon individual needs and life arrangements; of course, this also includes monetary transfers, and has implications for gender policies on all levels. On this policy level we are returning to the basic idea of *securing spaces for young people to navigate and create their own ways into parenthood*. For example, space for negotiation among partners and between generations regarding issues such as work share or housing always have an underlying crude material basis, which has to be provided for in social policy.

However, in order to make use of space for negotiation, additional programs are needed to support young people in family activities. This includes parental and familial education which is not limited to competency in baby care traditionally provided by medical counselling. It requires support in all those areas which are necessary for shaping a relationship under new circumstances: for developing and defending concepts of partnership in everyday life, and for negotiating with institutions and employers. Modern parental education needs to therefore include concepts such as gender competence, civic participation, and accessible local facilities for the creation of one's own networks. It should recognize that not all young parents have access to such programs and that this access is something which has to be actively created and organized" (Walther *et al.*, 2009: 121 ff.).

### **Instead of research gaps: Outlook to Integrated Transition Policies as future challenges:**

Supporting transition processes as such, rather than focussing on the potential but increasingly uncertain end point or arrival, implies a balance between security and flexibility. On the one hand young people need income security as well as secure access to forms of social support while at the same time these support systems need to be highly flexible to allow young people individualised use. This 'flexicurity' (Stauber *et al.*, 2003) is closest to the transition systems of the universalistic regime type because there social rights for support are connected to the individual citizenship status which is largely independent on the individual's life situation. The liberal regime shares the

reference point of the individual citizen while the concept of citizenship is much more that of a self-responsible entrepreneur than of an autonomous individual embedded in and supported by reciprocal solidarity. In the employment-centred and sub-protective transition in contrast systems of social security and social support are connected largely to family and employment status. While providing rather different levels of support this makes them rather inflexible both with regard to individual cases and to social change in general.

Another aspect of Integrated Transition Policies is the reflexivity of institutional actors in order to realise different needs and effects of support in different biographies. The fact that the positive performance of the universalistic transition regime does not extend to the same extent to ethnic minority and migrant youth suggests that other (dis-)integrative factors are at play which are normally not taken into consideration. For example migrant and ethnic minority youth receive contradictory messages between inclusive education or welfare and exclusive immigration policies, which may undermine feelings of being recognised as individuals and trust towards the institutions offering support.

The last key principle of Integrated Transition Policies is participation with the right of choice in taking biographical decisions, which needs to be secured through income security and negotiation rights. *UP2YOUTH* has been concerned with the obvious mismatch between institutional expectations of how young people should participate and young people's actual activities and priorities. According to Zygmunt Bauman this results from a lack of public space where individuals can communicate their needs, interest and aspiration and negotiate it with other concerned co-citizens. This includes the inadequacy of public institutions such as education, family and welfare policy or participation programmes for such dialogic exchange due to their prerequisites in terms of certain specific ways of conduct, lifestyle and aspiration.

Inasmuch as young people do not feel recognised as individuals, policies need to be designed in a way that allows for visibility to make sure that one's subjective needs and interests are not neglected; and - what is as important - is to realise that young people *are already acting*. Their activities are more or less successful due to unequal access to resources; their activities are more or less in line with dominant norms and models of coping. Discrepancies may partly result from lack of competencies and opportunities. They definitely also reflect that young people make decisions and act under conditions which have dramatically changed and which institutional actors have not yet realised (Walther *et al.*, 2009: 120ff.).

#### **D. Availability of studies focussing on local/informal policies, initiatives and networks of young fathers, young mothers, young families (mostly in-depth studies)**

Besides national policies, the living situation of young parents is clearly influenced by other levels of policies, namely those on the local level (which could be but not necessarily are the implementation of national policies) and on an informal level. The latter again points to the agency perspective on young parents who are not determined exclusively by structural contexts. As soon as they begin to look for and set in place childcare solutions, as soon as they start to negotiate not just in their private surroundings, but also with other young parents in their neighbourhoods, or with those who are responsible for family and work matters on a local level, in that very moment they engage in shaping their social context themselves – mostly on a micro level. With an institution's involvement, it's on a meso level – and perhaps in the long run on a macro level as well. This takes place whenever local engagement manifests itself in terms of initiatives which, on the temporal scale, last longer than the immediate needs of the individual parents involved. New insights offered by the agency perspective into these matters make clear that, because of the public-private divide – which, despite all the achievements of the feminist movement, is still alive and well – the issue of young parenthood is one that easily gets reduced to something pertaining to the realm of individual responsibility (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2006): not only do family-related needs tend to be seen as “private needs” and as such remain invisible, but also the role of agency fails to be acknowledged as an extremely important factor in shaping young people's lives. The engagement of young parents is not acknowledged as being relevant to policy to any significant degree (precisely because it is still perceived in terms of the public-private divide and therefore as being located in the private realm of “reproduction”), nor is it acknowledged as a vital component of public participation and as an essential contribution to social integration.

Of course, and due to specific institutional and normative ways of informal engagement, different kinds of informal policies evolve across Europe. On a scale of different pathways the extreme poles are marked by Germany (with its tradition of free associations, which, following a corporatist structure of the civil society, is giving incentives to institutionalise informal engagement), and on the other hand by the United Kingdom, which, according to its liberalistic tradition, regulated needs by the market (as a matter of fact, the UK care market is immense and costs for care are high). On the other hand, policies for young families often are implemented on a local level – as public programmes. Interesting aspects and strands for research therefore would be:

- On the level of informal policies: the network activities and strategies of young parents, informal policies in the different forms across Europe, evaluation of informal processes, etc.;
- On the level of local policies (which very often are financed by public programmes and therefore often evaluation is available): which

programmes are really covering young parents' needs? Which are the rationales behind different local programmes?

## 1. Studies on informal policies:

There are very few studies on informal policies, mostly they can be subsumed under gender studies, either by belonging to the strand of father research (Wolde, 2006), or, more general, by critically questioning the public-private divide (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2006; see also Jurczyk *et al.*, 2009), which has been discussed in section B on negotiation processes). A European comparative view on the boundaries of formal and informal work has been realised in the volume of Pfau-Effinger *et al.* (2009). Another collection of interesting articles on different types of research on - among others - the public-private divide can be found in Ellingsæter & Leira (2006).

## 2. Local policies

With the intention to give visibility to the plethora of national and local programmes, but also to informal initiatives of young parents themselves, compilations of good policy practices have been collected in different research contexts. Important of course is to specify, on which level these initiatives operate. In the *UP2YOUTH*-project, the criterion to collect good policy practices has been, if these policies potentially would serve as models because of their holistic approach<sup>10</sup>. Also at the "European Alliance for Families"-website<sup>11</sup> a large range of good practice policies can be found.

In the United Kingdom, the "Sure Start" centres, although belonging to a national government scheme, have strategic responsibility to plan the location and development of children's centres, in partnership with their Children's Trust partners, and meet the needs of their local communities. This is done in consultation with parents, as well as with the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Also, the New Deal for Single Parents Evaluation Report, 06/03 [E/S/W], besides presenting the national evaluation for the New Deal for Single Parents, gives an overview on the voluntary welfare to work programme set up with the aims of helping and encouraging single parents to increase their participation in paid work and to improve their job readiness and employment opportunities.

Some interesting policies also can be found at the Council of Europe Family Policy Database<sup>12</sup>. A Report on Good Practice at workplace level in supporting new parents in their paid work and family life is given by the *Transitions* project (Purcell *et al.*, 2005).

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<sup>10</sup> See UP2Youth <http://www.up2youth.org/content/view/192/60/>.

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/emplweb/families/index.cfm?langId=en&id=3](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/index.cfm?langId=en&id=3).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/familypolicy/Source/4%20Sources%20on%20family%20law%20and%20children%27s%20rights.pdf>.



For Germany, good practices specifically directed towards young mothers and fathers (regarding important policies such as part-time vocational training,) is given by the Good-Practice-Centre of the BiBB<sup>13</sup>. This issue, which is of strategic relevance within the highly standardised transition system in Germany, has been systematically explored by Friese (2010). Accordingly, there is growing sensitivity on the issue of parents as students in higher education, which evolves the issue of part-time higher education<sup>14</sup> (see also section E).

## Research gaps

Research gaps exist mostly on the level of informal policies: which is their relevance with regard to:

- The public-private-divide;
- Processes of (un)doing gender by engaging in informal policies;
- Visibility and participation of young parents;
- Resources and capabilities for being an engaged parent.

With regard to *transitions into parenthood* and social integration in terms of being a family, little is known about informal networking processes among partners, between the generations, within neighbourhoods and among peers and how such networking processes do (or undo) gender (cf. Butler, 2004). There is also hardly any analysis of where young parents actually learn how to become and act like parents, and to what extent their informal learning processes can be interpreted as processes of participation through negotiation among themselves as well as with institutional actors (see next section).

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.good-practice.de/2936.php> & [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/jobstarter\\_regional\\_3-2009.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/jobstarter_regional_3-2009.pdf) & [http://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/a1bud\\_auswahlbibliographie-berufsausbildung-in-teilzeit.pdf](http://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/a1bud_auswahlbibliographie-berufsausbildung-in-teilzeit.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.studis-online.de/Studieren/studieren-mit-kind.php>.

## **E. Availability of studies focussing on educational offers for young parents**

One effect of the changes into transitions into adulthood is a historically unprecedented rise in learning needs and opportunities, which has been characterised in terms of the knowledge society/knowledge economy and lifelong learning (LLL). However, such widely used terms may vary in scope and emphasis, depending on (transition regime) context and usage. However loosely they might be deployed, their pertinence and significance rests firmly on the existence of a clearly identifiable set of developments. The requirement to learn has impact on young parenthood in particular in a variety of highly concrete ways; on the one hand, young parenthood often has to be arranged in the context of not yet finished or reversible yoyo-transitions in the context of education and work, on the other hand entry into parenthood, far from sealing an end to formal education, opens up a range of new learning requirements.

Different strands are included here:

- Educational offers which enable a reconciliation of education/vocational training/higher education and parenthood;
- Educational offers for young parents with regard to parenting.

### **1. Education/vocational training/higher education and parenthood**

There is only scarce knowledge on the simultaneous demands of achieving school qualification and raising a child. In Germany, the BiBB (Federal Institute for vocational training) carried out a representative study on "educational trajectories and vocational biographies of youth and young adults after they have left compulsory education" ("transitions study"). According to data from 2006, almost one fifth of those young people without training or qualification - most of them are young women - have to care for their own child (BiBB, 2007).

In Germany, due to the high relevance of vocational training in the dual system, there is growing concern about the reconciliation of parenthood and training. In 2004, a report for the German Ministry of Family regarding older people, women and youth (BMFSFJ, 2004) was carried out and a juridical reform of the legislation of vocational training, which followed in 2005, gives a part-time option to young parents in vocational training ( if the employer gives his consent and supports the proposal). The evaluation on how the opportunity of part-time vocational training is used in Germany (Friese, 2008; Friese, 2010) shows, on the one hand, that young mothers and fathers develop a level of engagement into training and work, which probably would have been difficult to be activated under different living conditions. On the other hand, there is the necessity of permeable educational systems in which part-time arrangements on all levels should be a normality and much more spread out (LIFE e.V., 2008), as well as the necessity of building up support

networks with other relevant transition support systems (see also Hahner, 2008).

Regarding the reconciliation of parenting and higher education, some work is done on the level of individual universities (Auferkorte-Michaelis *et al.*, 2006), but also with regard to the wish of becoming parents (Heßling, 2005) and with regard to combining a career with being a mother (IAB, 2006)

## **2. Research on educational offers for young parents with regard to parenting**

With regard to existing educational offers, which (at least in Germany) are often middle-class biased, and not really appropriate to address younger parents, lower educated strata, and among them above all men, the need for a completely different way of offering parental or family education is evident (see Textor, 2007; Mühling/Smolka, 2007; BZgA, 2007), which has to consider the different contexts of parenting. In Germany (Land Baden-Württemberg) there is one new programme STÄRKE (“strength”), which since autumn 2008 is delivering vouchers for educational offers (€40) to parents in need, and explicitly to teenage parents. This programme is currently being evaluated. The results are expected in autumn 2010. Anke Spies (Spies, 2008) has carried out an interesting qualitative study on the implementation of baby simulators into pedagogical practice (as a strategy to prevent teenage pregnancy) – which according to her would be a bad practice because of the missing acceptance of young parents and the disempowering effects of this programme.

For Germany, besides one overview about programmes on family education (Lissewski, without year), the running study of the State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg (ifb) has to be highlighted: a comprehensive compendium on family education in Bavaria is carried out<sup>15</sup>, together with a comprehensive concept for family education in the framework of public youth aid (Rupp *et al.*, ongoing).

In the UK, the Sure Start Plus provides support to pregnant teenagers, to enable them to make responsible and well informed decisions according to their individual circumstances, and supports teenage parents around issues such as healthcare, childcare, parenting skills, education, training and employment. The programme is evaluated by case study analysis, questionnaires and interviews with programme managers, and concludes that the presence of advisors, who provided one-to-one holistic support for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, was beneficial (Wiggins *et al.*, 2005). By bringing together skills and knowledge from a range of sectors, the Sure Start Plus ‘teams’ provided valuable joined up working and simpler access to support for the target group.

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.ifb.bayern.de/english/index.html>.

The topic of an improvement of parental and family education is getting more and more attention, also on a European level, see the International Conference on “Improving parental competence in Europe – Instruments and Effects” in 2/2010 in Berlin<sup>16</sup>.

### **Research (and policy) gaps:**

The first level discussed in this section, the level of reconciliation of (vocational and/or higher) education and parenting, shows not only a better policy practice is needed, but also scientific evidence about its relevance, which can be delivered by surveys complemented by in-depth studies on how part-time programmes work and impact on young parents transitions.

The second level, considering a modern family-oriented education, shows firstly that appropriate programmes are needed beyond a middle-class and female bias, and secondly, their contents have to enfold gender-reflexivity (supporting active fatherhood, supporting innovative ways of being a parent, addressing the issue of negotiation by supporting negotiation competences within their relationship as a couple, within their roles as parents, towards their families of origin, towards employers and supporting institutions, etc.). The research level of these programmes has to be evaluated with regard to its relevance as a tool for improving negotiation competencies of young parents. They also have to be evaluated regarding their support through coping strategies for the different challenges of reconciliation a young parent faces.

A modern form of family education such as this would ideally become the open door to all available and important information, such as counselling services, support facilities, and how far apart they are could be an evaluation criterion as well. Another criterion could be in what sense these programmes support existing informal networks of young parents, and respectively, how they empower young parents to engage in such networking activities. Finally, in what sense they are linked with or even embedded into successful (pedagogical) institutions, i.e. youth and community work, by which access problems towards target groups could be minimised.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.iss-ffm.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Projekte/aeltere\\_Projekte/Observatorium/Internationale\\_FT\\_2010/Programm\\_Elternbildung\\_endg.pdf](http://www.iss-ffm.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Projekte/aeltere_Projekte/Observatorium/Internationale_FT_2010/Programm_Elternbildung_endg.pdf).

## **F. Overall research gaps: recommendations for future research**

Research on transitions into parenthood has to bring together macro-, meso- and micro levels of research:

- On a micro level, it should closely look at the practices of young adults, their subjective needs and desires, and how they arrange and negotiate their new roles as mothers and fathers and try to reconcile them with being a young woman or man in transition. On this level, recent studies have been collected in part B of this expertise, but far more research is needed, especially when considering trainees or students, or young adults in youth cultures;
- On a meso-level, the available social support and its related constraints should be explored, which also includes institutions such as youth or community work, counselling systems, etc.;
- Much more research is definitely needed on the interplay between practices (micro-level) and support systems (meso-level);
- With regard to comparability, it would then be crucial to relate knowledge on this interplay to the structural context of transition regimes, which serve as an appropriate tool for systematising such comparison.

With this in-mind, the following major research fields for a future research agenda which also points to significant gaps in knowledge can be identified (see du Bois-Reymond *et al.*, 2008: 139 ff.):

- Exploring the simultaneity of different transitions and trajectories which have to be studied in their interrelatedness as well as in comparative perspective. This includes qualitative approaches, possibly in a process-oriented, longitudinal perspective which allows for the reconstruction of decision-making processes of individuals and couples, situated within multifaceted contexts. This also has to include issues of time management within life courses, coping with planning paradoxes, etc.;
- Exploring (de-)gendering strategies of first parents who struggle with or adapt to the latent re-traditionalisation of gender roles after the birth of their first child through a lack of opportunities and public acknowledgement in the realisation of gender equality in all kinds of work, the professional sphere as well as family work. Under this heading, special questions could be looked at more closely: Exploring the strategies and practices of inventing motherhoods and fatherhoods; negotiation strategies in intimate (parental) relationships and how young parents can be regarded as “trendsetters” (e.g. by creating new imageries of “being a parent”);
- Exploring the decision-making processes of dual-career and highly mobile couples on if and when to have children, and how do they organise their lives after having become parents?

- Exploring partner-seeking strategies of young women and men on different educational levels;
- Exploring new strategies of bringing up children (e.g. elite mothers re-enchanting motherhood and engaging in home schooling for their children, not inclined to engage in gainful employment);
- Negotiation processes on family building in patchwork families.

Focus on transitions into parenthood under the conditions of migration and transculturality. Under this heading, special issues could be more closely examined:

- How do young men and women manage their parental role in the context of transnational labour markets and job demands?
- How do young adults from various ethnic-cultural backgrounds decide on parenthood and education-work-family-life balance? How much are different ways of “being a family” dependent on their families of origin and respective resources?
- How do young adults cope with arranged marriages? What impact do transcultural “marriage-markets” have on family building and gender relationships?
- What impact does ethnicisation processes have on family building, which can be observed in the Baltic States, as well as in the countries of former Yugoslavia?

Focus on transitions into parenthood under the conditions of poverty:

- How do young people manage this situation?
- How do they cope with housing problems?
- How are these circumstances coped with in the different countries according to care regimes, welfare mixes and support between the generations.

Focus on learning and support in transitions into parenthood. Here the following should be looked at:

- Learning sites and learning opportunities for young parents: what public or private offers are available, and how much are they used by young parents? What kind of “family education” or “parental education” would be appropriate for young mothers and fathers (see Mühling & Smolka, 2007)? What is the impact of (self-) imageries in the media or on the internet in this respect?
- What learning processes do young mothers/fathers reconstruct when looking at their transition into first parenthood?
- What support is available and what do young parents need in specific situations of conflict?
- What is the impact of grandparents and peers on family decisions and the practices of young parents?

These and other constellations of young parenthood, if researched properly, could illustrate different modes of modernisation. Even more so, if such research is designed as longitudinal studies, preferably including reconstructive methodology such as partner interviews, group discussions or individual interviews based on narratives with young women and men. To include both partners is crucial to avoid the trap of feminising the issue.

Such research also would be apt to bring the agency dimension to daylight without which transitions into parenthood cannot be properly understood, and which we think are crucial for conceptualising social change. Apart from this, it can also contribute to improved theoretical models and methodologies as well as to more nuanced and appropriate family measures and policies:

By considering young people as actors of social change, an important qualitative turning point for the political proliferation of better opportunities to enfold such agency seems to be achieved. This more appropriate perspective for supporting transitions into parenthood can be found in Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which has shifted attention from inequalities in resources, outcomes and preferences to inequalities in capabilities, in other words his or her freedom to be or to do what s/he has reason to value. Not surprisingly researchers working on transitions into parenthood currently end up in (see Crompton *et al.*, 2007: 235; Vassilev & Wallace, 2007) or start with (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009) this approach of Amartya Sen on capabilities and agency freedom and discuss the framework and the theoretical and empirical challenges that it poses for comparative welfare state research with a multi-level approach, that integrates the individual/household level, supra-national and national policy level and firm/work organisational level.

There are theoretical and empirical challenges. Sen's framework poses for welfare state research: How are the tensions and contradictions in the work family balance policy, both within and beyond the nation state, reflected in agency inequalities? How do institutional settings shape not only individual practices but also the perception of one's entitlement to make a claim, the conversion of rights into claims? How do we design research models that capture the multiple sites of claims making for work and family balance: household; work organisation and the state? But moreover, there are political challenges linked with this far-reaching and option-related concept, which perhaps has to be further explored for transition policies in general.

## G. View of expertise on key drivers of transitions into parenthood

If drivers are to be seen as forces and factors which effectively impact (in a positive or negative way) the well-being of families, and if drivers also could be seen in resources and / or risks, then drivers for the topic of transitions into parenthood would be:

- First and foremost, *the practices of young women and men* in their transitions into parenthood themselves, their *agency* (as a crucial aspect of social change, see Walther *et al.*, 2009), the solutions they find on an every day basis for the various dilemmas and problems within the context of reversible and risky transitions and the blurring of boundaries (not only) between work and family;
- This agency has a specific potential for social change (Walther *et al.*, 2009), and can be regarded as a plethora of informal policies of young people. These indeed are to be seen as drivers in the field;
- But of course, such agency also needs to be acknowledged, supported and facilitated by appropriate *gender and transition policies*, which hence have to be regarded as drivers – even more so, if they stick to the comprehensive concept of capabilities;
- As the availability of time (for care, for studying, for working and developing professional prospects, but also for some youth life) is crucial for the well-being of young women and men in their transitions into parenthood, also *time policies* are an important driver;
- This overlaps with *developments on labour markets and within the working sphere* and their responsiveness or ignorance towards the needs of young people as key drivers; this obviously has a strong gender dimension, as long as fathers are not adequately respected in the professional sphere.

Drivers are not forces *per se*, they can not be isolated, but have to be seen in the dialectics of structure and agency. As an example: If one regards the dynamics of gender relationships as key drivers, one soon will come to contextualise practices, one soon will relate option spaces of young couples to the availability of facilitating policies or to the normalcy transported by the respective transition regime. Means: drivers always have their history behind them – a history built from tradition and new trends, from (unequal) structure and (potentially transgressing) agency.



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