ABSTRACT

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SESSION II: FAMILY FORMS, STRUCTURE AND CONFIGURATIONS

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PERSONAL CONFIGURATIONS IN LIGHT OF COHABITATION TRAJECTORIES

Keywords: personal configurations, cohabitation trajectories, longitudinal data, sequence analysis, international comparisons

Description of the theoretical framework

Through social participation, individuals develop personal networks composed of family and non-family ties such as friends, colleagues and acquaintances. The prominence of those personal relationships vary across the life course following transitions and events such as leaving home, having a partner, becoming a parent, etc. At a macro level, the type of welfare state in which individual lives unfold influence this variation. This paper investigates the composition of personal configurations in light of cohabitation trajectories encompassing the transition to adulthood from 20 to 35-40, in three countries, Switzerland, Portugal, and Lithuania representative of contrasted welfare states. It emphases the importance of considering patterns of trajectories in their macro-structural context, rather than single transitions and events, to better understand personal configurations.

Individuals have personal networks which provide essential resources for individuals on a daily basis or in case of need such as instrumental, informational, and emotional support. As personal relationships have become more individualized and voluntary-based in contemporary welfare states (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991), personal networks often go beyond family and are composed of a great diversity of relationships. Throughout the life course, the composition of
personal networks varies depending on life stages as well as life transitions and events. Hence, individual networks of relationships reflect the influence of past as well as on-going life trajectories. Process of deinstitutionalization and destandardization of the life course have been identified, starting in the 1960s (Kohli, 1989). It leads to a limited pluralization of life trajectories. The transition to adulthood is particularly destandardized, as formerly simultaneous transitions such as leaving the parental home, getting a first job, and marrying (quickly followed by becoming a parent) are often independent from one another and postponed. Moreover, the patterns of transition to parenthood vary by gender, social class, and countries (Van de Velde, 2008).

From the 80s onwards, life course sociologists have stressed the importance of considering individual lives as comprehensive wholes, made up of interdependent sequences of social participation (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Cohabitation trajectories, especially, influence the development of personal networks. Cohabitation trajectories reflect family stages as well as transitions and events such as growing up in a one-parent family, leaving the parental home, moving in with a new partner, becoming a parent, and divorcing (Widmer & Gauthier, 2013). Beyond specific transitions and events, trajectories also show patterns and interestingly highlight stages and duration which is a major dimension to explain the prominence of certain relationships. Depending on what cohabitation trajectories they are following, some individuals will be more bound by family ties, whereas others will have more opportunities to open up their personal networks to other types of ties.

Life courses, as well as personal networks, are framed by welfare states, since the impacts of the current shared processes of de-industrialization and globalization on life courses depend on the answers given within countries. Four types of welfare states are commonly distinguished among Western societies: the liberal, the conservative, the social-democratic, and the Mediterranean welfare states (Arts & Gelissen, 2002). The Baltic states represent a particular type, known as the post-socialist welfare state (Aidukaite, 2003). Through social policies, welfare states differently shape life courses and personal networks. Switzerland represent a mix type with liberal and conservative components, Portugal the Mediterranean type and Lithuania the post-socialist type.

**Research hypotheses**

1. As individuals participate in several social fields, their personal configurations will be composed of family and non-family ties; the share of which being explained by previous cohabitational trajectories and the type of welfare state in which individuals live.

2. Standard cohabitation trajectories will be associated with a focus on the family of procreation, whereas non-standard cohabitation trajectories (e.g. lone parent, solo living) will foster non-kin based networks.

3. As a major institutional frame, the degree of individualization of the welfare state in which individuals live will influence the share of family and non-family ties, i.e. the degree of electivity in personal networks of relationships

**Description of the data and the research methods**

The data used in this study gathered together a subsample of three – structurally equivalent - national surveys on *Interpersonal relationships and individual life trajectories* carried out on a representative sample of individuals in Lithuania, Portugal and Switzerland between 2010 and 2012, focusing on specific birth cohorts. For the present analysis, we retain one that the birth cohort of individuals born between 1970 and 1975 (respectively 1000, 1000 and 400 individuals of both sexes).

Our methodological approach is a mix of methods composed of sequence analysis, cluster analysis, and regression analysis. Based on a free-listing technique or name generator (Widmer, Aeby, & Sapin, 2013), a typology of personal configurations using cluster analysis was build. Cohabitation trajectories were constructed using a retrospective life history calendar that recorded the dates of all
cohabitation changes of each respondent from birth to the year of the survey. We focus on the cohabitation trajectories between 20 and 35-40 to investigate in particular transition to adulthood. We retained nine potential statuses: living with two parents (1), living with one parent (2), living alone (3), living with a partner (4), living with a partner and child(ren) (5), living with child(ren) only (6), living with relatives (7), living with roommates (8), and living in another situation (9). Based on this information, a typology of cohabitation trajectories was built using consecutively sequence analysis and cluster analysis (Macindoe & Abbott, 2004). Eventually, the impact of cohabitation trajectories on personal configurations was assessed by means of logistic regressions with selected control variables (sex, citizenship, education, childhood cohabitation trajectories and welfare state of residence).

**Most important findings**

Sequences analysis carried out clear cut types of cohabitational trajectories, characterized by the timing, pace and number of transitions. Eight types of personal configurations were obtained showing the diversity of ties. Results show that certain family stages and transitions, in particular parenthood, strongly influenced the composition of personal networks. While parenthood associated with conjugality put the focus on the nuclear family of procreation, other situations enhanced other ties such as those stemming from friendship, kinship, or even occupation field. Considering the macro-structural context given by the three welfare states allows differentiating various levels of the individualization process and its links to the type of social capital available to individuals.

**Conclusions / discussion**

Results show a centration on the nuclear family of procreation underlining how important partners and children are in the considered welfare states, although with local differences. Parents, and particularly mothers, also occupy a key position. The prominence of friends in some configurations is worth pointing out. Following Pahl and Spencer (2004), a process of suffusion seems indeed to be going on but with different intensity according to the macro institutional context. We could group those ties in distinct personal configurations, dedicated to family ties, to friendship ties and to the occupational field. An additional type brings together individuals that seem to be completely socially isolated.

Personal relationships are influenced by cohabitation trajectories. Regarding personal configurations, several findings can be pointed out. Co-residency enhanced feeling of proximity. Present co-residents, partners and children, as well as former co-residents, parents and siblings, were likely to belong to the important relationships of the respondents. Transition to parenthood created a dramatic change in people's lives and reorganized ties along the parent-child relationship, which is central in contemporary welfare state, although with some local variations. Gender also had an influence on the composition of personal relationships. Results of the analyses highlight the relevance of a comparative, diachronic and systemic perspective taking into account whole cohabitation trajectories in macro institutional context to understand personal relationships.

**References**


