European Values at the Turn of the Millennium

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EUROPEAN VALUES STUDIES

European Values at the Turn of the Millennium

This volume deals with Europe's diversity and homo-
geneity at the turn of the millennium in terms of
fundamental value orientations. Using data from the
1999/2000 wave of the European Values Study the
contributors to this book try to identify and offer
explanations and understandings of the patterns in the
basic values and attitudes that have been ascertained
in specific life-spheres, e.g., work and leisure time,
religion, morality, society and politics, family and
marriage. The result is a cultural map of Europe that
captures the diversities and similarities in value profiles
of the Europeans.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILIES AND VALUES IN EUROPE

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1   Introduction

Demographic statistics can provide a snapshot of the status of current European family. The proportion of persons living in households by type of household for the 15 member states of the European Union in 1995 were measured by the Eurostat-European Community Household Panel (cited in Fotakis, 2000). The average of households with two adults and one or more dependent children, a nuclear family structure, is 36% in the 15 EU countries, with the lowest Austria (30%) and Germany (33%) and the highest Denmark and France (43%). The average of households with three or more adults with dependent children, which can be a brother or sister of one of the parents or a non-family member living with them, is 12% in the 15 EU countries, with the lowest the Netherlands (6%) and Denmark (7%) and the highest Spain (24%) and Ireland (23%). The single-parent with dependent children family has an average of 3% with the lowest Spain (1%) and the highest the UK (6%). Fotakis concluded that the most conventional family patterns and household forms are found in southern Europe. Four or more person households account for over 40% of the total number in southern Europe, primarily due to the high proportions of younger people aged 16–30 living with their parents (up to two thirds in Italy). The average of three-generation households, which corresponds to an extended family type with at least one grandparent, one parent and one child, is 10.8% in Europe, with Greece (21.7%) and Portugal (18.9%) having the highest percent while Finland (1.3%) and Sweden (1.3%) had the lowest. Greece and Portugal also have lowest percent of single parent families and couples without children. On the other hand, the Nordic member states have the highest percent of single parent families and one-person households and the lowest percent of three-generation households.

Another demographic statistic is the increasing divorce rate. According to Fotakis (2000) marriage rate has decreased and the divorce rate has increased in almost all EU nations between 1970–74 and 1988. The highest crude marriage rate in 1998 was in Portugal and Denmark with nearly 7 per 1000 population and lowest in Sweden with less than 4 per 1000. Divorce rate has also increased between 1970–74 and 1998; the divorce rate in Denmark and Sweden has remained unchanged, and the lowest increase in divorce rate has been in Greece and Ireland. The highest crude divorce rate in 1998 was found in the UK and Finland with nearly 3 per 1000 of the population, and the lowest in Ireland, Greece and Spain with less than 1 per 1000.

On the other hand life expectancy in Europe is increasing, estimated at 80.8 years for females and 74.5 years for males (Fotakis, 2000). The implications for the family are the increased presence of grandparents in the lives and potential care of grandchildren in the future. However, fertility is decreasing, estimated at 1.45 children/woman, the lowest, together with Japan, in the world.

The demographic statistics provide a picture of a variety of family types in today's Europe. They also suggest differences in types of families in northern Europe and southern Europe. Three-generation families are more prevalent in the south and one-parent families more prevalent in the north. However, the same is not the case with nuclear families. Indeed, one would not have predicted that Austria and Germany have the lowest percent of nuclear families in Europe, lower than Greece and other countries with higher percents of extended family systems. This is a fact of some importance in the issue of the 'autonomy' of the nuclear family, and in the issue of the importance of family networks; residence, frequency of contact and communication.

The decline of the family, the crisis of the family, the breakdown of the family, the rise of individualism, are phrases which reflect one school of thought during the past few decades. The increased divorce rate, the increase in unmarried one-parent families, the increase in remarriage and families with step-parents and step-brothers and sisters, the decrease in the birth rate, the increase in single-parent households, the gradual replacement of marriage by consensual union, same-sex couples, certainly provide support to the arguments of the breakdown of the family (Cuyvers, 2000). Over thirty years ago Laing

(1971) argued that the family is doomed, and the wrong setting to raise children.

An opposite school of thought questions whether these changes reflect a 'disintegration' of the family. As Aerts (1993) has argued, children continue to be born and raised by adults in a household. Also, the increase in divorce rates are a consequence of changes in the economic and social role of women since the 1950s. Thus, divorce represents the opportunity of women or men to leave an unsatisfactory marriage in which in the past, when the sanctity of the family was the social norm, the 'integrity' of the family often led to pathological relations between the mother and father in some families. Skolnick (1993) believes that rising divorce rates do not reflect a flight from marriage so much as rising expectations for satisfaction in marriage.

Aerts (1993) emphasizes that the major institutional change in USA and Europe is the rupture between marriage and family formation in the sense that marriage is no longer a socially sanctioned prerequisite of child-bearing. Men no longer have either the institutional or legal power to control the lives of spouses and mothers. Changes in the roles of women have altered profoundly the dynamics within the family. Women, because of their entry into the labor market, can control the number of births through contraception and abortion, can freely choose their spouses, and can leave an unsatisfactory relationship with the husband. Aerts concludes that although the idea of family remains valued, it is pragmatically accepted under compromised forms at the cultural and individual levels. However, Aerts pessimistically concludes that although family ties may develop between the child and father, grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc., it cannot be assumed any longer, considering the high divorce level, that significant, long lasting ties of this kind will develop, except with the mother, and be sustained for a period long enough to make a significant impact on the child's socialization.

On the other hand, Muncie and Sapsford (1995) argue that it was rare in 1900 for a young child to reach adulthood with grandparents still surviving, but because of increased life expectancy today, even great-grandparents are not uncommon in a family. They also argue that the twentieth-century family is a strengthened version of its predecessors, and that the modern family offers opportunities for greater closeness and intimacy than was possible in pre-industrial

Deviation = 10). Composite scores were computed as the mean T-scores of the items for each factor for each cluster and for the overall factor structure. Mean T-scores across cultures were compared with a series of one-way analyses of variance, for each equivalent factor (Table 7.4). Because the number of respondents in each cluster is very large, mean differences between the clusters for each factor were highly significant. Thus, the magnitude of the significance of the mean differences between the clusters on a factor are reported in terms of effect size, η^2.

Religiosity and family life. Values and attitudes relating to the importance of religion and family life, attending church, shared religious beliefs were found to be universal constructs in all four country clusters (Figure 7.1). The analysis of variance indicated significant differences between clusters. Cluster 3 (Croatia . . . Portugal) had the highest composite mean 53.97, followed by 51.45 for the former Eastern European countries of Cluster 2 (Belarus . . . Ukraine). The primarily Western European countries of Cluster 1 (Austria . . . UK) and the primarily Scandinavian countries of Cluster 4 (Denmark . . . Sweden) had approximately the same means, 48.91 and 48.74 respectively, with the lowest values for the importance of religiosity. The effect size of η^2 = .08 indicates relatively low to medium degree of variance explained.

Companionship in marriage. This factor was also found in the four country clusters, indicating it is a universal construct in the European countries. It concerns communication, sharing of household chores, mutual respect, happy sexual relationship, which may be consistent with the relationship between husband and wife, with or without children, and between unmarried partners. However, the effect size of η^2 = .01 indicates no important differences, or very little variation between the European countries on these attitudes and values.

Abortion and divorce. A factor regarding whether divorce is justified, and the justification or approval of abortion if the woman is not married or if more children are not wanted was also found in the four clusters of countries. Disapproval with mean 52.62 (high scores indicate disapproval; the directions of the scores are reversed for this factor) was found in Cluster 3 (Croatia . . . Portugal), followed by slight approval 49.65 in the former Eastern European countries of Cluster 2 (Belarus . . . Ukraine) and 48.97 in the countries of Cluster 1 (Austria . . . UK). The highest level of approval was found in the primarily Scandinavian countries of Cluster 4 (Denmark . . . Sweden)

Table 7.4 Factors-percent of variance explained, for the general factor structure and for each country cluster and analysis of variance measures of association

General Factor	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	η^2
A. (1) Religiosity and family life (12.2%) Mean T-score = 51.03	A. (1) (11.6%) Mean T-score = 48.91	A. (2) (7.8%) Mean T-score = 51.45	A. (2) (7.8%) Mean T-score = 53.97	A. (2) (6.6%) Mean T-score = 48.74	.08 >50: Important
B. (2) Companionship in marriage (7.4%) Mean T-score = 50.14	B. (3) (4.7%) Mean T-score = 50.19	B. (1) (11.2%) Mean T-score = 49.04	B. (1) (12.0%) Mean T-score = 50.92	Bb*. (5) (3.6%) Mean T-score = 50.22	.01 >50: Important
C. (3) Abortion, divorce, adultery (5.6%) Mean T-score = 49.92	C. (2) (7.1%) Mean T-score = 48.97	C. (3) (4.2%) Mean T-score= 49.65	C. (3) (5.7%) Mean T-score = 52.62	C. (1) (10.8%) Mean T-score = 45.85	.07 >50: Disapproval
D. (4) Children, family life, and marriage (3.5%) Mean T-score = 51.05	D. (4) (3.7%) Mean T-score = 49.24	Dd**. (5) (3.5%) Mean T-score = 51.78	D. (5) (3.6%) Mean T-score = 49.75	Dd**. (6) (3.2%) Mean T-score = 45.17	.09 >50: Important
E. (5) Family security (3.4%) Mean T-score = 51.01	E. (5) (3.4%) Mean T-score = 49.62		Ee***. (4) (3.7%) Mean T-score = 50.65		.01 >50: Important
FU2 OVR. (6) Importance of living conditions of family and the elderly (3.0%) Mean T-score = 50.03		FU2 OVR. (4) (3.7%) Mean T-score = 48.31			No comparison >50: Important
G. (7) Working wife and mother (2.8%) Mean T-score = 49.85	G. (6) (3.1%) Mean T-score = 49.90		Gg****. (6) (3.1%) Mean T-score = 50.81	G. (4) (3.9%) Mean T-score = 49.56	.01 >50: Disapproval
		U2U3. (7) Woman's role as a housewife (2.9%) Mean T-score = 51.91	U2U3. (7) Woman's role as a housewife (2.9%) Mean T-score = 49.56		.03 >50: Approval

Table 7.4 (cont.)

General Factor	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	η^2
	U1. (7) Importance of marriage and family life (3.0%) Mean T-score = 49.66				No comparison
					>50: Important
		U2. (6) Same social, political and religious background (3.0%) Mean T-score = 49.55			No comparison
					>50: Important
				U4a. (3) Adequate income, good housing and children (4.7%) Mean T-score = 49.16	No comparison
					>50: Important
				U4b. (7) Importance or keeping the family together (2.9%) Mean T-score = 50.36	No comparison
					>50: Important

The order of each factor in each factor solution is denoted in the parenthesis, followed by the percent of variance explained by the factor. 'U' stands for presence of a factor 'uniquely' for one cluster of countries.

Variance accounted for (rightmost column) refers to comparisons among similar or identical factors clusters of countries, excluding the overall factor structure, which is, however, reported as a point of reference.

* This factor (Bb) was similar and not identical to the 'Companionship in marriage' factor present in all other clusters of countries and in the overall structure.

** This factor (Dd) was similar and not identical to the overall and the cluster 1 and 3 'Children, family life, and marriage' factors.

*** This factor (Ee) was similar and not identical to the overall and the cluster 1 'Family security' factor.

**** This factor (Gg) was similar and not identical to the overall and the cluster 1 and 4 'Working wife and other' factors.

Figure 7.1   Factor composite T-scores for the four clusters of countries; two identical (Religiosity and family life, Abortion-Divorce-Adultery) and two similar factors
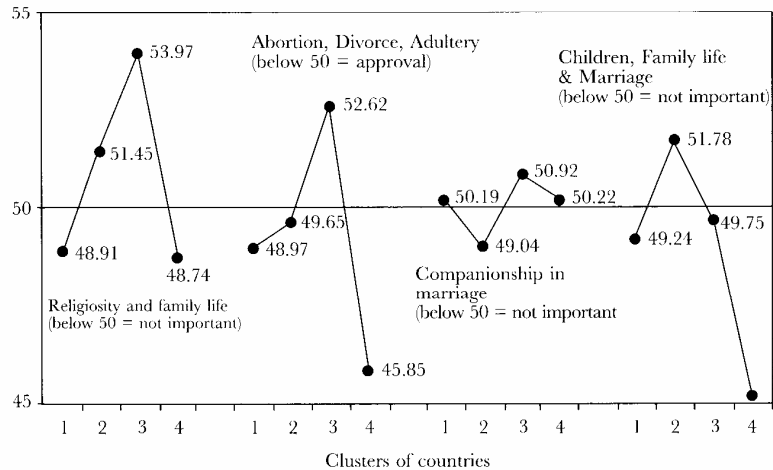
with mean = 45.85. The effect size of η^2 = .07 indicates a relatively low to medium degree of variance explained.

Children, family life, and marriage. Marriage or long-term relationship is necessary for one to be happy, a woman needs to have children to be fulfilled, and both parents needed in a family, values related to the traditional nuclear family system, were common factors found in the four clusters of countries. The highest mean 51.78 was in Cluster 2 (Belarus . . . Ukraine). Cluster 3 (Croatia . . . Portugal) and Cluster 1 (Austria . . . UK) had values 49.75 and 49.24 respectively, slightly below the mean, while Cluster 4 (Denmark . . . Sweden) with mean = 45.17 disapproved most of the values of related to this family system. The effect size of η^2 = .09 again indicates a relatively low to medium degree of variance explained.

Working wife and mother. These attitudes emerged in three of the four clusters (1, 2 and 3), but the effect size of η^2 = .01 indicates that the percent of variation explained is too small to conclude that the mean differences are significant.

Comparisons of the other factors shared by only two clusters also did not result in important mean differences. The remainder of the factors are specific for each cultural cluster.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the comparisons of the mean scores between the cultural clusters on the above factors was that even when mean differences were found, they were 'relatively' small and not indicative of extreme differences in these family values and attitudes in European countries.

2.5   Demographic correlates

This stage of analysis explored the relationships between the family values factors and demographic variables at the individual level. The factor indices employed for this stage of analysis were the 'overall' structure composite factor scores and the composite factor scores for each of the four clusters of countries.

Employing the scores for the overall factor structure could be a problem since the analysis indicated four clusters of countries with some identical, some similar and some unique factors across the four clusters of countries. However, for comparability reasons and in order to combine the similar (although not identical across countries) factor patterns into a single interpretative framework, this factor structure was also used together with the cluster of countries factor structures.[1]

The demographic variables employed were: a) gender, b) age, c) having a stable relationship or not, d) level of education, e) household income, f) marital status and g) religious denomination. All comparisons were at the individual-level. Some other demographic measures that could be employed at this stage, e.g., if the respondents were married to their partners, were highly unbalanced in regard to the number of respondents in each cell and were not pursued further; other sparsely distributed measures were not pursued further, as well. For some of the above demographic measures, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed and for others analysis of variance was applied. In Table 7.5, the results for the measures of association (r^2 or η^2) are summarized. A general finding was that the measures of association between the demographic variables and the factor indices were not very large.

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[1] If we tested for this combined-universal factor structure through a confirmatory factor analysis model, universalism would not be supported across all 33 countries but this was not the main target at this point; concurrent description of even similar patters across these countries was of more interest.