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Cross-country differences in the transition to the third child

Extended Abstract EPC 2020

Introduction

In recent decades, fertility rates have dropped in many European countries, with considerable cross-country differences prevailing regarding fertility levels (Frejka and Sobotka 2008; Zeman et al. 2018). Apart from the rise of childlessness, the decline in fertility rates has been driven by the decline of large families (Kohler et al. 2002; Bujard and Sulak 2016). Previous literature has focused on the causes of childlessness (Miettinen et al. 2015; Kreyenfeld and Konietzka 2017; Mynarska et al. 2015), whereas the formation of large families remains less explored. However, in order to better understand fertility behavior in societies today, we need to explore why people have more than two children.

Social structures represent "external opportunity structures" for generative decisions at the macro level. In addition, family culture is decisive in determining which family forms are perceived as norm-conform and which as a normative deviation and thus less accepted. In the most European societies the two-child family ideal is widespread (Sobotka & Beaujouan, 2014). Depending on the family policy regulations, which provide incentives for individual action, and the social family culture, which favors certain family forms and rejects others, country-specific opportunities and restrictions arise with the birth of the third child. They influence not only the socio-cultural factors relevant to decision-making through the motivational influence of the actors, but also the way in which these individual factors are included in the generative decision. In view of the above this ongoing paper examines the specific factors for the third child in different societal contexts.

State of art, research question and theoretical background

International comparative research provides empirical evidence that cultural norms and attitudes are very important for generative decisions across countries (Balbo, Mills 2011; Hoem 2008; Rossier, Brachet, Salles 2011; Westoff, Higgins 2009). Case studies on single countries such as Bernhardt, Goldscheider (2006) for Sweden, Liefbroer (2005) for the Netherlands, Moors (2008) for Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia) and Holton, Fisher, Rowe (2009) for Australia (Victoria) also provide empirical evidence that socio-cultural attitudinal variables contribute significantly to the explanation of generative behavior in general. Very few studies (e.g. Nauck 2007, 2010, 2014a; Nauck, Klaus 2007) investigate the direct relationship between socio-cultural factors and the third child. In an ongoing project we find out that values, norms and perceived costs are driving mechanisms behind the birth of a third child in ten European countries (Panova, Buber-Ennser, Bujard forthcoming). However in this case we used a pooled sample and could not calculate the comprehensive models for each country separately due to a low number of cases for some of the countries. The aim of this paper is to go a step further and study the country-specific impact of opportunity costs, values and norms on the transition to third child.

This paper follows up on previous research and addresses these research gaps. It analyses the transition to a third child using two waves from the Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) of four European countries – France, Austria, Hungary and Sweden. The aim is to cover different European cultural and institutional contexts as far as possible and to identify differences in the impact of factors influencing the third child.

The following research question is to be investigated: Are there country-specific factors and mechanisms that influence the probability of the birth of a third child? This question implies the assumption that the social context not only influences socio-cultural factors at the micro level, but also influences the relationship between individual values and norms and the birth of the third child (Billari, Liefbroer 2010; Billari, Philipov, Testa 2009; Keim, Bernardi, Klärner 2009). The central research interest of this paper in the country-specific mechanisms behind the birth of a third child can only be adequately pursued from an international comparative perspective. Only a cross-country comparative design can reveal to what extent the cultural and structural macro-context directly influences the emergence of child abundance by moderating the relationship between socio-cultural factors and the transition to the third child. Do countries like France and Sweden, where large families are widely accepted and common in society, for example, have different patterns of association than a country with lower social acceptance such as Hungary? And what about a traditional society like Austria?

To answer these questions I take into account theoretical arguments form several prominent theories of action the VOC, the Theory of Planed Behavior (TPB) and Rational-choice-Theory. After carefully reviewing of the fertility theories I focus on subjective opportunity costs, values towards children, social norms regarding children as well as intergeneral transmission as most promising explanatory factors for studying parity specific transition.

Data and research methods

Based on the 1st and the 2nd wave of the GGS for France, Austria, Hungary and Sweden I estimate logistic regression and average marginal effects (AME) for the birth of the third child. In order to uncover country differences, predictive margins are also calculated. The main dependent variable is the birth of a 3rd child between the 1st and the 2nd survey wave. This paper focuses on individuals in reproductive age between 18 and 45 years and analyzes approximately 3500 men and women with two children at 1st wave. The next methodological step is to include Sweden in the analysis. Since the data from the second wave is not yet available, the first analysis cover only three countries. Furthermore education specific analyses are planned. In the further analyses the grouping of countries will be taken into consideration.

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First Findings

The multivariate results (table 1) show that the considered theoretical arguments influence the birth of the third child differently in the different countries.

Table 1: Factors for the birth of the third child in France, Austria, Hungary and Sweden, pooled data, AME

	France	Austria	Hungary
Socio-cultural factors			
Effects having another child: affect and social esteem (ascending)	0.07***	0.05*	0.02+
Subjective costs having another child (descending)	-0.03*	-0.05***	-0.01
Social pressure (ascending)	0.05***	0.04***	0.02***
Educational level (middle)			
Low	-0.05	-0.04	0.05+
High	-0.02	0.00	0.02
Employment status (employed)			
Unemployed	0.04	0.02	-0.02
Constant	-2.30***	-2.54***	-2.34***
Observations	449	809	1113
Pseudo R^2	0.348	0.292	0.285

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Controlled for age, age of youngest child, sex, partner status
Source: GGS Wave 1 and 2, own estimations

Figure 1: Predictive margins by subjective costs for France, Austria and Hungary

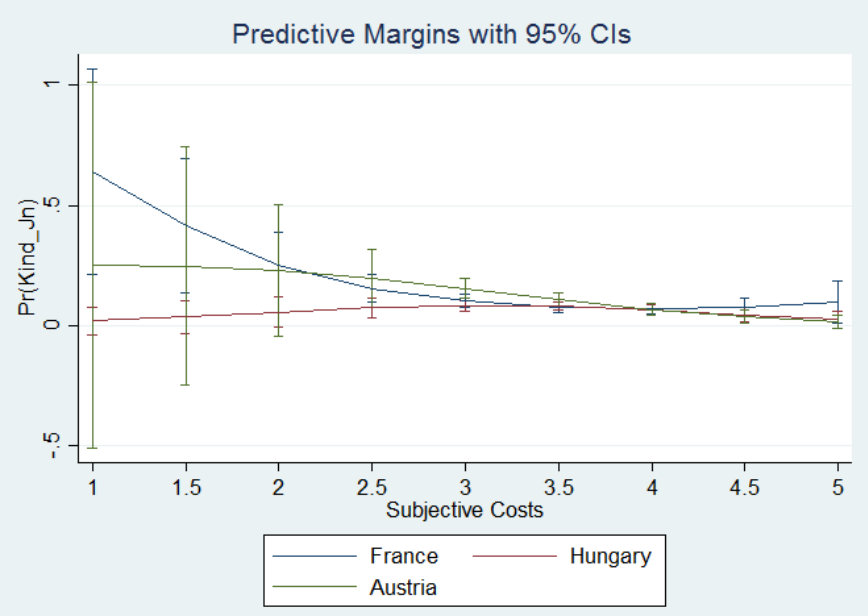

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Figure 2: Predictive margins by social and emotional utility for France, Austria and Hungary

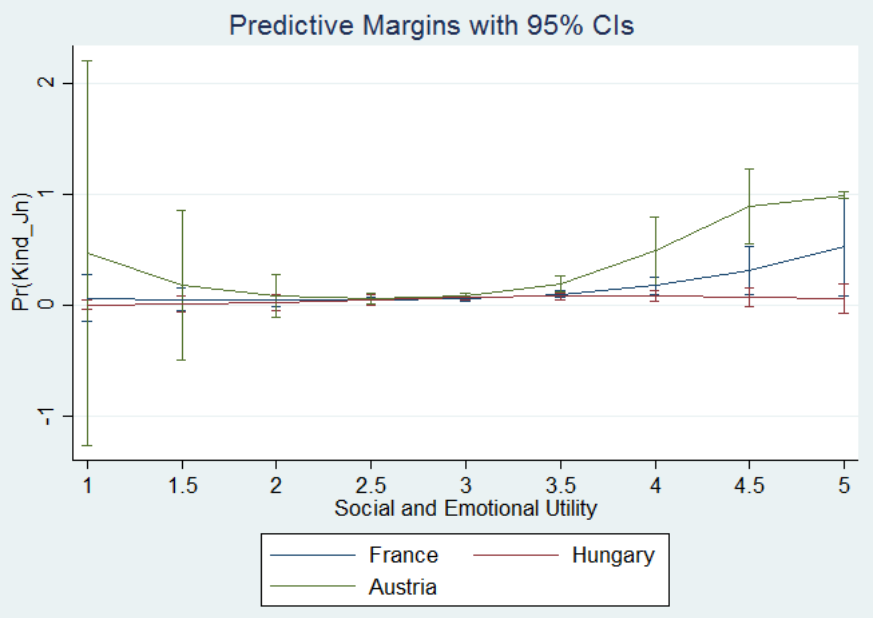

Figure 3: Predictive margins by social pressure for France, Austria and Hungary