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Family policy, fertility and institutional trust

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12th LPR Network Seminar, Trondheim 1-2 September 2015

- Research literature on relationship family policy and fertilty weak, is inconclusive/contradictory
- 'Standard' framework for studying family policy impact based on cost-benefit 'incentive thinking', attempting to isolate 'pure' causal effects
- Need for complementary approaches that can shed on light on how family policy impact works
- This study: Emphasis on the systemic properties of policies, *institutional trust,* i.e. trust in the welfare state
- Need to study people's *perceptions* of polices: The extent to which and how trust in the family policy system is expressed in young adults' reasoning about having children in Norway
- The talk is based on A.L. Ellingsæter & E. Pedersen (2015) 'Institutional trust: Family policy and fertility in Norway, Social *Politics*, doi:10.1093/sp/jxv003)

Beyond cost-benefit rationales

- Main assumption: Processes are not strictly individual, but social and structural
- Material resources and ideational/cognitive structures are *mutually constitutive*
- Perceptions of resources are filtered through *cultural* schemas, i.e. context dependent conceptual structures of interpretation, often taken for granted ways of perceiving and acting
- Focus: the processes through which policy alternatives become meaningful alternatives

On institutional trust and the welfare state

Three dimensions:

- •Reliance on institutions in everyday life
- •Trust in institutions based on **expectations** (predictive and normative)

•Trust does not depend on detailed **information**; good institutions relieve trusters from reducing insecurity from their own investigations

- •Social trust: thin or impersonal trust in strangers/acquaintances
- •Linkages between institutional trust and social trust

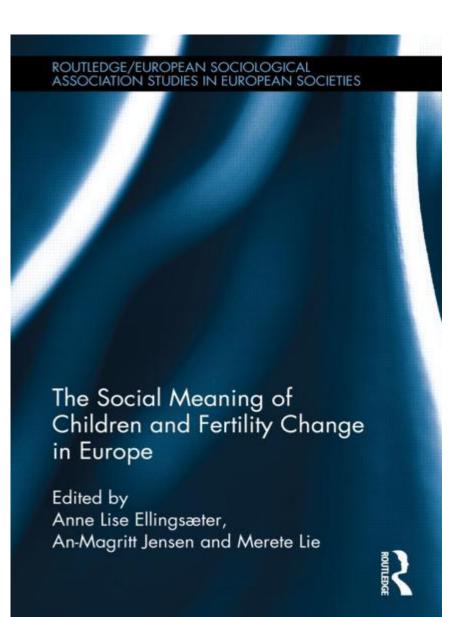
A note on Norway context

- Stable fertility levels past couple of decades; small educational differences, increase in fertility among highly educated women
- Gradually improving family policy system: About one year of paid parental leave, low threshold. Right to a childcare place (from age 1), affordable maximum fee. Cash for care benefit for 1-2 year olds (after 2012 only 1 years olds) not using childcare services
- Children considered a 'public good', children culturally very desirable
- High employement rates, also among mothers. Low unemployment, material well-being

A note on the material

- 90 semi-structured interviews with 25-35 year olds in Oslo and Trondheim in 2010; including women and men, working class and upper middle class informants, and informants with and without children. ass and parental status
- Data collected for the project: The Social Meaning of Children: Reproductive Choice, Gender and Social Class (book published by Routledge 2013)
- Analysis of questions dealing with the importance of family policies for having children

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Main findings: Virtuous circles of trust

•Trust in the family policy system permeates young adults reasoning about having children. They take the family policy system for granted and trust that it will work out

 Institutional trust is mediated by high levels of social trust – creating virtuous circles where the two forms of trust are mutually enforced

Reliance

- Having children based on the dual earner model
- Paid parental leave and kindergartens main arrangements; not perceived as 'incentives' to be chosen from; rather taken for granted
- High trust in quality of childcare institutions: one year at home self-evident norm (for women), kindergartens highly regarded. Cash for care benefit not important
- Underlying cognitive assumptions about children's needs and appropriate care resonate closely with policy set-up

- I have always wanted to have [my child] in kindergarten, I could not imagine to have [my child] with a nanny (Woman, working class, children).
- We are so pleased with those working in the kindergarten, and the kindergarten. It's a very safe place (Man, working class, children).
- Without a place in kindergarten, I would have had to stay at home. Or use private childcare, but I would not have liked that at all (Woman, upper middle class, no children).
- Kindergarten, I'm very enthusiastic about it. I think it's great, for both parents and children [...] I've seen it as something you can lean on (Man, upper middle class, no children).

Expectations

- Family policy system associated with predictability
- Security (trygghet) key notion
- Policies reduce risks related to having children
- System highly appreciated, reflecting high level of social trust
- Policies are taken for granted

- Interviewer: What about the fact that we have [full] childcare coverage and paid parental leave?
- Interviewee: Yes, that's great. I think it's a luxury that we take for granted really. I don't think everybody else has it, around the world...So one is generally extremely lucky in this country...But you take it for granted, I think.
- Interviewer: No...So it does not have much of an effect because we don't think about...
- Interviewee: No, at least I don't...we just, we know we get it, and we expect it also, really.
- Interviewer: Yes. So one calculates it into one's plan to have children anyway...
- Interviewee: Yes, one knows that it is there, in any case.
- (Man, working class, children)

Information

- Many enter parenthood without detailed information of policies
- Information sought after pregnancy is a fact or after the child is born
- Lack of explicit consideration implies trust in the policy system
- Women more knowledge than men; having children more consequential for women
- Institutional trust most decisive for women's transition to parenthood

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- Sure the [policies] are important, even if I didn't think much about it [before I had children] (Woman, working class, children).
- [Policies] were not important for me having children, but they were important afterwards, to manage everyday life. If the arrangements hadn't been there I don't know what I would have thought or planned, but they were there so... (Woman, upper middle class, children).
- [...] for my own part I don't think I would have begun to think about such things until after I eventually have had a kid (Man, working class, no children).
- [Policies] has had very little influence on the rumination about having children or not, that is, it has not entered our discussions at all. It follows afterwards, I think. Again a little of this luxury attitude...it's going to be alright (Man, upper middle class, no children)