Chapter 9
Gender and Fertility

Attitudes Towards Gender Roles and Fertility Behaviour

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Abstract Two hypotheses are tested in this contribution: (1) The existence of preference types related to the value-of-children and the emancipation dimension, showing a similar profile in a cross-national comparison. It was possible to confirm this hypothesis. We found a home-centred preference type with high fertility intentions and a work-centred type with lower intentions. (2) The relation between structural opportunities provided by family and gender policy, and the gap between intended and achieved fertility. It was also possible to prove this hypothesis at least partly. Finally a positive impact of child oriented preferences on closing the gap between intended and achieved fertility dominating structural opportunities was found.

Keywords: Gender · Preference type · Fertility · Fertility intentions · European comparison

9.1 Introduction

Europe looks back at the end of the 20th century on a constant decline in fertility rates taking place over a period of more than 50 years. At the same time, a fundamental change of values has taken place. The two developments come together in the so-called theory of the second demographic transition. The perception of the role of women in family and society has changed profoundly in the course of this transition. The second wave of women’s emancipation in the 1960s led to a growing participation of women in education and on the labour market, at the same
time caused by and further enforcing the change of values. Nevertheless, not all societal institutions changed, or if they did they did so only slowly, thus increasing the gap between individual, especially female expectations and structural opportunities. Women were confronted with competing demands from the family and from the labour market, and seem to have responded to this dilemma by reducing their fertility.

In this contribution, we would like to examine the connection between female orientations regarding gender roles and structural opportunities provided by family and gender policies, and their consequences for fertility. After a short introduction to the theoretical background, we present a typology of work-parenthood preferences, and compare the fertility of the different preference types. Finally, these results are examined in relation to country-specific structural opportunities in view of exploring the effects of family- and gender-related policies.

9.2 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

9.2.1 Modern Gender Roles

Individual and societal modernity are not always developed to the same degree in modern societies. As Safilios-Rothschild (1970, 18) stated “even when a society is modern, it does not follow that all individuals in it are equally modern. On the contrary, individuals may be quite modern despite the fact that the overall society is still traditional”, and vice versa. This applies especially to the perception of women’s roles in society. For a long time, motherhood was at the core of women’s self-perception, with a growing importance since the middle of the 19th century (Schütze 1991, 19ff.; Shorter 1975, 263 et seqq.). From then on, approximately until the middle of the 20th century, a lot of tasks formerly performed by women, e.g. in the context of household production or education, were assigned to other institutions, leaving only child and family care to the female realm. Accordingly, women’s interest concentrated on children, the latter becoming the very meaning of female existence (Herwartz-Emden 1995; Schenk 1988). An idealised model of motherhood emerged where the “responsibility for mothering rests almost exclusively on one woman (the biological mother), for whom it constitutes the primary if not sole mission during the child’s formative years.” (Glenn 1994, 3). This changed with the feminist movement in the 1960s, when women, after having gained legal equality, also claimed full social and economic equality. In this process, it was becoming more important for a woman to be independent, i.e. to have a job and to have her own income. In the course of this “equal opportunities revolution” (Hakim 2002, 434), women increasingly obtained opportunities to choose what to do with their lives. Although there may still be obstacles, increasing numbers of women are accepting this idea and trying to live up to it. In the course of this change, motherhood became just one lifestyle option among others, even though still a very important one.