

## **KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF DEVELOPMENTAL THINKING ABOUT SOCIETIES AND FAMILIES AMONG TEENAGERS IN ARGENTINA**

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the extent that ordinary people in Argentina understand and believe the ideas of development, progress and modernity and use these ideas in evaluating the world in general, and family behaviour in particular. We ask whether the concept of development and modernity is known and understood by ordinary people and the extent to which ordinary people use developmental language in describing societies and family organisations.

Ordinary people's knowledge and adherence to the ideas of development, progress, and modernity are essential components of Thornton's (2005, 2001) theory that developmental idealism is an important source of social change in many parts of the world. Thornton argues that the ideas of development, progress, and modernity were used by scholars for centuries to interpret the world and were combined with the conclusions of social sciences to form a package of ideas – that Thornton labels developmental idealism – to guide and motivate subsequent social change. Moreover, Thornton posits that the ideas of development, progress, and modernity and the propositions of developmental idealism have been widely disseminated and have been especially important in changing family life and demographic behaviour in much of the world.

This paper presents results from a study conducted in Argentina that was specifically designed to evaluate whether ordinary people are familiar with the ideas of the developmental paradigm and the extent that they adhere to or reject the propositions of developmental idealism. This paper focuses the attention on the conceptual component of the framework and examines people's familiarity

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and application of developmental thinking in concrete societal and family situations.

Using qualitative and quantitative information collected among high school teenagers from urban and rural settings in Argentina in 2003–2004, this paper address the following four specific questions. First, do people know and use developmental thinking to evaluate societies? Second, do they identify and characterise modern and traditional families in accordance with the ideas of the developmental idealism package? Third, do people adhere to the idea that there is an association between modern family behaviours and development? And, fourth, to what extent does adherence to developmental ideas vary between people living in urban and rural areas?

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As Thornton describes in detail elsewhere (2005, 2001), the developmental paradigm is a model of social change that has dominated much of Western thinking from the Enlightenment of the 1600s and 1700s to the present. This paradigm suggests that all societies progress at varying speeds through the same natural, universal, and necessary stages of development (Burrow 1981; Harris 1968; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969; Sanderson 1990; Stocking 1968). Scholars used this paradigm and international cross-sectional data to claim that at some time in the past the most developed nations – believed to be those in Northwest Europe and the Northwest European Diaspora – had been like their less developed contemporaries, and that at some point in the future the least developed nations would become like their more advanced neighbours (Berkhofer 1978; Carniero 1973; Gordon 1994; Harris 1968; Sanderson 1990).

According to Thornton (2001, 2005), scholars of the era also observed that the family systems of Northwest Europe were very different than those in many other parts of the world. Although there was considerable heterogeneity outside of north-western Europe, these societies were generally characterised as family-organised, with considerable family solidarity, extended living arrangements, universal marriage, marriage contracted at a young age, considerable authority in the hands of parents, particularly in their children's marriages, with little opportunity for affection before marriage, and with low valuation of women. In contrast, Northwest European societies were believed to be less family organised, more individualistic, and to have less parental authority, more nuclear households, less universal marriage, older marriage, more affection and couple autonomy in the mate selection process, and higher respect for women (see for illustrative examples Alexander 1995/1779; Home 1813/1774; Malthus 1986/1803; Montesquieu 1997/1748; Morgan 1985/1877; Smith 1976/1759; Westermarck 1894/1891).

With the developmental paradigm and using international cross-sectional data to infer developmental trajectories – what Thornton calls reading history sideways – it was easy for generations of scholars to conclude that the process of development transformed family systems from the traditional patterns observed outside of Northwest Europe to the developed or modern patterns within Northwest Europe (for illustrative examples, see Alexander 1995/1779; Durkheim 1978/1892; Engels 1971/1884; Le Play 1982/1855, 1982/1872; Malthus 1986/1803; Westermarck 1894/1891). Since, in general, the social and economic systems of northwest Europe were different from those elsewhere in the world, scholars made the inference that the unique Northwest European family system was causally connected to the Northwest European social and economic system. Most saw this causation as being the influence of socio-economic development on family change, but others hypothesised an effect of family change on socio-economic development. These ideas and conclusions permeated the scholarly literature from the 1700s through the middle 1900s, even though historical research in the 1960s and 1970s showed that family patterns in Northwest Europe had been in place for centuries, discrediting the idea that family organisation there had progressed from traditional to modern (for examples see Hajnal 1965, 1982; Laslett 1965; Macfarlane 1986).

The developmental paradigm and reading history sideways were not just ideas and approaches used by several generations of scholars to interpret the world; rather, they were combined with the conclusions of social science to form a package of ideas – labelled developmental idealism by Thornton (2005, 2001) – that identifies goals to be pursued in life, a means for evaluating family life, a causal framework identifying causal influences between family and social and economic life, and statements about human rights. The framework also provides a model for the development of societies perceived as less developed, and that model lies in the Northwest European societies perceived to be more developed. Thornton argues that these ideas have been spread widely around the world – often explicitly by key actors for the purpose of achieving family and demographic change – where they have been powerful forces affecting behaviour.

There are four propositions emanating from this developmental idealism that are especially important for influencing family life (Thornton 2001, 2005). The first proposition is that modern society is good and attainable. By modern society we mean the dimensions of social and economic structures identified by generations of scholars as developed – including being industrialised, urbanised, highly educated, and highly knowledgeable. The second proposition is that the modern family is good and attainable. By modern family we mean the aspects of family identified by generations of earlier scholars as modern, including the existence of many nonfamily institutions, individualism, nuclear households, intergenerational independence, marriages arranged by mature

couples, courtship preceding marriage, and a high valuation of women. The third proposition is that a modern family is a cause and an effect of a modern society. That is, a modern socio-economic system produces a modern family system and a modern family system produces a modern society. Finally, the fourth proposition is that individuals have the right to be free and equal and have their social relationships based on consent. Thornton's argument is that increases in the acceptance of these propositions can lead to substantial changes in family behaviours such as marriage, childbearing, and divorce. Alternatively, rejection of these propositions can lead to a strong resistance to changes in family life.

It is important to note that we present developmental idealism and its four summary propositions not because we advocate them as good or bad, true or false, but because we believe that their acceptance or rejection can have important implications for people's behaviour. Whether or not the ideas of developmental idealism are good, bad, true, or false is beyond the scope of this paper.

As discussed by Thornton (2001, 2005), there have been different actors and mechanisms for the dissemination of the specific propositions of the developmental paradigm with its hierarchy of countries and developmental idealism around the world. These include, but are not limited to, treatises of the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s, Christian Churches, mass education, mass media, social movements, and international government and nongovernmental organisations, etc. Several scholars have argued that this kind of developmental thinking is widespread around the world (for examples see Ahearn 2001; Amin 1989; Blaut 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Kahn 2001; Latham 2000; Lee 1994; Melegh 2006; Nisbet 1980; Pigg 1992; Robertson 1992; Sanderson 1990; United Nations 1948, 1962, 1979). This developmental thinking has probably facilitated many world-wide family changes, including the increased use of contraception, smaller families, later marriage, less control of marriage by parents, more divorce, greater gender equality, and more nonmarital sex and childbearing (Thornton 2001, 2005; Thornton and Philipov 2008). And, in some places resistance to developmental idealism has been a factor in the retention of indigenous family forms.

Although there are many reasons to expect that beliefs in the developmental paradigm, with its hierarchy of countries, and developmental idealism are widespread, there has been a lack of systematic studies among people in everyday life designed to directly evaluate familiarity, acceptance and rejection of developmental thinking and developmental idealism among ordinary people. Among the exceptions is the recent study by Thornton et al. (2005) that specifically examined these issues in Nepal. They provide strong evidence that ordinary people in Nepal are familiar with the ideas of development and use them extensively in their understanding of the world, supporting the contention that developmental thinking has been widely disseminated (Thornton et al. 2005).

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Argentina is a sparsely populated country of about 37 million people, with almost 90 percent living in urban areas. The population is highly concentrated with one third living in the City of Buenos Aires and its Metropolitan Area. A Spanish colony for more than two centuries, Argentina declared its independence in 1816, but it was only in the 1880s that the State gained a vital role in the control and regulation of several aspects of social life, including education, marriage, and health. These changes were driven by the ruling elites' strong commitment to modernise the country, emulating Western societies. The elite's idea of progress was strongly based in a racial component, defining native populations as "barbaric" and European immigrants as "civilised" (Zimmerman 1992). This translated into the promotion of European immigration and campaigns to decimate the indigenous population. The massive European immigration at the turn of the twentieth century (mainly from Italy and Spain) greatly contributed to the growth and urbanization of the population and had a great influence in shaping culture and society.

Another main avenue that ruling elites pursued to become a modern nation was through mass education. Free, mandatory, and secular public education was established by law in 1884, resulting in a rapid fall in illiteracy rates for both men and women. Enrolment in elementary and secondary school increased steadily in the following decades. Today around 75 percent of teenagers achieve at least some high school education. By the early 20th century, Argentina had experienced extensive urbanization, with more than half of the population living in urban areas by the 1910s.

Canonical principles regulated family issues up until the legislation of the Civil Code (1869) and Civil Marriage (1888), which placed marriage under state control. However, catholic family ideas and a patriarchal family system served as the basis for family legislation for most of the twentieth century (Torrado 2003).

Argentina had historically followed Western family patterns with marriage being the institution that regulated and legitimised couples' coresidence, sexual relationships, and childbearing. Marriage was at relatively late ages, with an important preference for nuclear family living arrangements (Ghirardi 1998; Gil Montero et al. 1998; Szuchman 1986). These patterns, however, coexisted with considerable levels of illegitimate childbearing and consensual unions among people in poverty, with low education, and living in rural areas (Torrado 2003).

Despite historical institutional and religious pressures against any type of fertility regulation, fertility levels began to decline by the turn of the 20th cen-

tury, before most other Latin American countries, and way before the accessibility of chemical contraceptives (Pantelides 1989). Fertility decline occurred during a process of rapid urbanization and incipient industrialisation. Mass education and the lower fertility of women from some immigrant groups have been singled out as important influences in the decline in fertility. The city of Buenos Aires has constantly had lower fertility levels than any other area of the country, and fertility first declined in this city (Pantelides 1989).

Similarly to what is observed in many other countries, the last decades have seen significant changes in matters of family formation, dynamics, and dissolution. There are fewer people getting married, and if they do, they are marrying at later ages, having fewer children, and more often disrupting their marriages. In addition, more people are choosing to cohabit and are having children while cohabiting (Binstock 2004; Torrado 2003). Women have also altered their roles within their families by playing a more significant role in the household economy (Wainerman 2003; Geldstein 1999). Cohabitation, marital dissolution, unmarried childbearing, and premarital sex have become increasingly accepted in mainstream culture.

Over much of its history Argentina has been politically unstable. Since 1930, several military dictatorships ruled the country, alternating with short periods of democratic governments. The last military dictatorship (in power between 1976 and 1983) implemented a systematic policy of censorship and repression. After democracy was recouped, human rights became a major focus of debate in society, and freedom of the press was reinstated. In addition, significant legal changes were made to equalise women and men's rights within the family, including the possibility of divorce and remarry. Also, with the Constitutional reform of 1994, international treaties that recognise basic human rights, rights for children, and the condemnation of all forms of discrimination against women gained constitutional rank.

Our data collection was conducted in the wake of an unprecedented economic recession. Argentina showed a relatively constant growth in the economy until the mid 1970s. In general, these decades were periods of upward mobility and the consolidation of a wide middle class. Since the 1970s, however, the economy began to show signs of deterioration that worsened in the decades to come with the implementation of a series of neo-liberal and structural adjustment policies during the 1990s. This resulted in a great deterioration in income, and an unprecedented increase of poverty and unemployment rates (Rapoport 2000).

## DATA AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the City of Buenos Aires, and in five rural communities in northern Santa Fe state. These communities were located at a 30–45 minutes drive from Reconquista, the closest city. Reconquista, with a population of 65,000 habitants is, in turn, more than 300 km away from the capital of the State, 800 km away from the city of Buenos Aires, and 200 km away from the capital city of the state of Chaco, one of the poorest states of the country. Reconquista has a number of educational, health, and recreational facilities, but retains a calm life style. The rural communities where we conducted the study, in contrast, have very basic services and amenities; high school institutions were founded during the last five years.

### *Respondent Selection and Characteristics*

The results presented in this paper are based on a mixed-methods study with high school students attending the last three years of high school and were chosen to represent the general population of students in these grades rather than any specific type of students. The focus groups were segregated by sex, with the number of participants in each group ranging from 6 to 8 students. We conducted a total of 9 focus groups with students from two public high schools in Buenos Aires and 8 focus groups with students from two public rural schools in northern Santa Fe. The focus groups discussed a range of topics centred on the meanings of modernity and traditionality and the ways they were connected with social structure, families, and change. The duration of focus group discussions ranged from an hour and a half to two hours. Focus groups were taped, and the tapes were transcribed for the analysis.

Prior to the conduct of the focus groups, participants were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire containing both demographic information and questions about development and developmental idealism. This self-administered questionnaire was also independently administered to additional students in the same two high schools in Buenos Aires and in three additional rural high schools in northern Santa Fe, thereby increasing the number of questionnaires obtained (456) beyond the number of people participating in the focus groups. Like the students participating in the focus groups, these students were not limited to classes of any particular subject matter. It is important to note that the administration of the survey before the focus groups provided a context for the focus groups. Unfortunately, our design does not allow us to see how this ordering of the survey and focus groups influenced the outcomes of the focus groups.

*Table 1*  
*Survey participants' selected characteristics, 2003–2004, Argentina*

	Rural	Urban	Total
<b>Time in current place of residence</b>			
10 years or less	17.1	8.2	12.6
More than 10 years	11.3	5.2	8.1
Since were born	71.6	86.6	79.3
<b>Employment</b>			
Presently working	41.7	9.9	25.5
Worked in the past	21.1	26.7	24.0
Never worked	37.2	63.4	50.5
<b>Age at first job (a)</b>			
13 or younger	64.0	18.8	47.3
14	15.1	20.0	17.1
15	10.8	29.4	18.0
16	7.9	16.5	11.3
17 or 18	2.2	44.7	6.4
<b>Household size</b>			
Mean number of members	5.5	4.6	5.1
<b>Father's education</b>			
Incomplete elementary or less	30.3	8.2	19.4
Complete elementary	45.9	12.7	29.2
Incomplete high school	7.3	25.5	16.4
Complete high school	11.0	24.1	17.6
Superior	5.5	29.1	17.4
<b>Mother's education</b>			
Incomplete elementary or less	29.6	10.6	19.9
Complete elementary	42.6	13.2	27.5
Incomplete high school	7.4	19.4	13.5
Complete high school	12.0	21.1	16.7
Superior	8.3	35.7	22.3
<b>Ever been to a movie hall</b>			
Yes	39.9	100.0	70.4
<b>Hours spent watching tv</b>			
Never	10.9	5.2	8.0
1 hour a day	23.6	15.2	19.3
2 or 3 hours a day	49.5	49.8	49.7
4 or more hours a day	15.9	29.9	23.1
<b>Ever visited a foreign country</b>			
Yes	19.0	48.3	33.9
<b>Religion affiliation</b>			
None	1.4	30.4	16.2
Catholic	92.8	57.4	74.8
Other	5.9	12.2	9.1
<b>Religiosity</b>			
Very religious	17.3	5.7	11.4
Moderately religious	57.7	27.8	42.5
Somewhat religious	20.0	33.5	26.8
Not at all religious	5.0	33.0	19.2
<b>Family preferences</b>			
Women's ideal age at marriage	24.5	25.3	24.9
Men's ideal age at marriage	26.3	26.8	26.6
Ideal age at first child	25.2	26.2	25.7
Family's ideal number of children	3.1	2.7	2.9

(a) for those who ever worked.

Source: Developmental Idealism Study of High School Students in Argentina.



The survey questionnaire included nine sections asking about many dimensions of the developmental paradigm and developmental idealism.<sup>2</sup> However, in this paper we focus our attention only on the three sections most relevant for investigating ordinary teenagers' familiarity, adherence and application of the developmental paradigm in concrete societal and family situations.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 summarises some characteristics of the survey participants in the study. Compared with rural participants, urban participants have parents with more formal education, live in smaller households, are less religious, and have less work experience. They also have more frequently visited a foreign country, more often attended a movie hall, and spent more time watching television. Finally, urban respondents report somewhat older preferences than their rural peers for getting married and having a child.

#### *Data and Measures*

One section of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether different family attributes and behaviours (e.g. spouse choice) were more common in places with modern families or were more common in places with traditional families. Another section of the questionnaire asked respondents to compare family structures and behaviours across different levels of development. More specifically, respondents were asked to indicate whether a particular family characteristic (e.g. marrying at old ages) was more common in less developed places or in more developed places. For both sections of the questionnaire, respondents were given an option where they could specify that each attribute was distributed "about equally" in both places. In addition, while "don't know" was not given as a response option, those few such answers – or missing data – were also coded.

Another section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank countries on a development scale. This section began with the following introduction: "Now we would like you to consider how developed different countries in the world are. Here is a scale of development – with the least developed country in the world being at number 0 and the most developed place in the world being at number 10. And, moderately developed countries are in the middle at number 5." The respondents were asked to rate on the scale the following countries: Argentina, Japan, India, U.S., Nigeria, China, England, Bolivia and Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Pretests were conducted with a modest number of respondents. Each pretest provided information about questions that were ambiguous or difficult to understand. This provided the necessary information to refine the questions, leading to the final version of the questionnaire that we used in our survey.

<sup>3</sup> For a full version of the survey questionnaire and focus group guide see <http://di.psc.isr.umich.edu/projects/argentina>.

*Analysis Strategies*

We utilise several criteria for evaluating whether high school students understand and believe the ideas of the developmental paradigm. Our first criterion focuses on teenagers' general ability to use and apply developmental and modernity concepts during the focus group discussions. We also take into account respondents' overall comments and the amount of survey missing data. We hypothesised that lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with developmental language would be revealed in respondents becoming frustrated, terminating the survey early, refusing to answer questions, and providing answers that do not appear to be related to the questions.

Second, we document knowledge and application of the developmental paradigm through our questions asking respondents to rate a series of countries on their levels of development. Here we compare both the individual and aggregate ratings of respondents concerning the development levels of countries with the ratings provided by the United Nations, with the presumption that a distribution of answers similar to the ratings of the United Nations indicates great knowledge of the countries of the world and great ability to apply the concept of development in everyday life.

Finally, we compared the answers of our survey respondents with those provided by the developmental literature. That is, we estimate the fraction of respondents who provide the predicted answers in comparing traditional and modern families, and in comparing family attributes between less developed and more developed places. We posit that respondents identified modern and traditional families and family attributes of developed and less developed places in correspondence with the developmental framework must be familiar with the developmental model and its application. We also used information from focus group discussions to enlighten us about the teenagers' reasoning and beliefs concerning development.

We conduct the analysis comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between urban and rural respondents. Our presumption is that Buenos Aires respondents – having a longer and higher exposure to many of the mechanisms of diffusion of ideas – will be more familiar and knowledgeable of developmental ideas than their rural peers.

## RESULTS

We begin the analysis by emphasising the level of co-operation and enthusiasm displayed by the majority of teenagers that participated in the study. For all teenagers participating in the focus group discussions, this was their first experience with such discussions. Thus, we were not surprised that the teenagers displayed a significant level of shyness that affected the pace of the initial discussions. Still, the teenagers' participation was substantial and enthusiastic. The discussions also suggested a high degree of understanding of developmental concepts and the ability to apply them in everyday life. In fact, we concluded that in only one out of the seventeen focus groups was participation low and discussion limited.

Evidence of high levels of respondent co-operation and understanding is also provided by the survey data. The survey questionnaire was relatively long (an average length of about 30 minutes) and intensive. It required a great deal of thought as most of the questions were about knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes, with many being about relatively complex and abstract ideas. Nevertheless, both respondents to the survey and focus group participants provided positive comments about the study experience.

Before the survey questionnaire was given to respondents, they were informed about the overall content of the questionnaire. Respondents were also informed that one of the main goals of this study was to learn teenagers' beliefs about a wide range of family issues rather than to test their actual knowledge. Therefore, we asked participants that, in the case they came across a question where they felt they did not have enough information to respond, to give the answer that best matched what they believed. Respondents were also informed that they had the right to decline to answer any question if for any reason they did not feel comfortable to do so.

Despite the complexity of the questions and our invitation for respondents to skip questions they did not feel comfortable answering, there was a relatively low level of missing data. Considering the dimensions analysed in this paper, the maximum of item non-response for the set of questions asking respondents to compare attributes in more developed and less developed places was 1.3 percent. And the maximum item non-response for the set of questions that asked respondents to compare attributes in traditional and modern families was less than 1 percent. In rating countries on development, only 4 percent of the respondents did not provide answers for the entire set of 9 countries. In other words, 96 percent of respondents provided valid data in ranking each of the nine countries on the development index.

*Teenagers' characterisation of developing and developed societies*

Focus group participants spontaneously understood the concept of development and contrasted less developed and developed societies in accordance with the dimensions of the developmental paradigm. They associated development with technology, urbanization, industrial plants, wealth, high levels of access to communication, and with an extended array of education, transportation, and health facilities and services. Teenagers also characterised developed societies as those having a wide range of amenities for recreational and consumption purposes, including movie halls, theatres, night-clubs, restaurants, coffee shops, markets, clothing stores, bookstores, etc. In contrast, teenagers associated the least developed places with rural locations and small villages, describing them as places that are poor and isolated, lacking or having the minimum basic services such as electricity, gas, potable water, health and educational services, and with insufficient communication services and scarce recreational facilities.

There was a great deal of consensus among teenagers that development is a good thing for a country and people's well being, since development increases people's prospects to have a more satisfying life through more education and working opportunities and the availability of health and recreational services. However, some study participants also pointed out some aspects associated with development that they indicated were negatively valued. One refers to the continuing inequity and disparity in the way people living in developed societies have access or benefits from its wealth and range of services and facilities. In this sense, a few participants stressed that marginalisation, poverty, and unemployment are also common realities in developed places, particularly when referring to the situation of their own country.

A second negative aspect of development noted by an important number of teenagers was that it brought materialism, irresponsibility, and other social ills. They believed that as money and material goods become imperative for people, crime and insecurity increases. While teenagers make the exception that many people might rob under extreme poverty circumstances, they also said that delinquency and many criminal activities are often driven by material ambitions generated in developed societies. In addition to problems associated with insecurity and criminality, teenagers also emphasised the problematics associated with the availability, consumption, and commerce of drugs in developed societies. And, the last aspect associated with development valued negatively is the pollution and contamination of the environment.

It is useful to note that the negatively-judged evaluations of development were seen as clearly secondary to the overall positive connotations associated with development. That is, the students saw the overall changes associated with development as positive and progressive rather than negative.

In discussing the specific case of Argentina, participants from both the rural and urban areas agreed in naming the city of Buenos Aires as the most developed place in the country. They also agreed in suggesting a variety of small villages or rural settings as examples of the least developed places locally.

Participants from rural settings identified themselves as living in undeveloped places and clearly used a scale of social progression with their nearby villages and towns, placing them as more or less developed using many of the dimensions identified by developmental thinking, such as the extent of the services the place has, how well off people living in that particular place are, how educated they are, and how much work opportunities they have. Another indication of rural teenagers' familiarity and use of developmental ideas was revealed in their responses about how they thought teenagers in Buenos Aires would describe them. They believed that they were looked down upon by people in Buenos Aires, using in their answers negative terms such as "indigenous", "dulls", and "foolish". The only positive references – based from first hand experiences with visitors or relatives – centred on aspects relating to the tranquillity and safety associated with rural life.

In characterising people from more developed places – and particularly teenagers from the city of Buenos Aires – many teenagers living in rural areas used unfriendly and hostile terms, such as "crazy", "senseless", "materialistic", and "drug addicts". Their point of view was seldom based on personal experiences (given that only a few of them have been in the city) but mainly on the information that they obtained from news reports and television shows. Only a handful of teenagers questioned the sources of this overall view by cautioning that "for each young drug addict they [mass media] show, or each adolescent mother, etc., there are hundreds of teenagers that are not". Participants systematically referred to a specific television show about high school teenagers that highly permeated their comments and opinions about youth life in Buenos Aires. Despite their negative evaluations, many rural respondents reported that these shows are very influential in shaping their own and their peers' preferences, tastes, and behaviours, as reflected in new haircuts, clothing, verbal expressions, and in the ways they interacted with their peers and families.

Teenagers living in Buenos Aires described rural life as calmer and safer, but limited in education and labour opportunities and the range of recreational activities that people can do. While they did not explicitly use derogatory terms in describing youth life in rural areas, the idea that people were happy and had fun in their own – but rudimentary – terms was mentioned repeatedly. Only a few urban participants indicated that rural places and small villages are not always isolated, with many places having full access to communication devices such as the internet and satellite television. Nonetheless, the majority concurred on the fact that they could not imagine themselves being happy living as they imagined their peers in rural places do. At the same time, they also had strong

reservations on whether rural teenagers could adjust and be happy in a place like the city of Buenos Aires.

*Perceptions of development around the world*

In referring to development around the world, teenagers systematically mentioned during focus group discussions the United States, Japan, Canada, and Germany as examples of developed countries. Africa was most frequently mentioned as an example of the least developed.

The teenagers' perceptions about development around the world is demonstrated by their responses to our survey questions asking them to rate nine countries on their level of development using a 0–10 scale. Table 2 contains the mean development scores for each of the nine countries rated, along with the corresponding scores of the index of development created by the United Nations (multiplied by ten to create a similar metric) for each of the countries (United Nations Development Program 2001, 2003). Given that the UN is an organisation expending considerable resources to assess development in the world's countries, we use its index as an external criterion to compare with the answers of Argentinean respondents. The UN human development index was calculated using the education index<sup>4</sup>, life expectancy at birth, and the GDP per capita of the country.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The international education index is comprised of measures of national adult literacy (% of population over age 15 who are literate) and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment ratio.

<sup>5</sup> The scores can theoretically range from 0 to 1, but actually range from .275 to .94.

Table 2  
*United Nations' Human Development Index and Respondents' Mean Scores on Development by region of residence*

Countries	United Nations	Argentinean Respondents					
	Human Development Index* (x10)	Rural		Urban		Total	
		Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
England	9.30	8.22	213	8.60	225	8.41	438
United States	9.37	9.13	213	9.05	226	9.09	439
Japan	9.32	8.88	213	9.04	225	8.96	438
Argentina	8.49	6.29	213	5.69	226	5.98	439
Brazil	7.77	6.85	212	5.77	224	6.30	436
China	7.21	7.89	212	7.64	225	7.76	437
Bolivia	6.72	5.80	212	3.93	225	4.84	437
India	5.90	5.37	213	3.65	224	4.49	437
Nigeria	4.63	5.45	211	3.52	222	4.46	433
Correlation between UN and Argentina Respondents' Scores		0.836		0.873		0.862	

(\*) 2003 Human Development Report, Human Development Index. The Human Development is an index of GNP per Capita, life expectancy and the Education Index. ([www.undp.org/hdr2003](http://www.undp.org/hdr2003))

*Source:* Developmental Idealism Study of High School Students in Argentina.

Perusal of Table 2 reveals that the perception that both urban and rural teenagers have of the distributions of development around the world are very similar to those of the scholars at the United Nations, as indicated by the comparison between UN and teenagers' average development scores. As a summary measure of this correspondence we calculated Pearson correlation coefficients between the United Nations scores and the mean scores for the respondents. The overall correlation is .862 (being only slightly higher among urban than rural students), providing strong evidence of teenagers' understanding of the developmental hierarchy, and the correspondence between their beliefs and the overall criteria provided by the UN.

Just as Pearson correlation coefficients can be computed between the aggregate scores of respondents and the United Nations, correlations can be computed between the scores of an individual and the scores of the United Nations.

That is, we calculated 432<sup>6</sup> correlations between each individual's scores on country development and the United Nations development index. We summarise the distribution of correlations in Table 3 by showing quartile breaks.

Table 3  
*Bivariate Correlations between Individual Respondent's Ratings of Development and United Nation's Ratings of Development by region of residence*

Percentiles	Rural	Urban	Total
25 <sup>th</sup>	0.42	0.69	0.55
50 <sup>th</sup>	0.66	0.81	0.75
75 <sup>th</sup>	0.82	0.87	0.85
% with corr .5 or higher	6.73	91.0	79.6
N	211	221	432

*Source:* Developmental Idealism Study of High School Students in Argentina Possible range is from -1 to 1.

Looking at the individual correlations between Argentinean teenagers and the United Nations on development, we see that very few respondents had extremely low correlations with the UN scales. That is, only 25 percent of respondents had correlations below .55. Furthermore, the median correlation was .75, and 25 percent of respondents had correlations of .85 or above.

While the evaluations of development among both rural and urban students closely matched those of the UN, urban teenagers, as expected, showed a higher correspondence than their rural peers. Half of urban teenagers had a correlation of .81 or higher, compared to a median correlation of .66 among rural teenagers. In addition, 91 percent of urban teenagers (but 67 percent of rural adolescents) had a correlation of .5 or above.

The ability of most respondents to perform so well on this evaluation task suggests that teenagers were not only able to apply our measurement procedures reliably, but they also have a knowledge of key world countries and an understanding of development that is in agreement with that of the UN.

#### Traditional and modern families

In this section we turn our focus to the extent that teenagers are familiar and adhere to developmental categories in describing and characterising family organisations, using data from both the focus group discussions and the survey. The topic in each focus group session was introduced with the following open question: What do you think about (or what images come to mind) when we talk

<sup>6</sup> This is the total number of respondents (out of a total of 456) that had valid answers for all countries.



about traditional and modern families?<sup>7</sup> Data from the survey comes from a set of questions that asked respondents to indicate whether different family behaviours (e.g. marrying at late ages) were more common in places with traditional families, more common in places with modern families, or equally common in places with traditional families and places with modern families. The distributions for these comparisons are presented in Table 4, with the answers specified by centuries of developmental thinking noted in bold.

Table 4  
*Respondents' perceptions of whether certain family attributes are more common in places with traditional families or with modern families, by region of residence*

Traditional versus modern families	Rural	Urban	Total
<i>People marrying at older ages</i>			
Traditional families	30.9	23.8	27.3
Modern families	<b>48.9</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>
About the same	20.2	10.8	15.4
<i>Women getting treated with more equity</i>			
Traditional families	45.2	14.3	29.4
Modern families	<b>31.7</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>52.2</b>
About the same	23.1	13.9	18.4
<i>Adult children living with their parents</i>			
Traditional families	<b>50.2</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>47.0</b>
Modern families	27.8	29.7	28.8
About the same	22.0	26.3	24.2
<i>Young people choosing their own spouse</i>			
Traditional families	21.0	3.5	12.1
Modern families	<b>57.1</b>	<b>84.8</b>	<b>71.2</b>
About the same	21.9	11.7	16.7
<i>Prioritizing individual above family needs</i>			
Traditional families	29.3	15.7	22.3
Modern families	<b>44.1</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>50.7</b>
About the same	26.6	27.4	27.0

Valid responses range from 452 and 455 cases (out of a total of 456 surveys).

Source: Developmental Idealism Study of High School Students in Argentina.

The dimensions most frequently mentioned by the majority of teenagers to characterise and contrast traditional and modern families during the focus

<sup>7</sup> Participants first discussed spontaneously their views and opinions. Topics or specific family behaviours important in the developmental idealism package that were not mentioned spontaneously were explicitly introduced for discussion by the co-ordinator.

group discussions closely parallel those singled out by centuries of developmental thinking. Traditional families were described as those that spend a great amount of time together, value family life, and have high levels of parental authority. Common expressions used by teenagers to exemplify their thoughts about high levels of parental authority over children were: “You had to ask permission for everything”, “you were not allowed to voice your opinions”, and “you had to do what they tell you to”. It is not surprising, given the age of our respondents, that they illustrated parental authority with examples they relate to, such as permission for going out, having a curfew, spousal choice, and even decisions about work and education. Courtship and romantic relationships in traditional families were described as being highly supervised, with premarital sex being unacceptable. Women within traditional families were characterised with low autonomy and valuation, confined to their households, having many children, and taking care of all domestic activities. Depiction of family composition was somewhat less consistent, split between nuclear (a married couple with many children) and intergenerational (with grandparents, and other relatives such as cousins, brothers or sisters, etc). Finally, traditional families were portrayed as more religious and highly concerned about maintaining reputations and with religious and societal values.

Modern families were generally contrasted during focus group discussions as those that, even when living under a common roof, spend little time together, have little communication and knowledge of each other activities, have low parental authority over children’s activities, and with children that show little respect towards their parents. Modern families were also described as having a small number of children, being fragile and fragmented because of divorce, and having a variety of arrangements, including unmarried couples with children, blended families, single mothers, and even same-sex couples. Courtship has low or no supervision, and sexual relations are accepted within both formal and informal relations. Women in modern families were characterised as having a more active role within the family that goes beyond their reproductive role, including working for pay and contributing to the household economy, and having an influential voice in family decisions.

Only a few teenagers reported having difficulty distinguishing between traditional and modern families, arguing that “what is considered modern in one place and time could be considered traditional in some other place or time”. This idea, although explicitly mentioned by only a handful of teenagers, seems to be present among numerous study participants when they applied family organisations to concrete situations. That is, many teenagers believed their own families to be modern, although not as modern as in other places. Similarly, others conceived their own families and those around them as traditional although not as traditional as in other places or as their own families used to be in the past. Furthermore, although participants were highly knowledgeable of the

categories used by developmental thinking to depict traditional and modern families, they prioritised some aspects over others to define and categorise family organisations in concrete situations. As we will see next, this fluctuating categorisation of traditional and modern families, provide important insights to understand many of the survey responses.

Perusal of survey results presented in Table 4 reveals that in the comparison among modern and traditional families, responses in accordance with developmental thinking are the most frequently chosen by our respondents. In addition, consistent with our expectations, associations between family behaviours and modern families were, with different degrees of strength, higher among urban than rural students. This gives support to the idea that, at least during childhood and adolescence, urban residents have more prolonged exposure and adherence to the developmental model.

The majority of teenagers in the survey reported a positive correlation between modern families and independent spouse choice and late marriage. Consistent with the survey results, courtship and the mate selection process were dimensions that teenagers systematically brought up during the focus group discussions to characterise and contrast modern and traditional families. Courtship within modern families was described to be fully in the hands of young people. Young people in modern families were said to have freedom for their social life, and to date as they wish, be it casually or formally. They suggest that “parents even accept their children to bring their girlfriend or boyfriend to spend the night in their house”. Sexual relations are said to be openly accepted, even in the context of informal relations. There is also couple autonomy in the mate selection process for marriage. Marriage is usually described to take place at older ages, with people having a preference to postpone marriage until having completed their education and being settled in their work careers. Furthermore, teenagers report that modern families are not necessarily formed through marriage, with unmarried cohabitation as an accepted – and increasingly preferred – option. In contrast, most teenagers describe the mate selection process within traditional families with considerable authority in the hands of parents, who prioritise social or economic interests over love in deciding or approving who their children date and marry. Recurring expressions to describe courtship in traditional families during the focus group discussions were: “parents decided who to marry”, “parents have to give permission or approval to marry”, and “parents choose the spouse”.

At the same time that most survey respondents report that late marriage is associated with modern families, about one-quarter reported the opposite association, i.e. later marriage being more frequent in traditional than in modern families. There were two main arguments offered during focus group discussions that sustained this view. One argument focused on the value of the institution of marriage within traditional families. Thus, with marriage being highly

valued and separation and divorce being socially disapproved within traditional families, these teenagers conclude that people would tend to spend more time before deciding to marry, and therefore marry at later ages. This view is sometimes complemented by the second argument that associates marriage timing with levels of parental authority. That is, a few teenagers argued that since parents have high level of authority and influence over their children's marital decisions within traditional families, they would not allow their children to marry at young ages, whereas within modern families people marry when they please. It is also likely that some respondents said that an old age at marriage was more common in the past because Argentina, indeed, has had a relatively old age at marriage for a long time – and this fact was recognised by the respondents.

The majority of survey respondents believe that female equity is related to modern families. However, the association between women's equity and modern families is the only dimension where teenagers from rural and urban settings showed substantially different overall responses in the survey.

About 72 percent of urban but just 32 percent of rural respondents reported a positive association between women's equity and modern families. In contrast, nearly half of rural – but just 14 percent of urban respondents report a positive association between women's equity and traditional families. This was a surprising result given that – as we already mentioned – women's higher status and roles were consistently singled out as a central dimension that differentiate modern from traditional families by both urban and rural teenagers during the focus group discussions. However, participants prioritised specific aspects over others in defining and characterising traditional and modern families. In the case of women's status, many rural teenagers believed that in their families and those around them – that they defined as predominantly traditional – women and men had comparable opportunities, roles, and recognition. A similar line of reasoning is probably underlying the answers of many of the one fifth of respondents that answered that free spousal choice is more common among traditional families.

Nearly 50 percent of teenagers reported a positive correlation between traditional families and intergenerational living arrangements, but nearly three-tenths associated intergenerational arrangements with modern families. In addition, 51 percent of teenagers reported a positive correlation between modern families and prioritising individual over family needs in general, whereas 22 percent reported the opposite correlation. The only comments and remarks during the focus groups discussions that could help us interpret these associations that are not in agreement with the developmental model focused on how people and family's economic situations could shape their family circumstances. As examples of these situations, teenagers indicated that economic crisis had made it impossible for many families to afford their homes, leading

to new arrangements such as grandparents or other relatives moving in. Along the same lines, economic circumstances were seen by some teenagers as forcing people to have to take care of themselves first over their families. To comprehend participants' responses and opinions in these issues it is important to take into account that the present study was conducted in the wake of one of the worst economic crises experienced by the country, that significantly increased unemployment and poverty rates. Even so, teenagers' arguments linking family behaviours and economics indicates that developmental theories are not the only framework they used to interpret family behaviours and change.

Although we have focused our primary attention on respondents saying that certain attributes were more common in traditional or modern families, it is important to recognise that in all cases a significant minority said that the attributes were equally common in both types of families. There are at least two substantive and one methodological explanations for the "about the same" responses. One substantive explanation is that the students genuinely believed that there was no difference between modern and traditional families on that attribute. Another substantive explanation is that the students believed that they did not know the difference and, consequently, said that the attribute was equally distributed between modern and traditional families. The methodological explanation is that some respondents decided to take the easy way out in answering a question and just marked the "about the same" response. Or as a dissenting voice they were dissatisfied with the presumed and dominant dichotomy and therefore they opted for some kind of a "compromise".

#### *Connections between family organisations and development*

In the previous sections we documented that high school teenagers living in both rural and highly urbanised areas have a great deal of familiarity with the developmental model in enumerating the dimensions that distinguish places across different levels of development and family organisations. However, little has been said about whether ordinary teenagers in Argentina make any connections between development and family organisation. In order to evaluate whether teenagers make a connection between family organisation and level of development, we asked survey respondents to indicate whether a variety of family characteristics (e.g. use of contraception) were more common in developed places, more common in less developed places, or equally common in developed and less developed places. The distributions for these comparisons are presented in Table 5, with the answers consistent with developmental thinking noted in bold. As in previous sections, we also complement the analysis with participants' comments during the focus group discussions.

Table 5  
*Respondents' perceptions of whether certain family attributes are more common in less developed places or in developed places, by region of residence, Argentina, 2003–2004*

Developed versus developing places	Rural	Urban	Total
<i>People marrying at older ages</i>			
More common in less developed places	25.0	19.9	22.4
More common in developed places	<b>48.2</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>52.5</b>
About the same	26.8	23.4	25.1
<i>Women getting treated with more equity</i>			
More common in less developed places	29.7	9.2	19.3
More common in developed places	<b>43.2</b>	<b>77.7</b>	<b>60.8</b>
About the same	27.0	13.1	20.0
<i>Married couples using contraception</i>			
More common in less developed places	17.9	5.2	11.5
More common in developed places	<b>59.2</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>73.3</b>
About the same	22.9	7.8	15.2
<i>Parents controlling who their children marry</i>			
More common in less developed places	<b>32.3</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>38.5</b>
More common in developed places	42.6	30.7	36.6
About the same	25.1	24.7	24.9
<i>Women and men doing the same work</i>			
More common in less developed places	34.8	25.2	30.0
More common in developed places	<b>39.7</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>48.5</b>
About the same	25.4	17.8	21.6
<i>Couples getting divorced/separated</i>			
More common in less developed places	17.9	12.1	15.0
More common in developed places	<b>51.1</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>54.6</b>
About the same	30.9	29.9	30.4
<i>People deciding not to marry or living with a partner</i>			
More common in less developed places	25.6	17.4	21.4
More common in developed places	<b>41.3</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>44.6</b>
About the same	33.2	34.8	34.0
<i>People valuing family life more</i>			
More common in less developed places	<b>48.4</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>46.9</b>
More common in developed places	26.5	23.4	24.9
About the same	25.1	31.2	28.2

Valid responses range from 451 and 455 cases (out of a total of 456 surveys).  
 Source: Developmental Idealism Study of High School Students in Argentina.

As we can observe in Table 5, responses consistent with developmental thinking were the most frequently chosen by our survey respondents, although

with different degrees of strength. Between 61 and 73 percent of the respondents reported a positive association between development and women's status and the use of contraception. In addition, slightly more than half of teenagers reported a positive association between development and age at marriage and couples getting divorced or separated. And, between 38 and 48 percent reported a positive association between development and parental control over marriage, never marrying, valuing one's family less, and men and women doing the same work.

Associations between family attributes and development that are consistent with the developmental model are almost always higher among urban than among rural students, but with different levels of strength. In the case of the association between development and women's status, contraceptive use, and men and women doing the same work, differences between urban and rural students are large. The only exception is observed in the association between development and valuing family, where rural students reported a slightly higher association than their urban peers.

The main arguments in the focus groups underlying answers consistent with developmental ideas generally referred to the extended range of educational, labour, and recreational opportunities in developed places, coupled with a life style inherent to large cities that stimulate people's other interests over the family. These were the most frequent explanations during focus group discussions to interpret the positive associations between development and late marriage, no marriage, value family less, spousal choice and divorce. In the case of the positive association between development and contraceptive use, participants argued that developed places offered higher opportunities for people to be knowledgeable about methods, to have more education in how to use contraceptive methods effectively, to have easier access, and to be more able to afford them. Arguments that supported the positive correlation between development and women's equity and men and women doing the same work put emphasis on the higher opportunities for women in the labour market and lesser prejudices about women's capabilities to perform their jobs as well as, or even better than men. In addition, teenagers from Buenos Aires also argued that rights and legislation that place women in a more equal position to men, including voting and parental rights are also more common in more developed societies.

At the same time, a reasonable proportion of teenagers reported that there was no association between family attributes and development, as well as that there was an association – but in the opposite direction as developmental models would predict. Interestingly, many of the arguments that endorsed these opposite associations during focus group discussions were not essentially different than those already mentioned. We begin with the negative association between development and spousal choice, that was reported by a significant number of students (38 percent). In fact, this association that is not in accor-

dance with standard developmental models was the most frequently chosen among rural students. Material and economic ambitions, that for the majority of teenagers were intrinsic characteristics of people living in developed societies, are the main reasons that explain the negative association between development and spousal choice. For a number of teenagers, higher material and economic ambitions in developed places translated into higher parental pressure and scrutiny for suitable partners for their children. Teenagers arguments to interpret the negative association between development and late marriage (reported by around one fifth of teenagers) and between development and contraceptive use, reported by almost 20 percent of rural students – but by just 5 percent of urban students, are based on their perceptions of the lifestyle in developed societies. As we mentioned before when discussing how teenagers describe and characterise less developed and developed societies, there was a fair number of students – particularly rural students although shared by a number of urban students as well – that expressed a very strong and catastrophically view of life in the city of Buenos Aires (as their reference of a highly developed place). The underlying argument was that people in developed societies have all the material goods they want and have tried it all, so many speed up having new experiences such as marriage and having children. Although this argument partially resembles standard economic theory that wealth facilitates marriage formation and childbearing, teenagers' emphasis was placed on people – particularly the youth – taking marriage as a simple procedure and being reckless about getting pregnant and having children at very young ages.

We mentioned already that the dynamic life style associated with living in developed places coupled with increasing material ambitions is a fundamental explanation for many of the associations between development and family attributes. However, a number of teenagers balanced this negative view with some of the advantages associated with being more economically affluent. Consistent with standard economic thinking, many teenagers endorsed the idea that having sufficient means and assets take away a significant amount of pressure and tension from people, couples, and families, facilitating the formation and stability of the family.

Finally, around a quarter of rural and urban students reported that valuing family life is more common in developed places and about another quarter reported that it is about the same in the two places. This was perhaps one of the most intriguing results from the survey, given that during the focus group discussions in both urban and rural settings there was high consensus that there was less emphasis on the family in developed places. However, as we detail next, teenagers from both rural and urban settings also acknowledged with concrete examples such as China and Japan, that it is possible for developed societies to strongly value family life.



*Causal connections between development and family change*

Participants' most recurrent arguments linking family behaviours and development suggest a strong adherence to a causal connection. Although many participants believed this is the case, for many others this association is more complex. This is because they hold and combine multiple theories and perspectives to evaluate and link development with families, including structural, economic, and ideational frameworks.

For instance, a number of teenagers did not necessarily adhere to the idea that development causes family change, reflecting on the fact that some highly developed countries such as China and Japan have been able to retain their family customs and traditions. In addition, and closely related, teenagers shared the idea that societies have an idiosyncratic family culture that development and social change can shake, but not entirely undermine. That is, while they agreed that Argentinean families have deeply changed towards modern patterns and also believed that those changes will deepen if the country becomes even more developed, they had the conviction that people would still remain more family oriented in comparison to other societies that are perceived as essentially more individualistic, such as Buenos Aires, for rural teenagers, or the United States and Sweden, for urban teenagers.

Other participants, in turn, challenged the idea of a causal influence of development on family change from a different perspective. In this case, they argued that changes in family behaviours and dynamics can occur without many structural changes linked to development, such as urbanization, industrial expansion, or wealth. Moreover, they believed that development is not a necessary element to elicit family change, but that changes in values and attitudes are. In fact, explanations that rural teenagers provided when we asked them about the origin of family changes in their communities recurrently centred on "being exposed to new ideas", including television, new residents' arrival to the community, and their own people's contacts with other towns, larger cities, etc. This view was also shared by a number of urban teenagers as well.

Furthermore, teenagers reflected on the idea that development can pause, slow down, or even have set backs. In contrast, family values, preferences and behaviours are frequently seen as constantly changing – either slowly or rapidly – in a unidirectional way towards more individualism, less emphasis on the family, more divorce, less marriage, less family communication, and more interest in material over spiritual things. These were focus group participants' categorical answers when we asked them how they foresee families in their communities 20 years from now. Practically all teenagers thought it highly unlikely that families could change towards more traditional patterns.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper was motivated by the hypothesis that the ideas of societal development and modernity have been widely disseminated and have been especially important in changing family life in much of the world. Based on a mixed-methods study with high school teenagers in urban and rural Argentina, we evaluated the extent they understand and adhere to the ideas of centuries of developmental thinking, and use these ideas in evaluating the world in general, and family behaviour in particular.

The results indicated that most teenagers have a great level of familiarity and knowledge of the developmental model. This was reflected in the fact that the dimensions that teenagers identified and used to characterise and contrast societies across different levels of development closely match those used by centuries of developmental thinking. Further evidence of teenagers' knowledge and use of developmental paradigm was revealed in their ability to rank countries' development levels very closely to the corresponding ratings constructed by the United Nations, an organisation that has dedicated considerable resources to assess development around the world.

Teenagers in urban and rural Argentina also showed extensive expertise with the application of developmental ideas to family organisations. The majority of participants identified and contrasted traditional and modern family on parental authority, family solidarity, supervision and arrangement of romantic relations and marriage, women's status, and individualism in accordance with developmental thinking. Their views and beliefs are substantiated by multiple sources, including their own and others families' experiences and stories, anecdotal information from other places, television shows and other mass media information, and material studied in school. Therefore, although teenagers emphasised similar dimensions as those singled out by developmental ideas to distinguish family organisations, their conception of modern families went beyond that embraced by earlier scholars and included more contemporaneous behaviours such as cohabitation, divorce, and blended families. Further evidence of teenagers use of developmental thinking was shown in their conceptualisation of family change. Practically all participants agreed on a unidirectional theory of family change, with families always changing – either slowly or rapidly – towards modern patterns. In addition, a considerable fraction of Argentinean teenagers believed that there is an association between development and family organisations, with their argumentations indicating an endorsement of a causal connection, with development influencing family organisation and family life towards modern patterns. Finally, and consistent with our expectations, urban teenagers show somewhat higher level of familiarity, knowledge and use

of developmental ideas in evaluating societies, family organisations and family change.

This paper provides valuable evidence consistent with the assertion that developmental thinking has been widely disseminated. However, an important outcome of this study is that developmental ideas are just one of the various frameworks teenagers use to evaluate family organisations, behaviours, and change. In fact, teenagers combined structural, economic, and ideational arguments in their reasoning. Of central importance is that they partially rely on economic reasoning to infer attributes of traditional and developed societies. It also appears that some students rely on their understanding of actual social change in Argentina to infer differences between developed and traditional places. In addition, Argentinean teenagers frequently mentioned ideational theories to explain family change, with a significant number of participants suggesting that changes in values and attitudes were the most important forces for family change.

The widespread dissemination and understanding of the concepts of development and modernity in Argentina also give support to the idea that developmental thinking and adherence to developmental idealism play an important role in family change in Argentina. With developmental thinking being widespread in Argentina, it is likely that developmental idealism – with its endorsement of modern societies and families, its causal connection of modern families and society, and its emphasis on freedom and equality – is widely endorsed in Argentina. It is also likely that these ideas have important implications for current patterns of family life and family change in Argentina. Of course, these extrapolations go beyond the scope of the data presented here, but, at the same time, form an agenda for future research in Argentina.

Although this research demonstrates that development thinking is widespread in Argentina, it provides no evidence concerning its importance in other parts of the world. In an effort to evaluate the extent of adherence to the developmental paradigm and developmental idealism elsewhere, we have joined with an international team of scholars to conduct similar research in ten other countries, including Albania, China, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, the United States, and Vietnam. Results of this research will provide further evidence of how widely developmental ideas have been disseminated and how they have been accepted in a wide variety of countries.

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