

OLÁH, LIVIA SZ. and FRĄCZAK, EWA (eds.) (2013): *Childbearing, Women's Employment and Work-Life Balance Policies in Contemporary Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 224 pages.

Edited by Livia Sz. Oláh from Stockholm University and Ewa Frączak from the Warsaw School of Economics, this volume addresses the interplay between paid work, work-life balance policies and childbearing choices of women in the context of low fertility, increased labour market flexibility and different work-life balance policies in contemporary Europe. The contributors assess the importance of labour force attachment on young women's fertility intentions (i.e. intention to have a first/next child) or desires (ideal family size). They study childbearing choices (and not actual births) because of their interest in understanding long-term fertility developments and identifying possible areas for policy interventions.

The *conceptual framework* of the volume centres around two key concepts that one needs to consider when trying to understand the relationships between work, family and fertility: uncertainty and risk, and incoherence. In the volume the two key concepts are not given equal attention – less emphasis is put on the issue of gender equality than on risk and uncertainty.

Increasing uncertainty and risk characterise the labour markets of Europe. When eligibility to social benefits and services has become increasingly dependent on one's labour force participation, and when childbearing is seen to greatly increase uncertainty, the impact of unemployment, temporary employment and job insecurity on fertility decisions may also have strengthened. In this context many risk-averse prospective parents postpone or forgo childbearing and instead concentrate on acquiring higher educational attainment or further employment experiences.

Incoherence concerns the difference between levels of gender equity in individual-oriented (e.g. education and paid work) and family-oriented institutions. While young women's aspirations are no longer limited to the family, the persistently unequal division of housework and childcare is seen as severely constraining the opportunities women have in terms of education and the labour market. However, the institutional context and work-life balance policies may greatly reduce the negative impact of family responsibilities on economic and other roles of women (and especially mothers) beyond the family.

The volume includes *five case studies*, focusing on two high-fertility countries, Sweden and France, and three low-fertility societies, Germany, Poland and Hungary. (East and West Germany are also differentiated.) These countries represent different welfare regimes and work-life balance policies. Sweden is the prime example of a social democratic welfare regime and the dual-earner policy configuration. France and Germany represent the conservative welfare regime and the general family support policy configuration. Hungary and Po-

land represent the post-socialist welfare regime and the transition post-socialist policy configuration. These countries show that there is no one-to-one relationship between the fertility level of a country and the welfare regime or policy configuration to which it belongs.

*Results* shed more light on how the employment situation and incoherence between low gender equity at home and high gender equity in the public sphere impact on childbearing decisions in different welfare and policy contexts. A weak labour market position constrains plans to become a mother in all analysed countries. Policy protection against economic hardships is insufficient or non-existent in the case of mothers without stable employment. Being in education, unemployed, inactive, or in part-time or temporary employment are linked to pronounced risk of economic hardship and insecurity, and these life situations have been found to reduce motherhood intentions, although the effects do vary by country.

Continuous participation in the labour force is more important to entering parenthood than to having another child – parents seem to be less vulnerable to labour market uncertainties in most countries, depending on the policy context. Generous family and employment policies greatly reduce uncertainty and financial hardships for French and Swedish mothers who wish to have more children. The exception is Swedish mothers with weak labour market attachment, who do not qualify for generous social provisions, and who thus suppress intentions to extend their families. Unemployment has a negative effect on childbearing intentions in East Germany but not in West Germany and Poland, where unemployment of mothers is linked to planning to have additional children. In these latter cases unemployment may indicate mothers' family orientation and her preference for fulfilling family roles over employment, especially if the partner can provide a reasonable standard of living for the family (the male breadwinner model).

Incoherence between gender equity in the private and public spheres has been found to decrease childbearing intentions in most cases. Social norms and the lack of child-care institutions often compel women in West Germany to choose between having children and caring for their young children themselves, or not having children at all and instead participating in the labour market. In Poland women who experience higher gender equity in their partnership also have stronger childbearing intentions. The Hungarian interviews also highlight the fact that competing aspirations and the tension between the demands of domestic and paid work may suppress women's fertility aspirations.

All in all, the volume extends our knowledge about the mechanisms of childbearing decision making, the effect of increased labour market flexibility on family choices, the impact of policy measures, and the interplay between micro- and macro-level factors in different social contexts. The careful selection and the relatively low number of countries make the cross-national com-

parisons interesting and manageable, providing a good balance between detailed single-country descriptions and more generalised overview of dozens of nations. Even though each empirical chapter deals with one country at a time, the common comparative conceptual framework and the harmonised research design are meant to contribute to the *coherence* of the book. Moreover, the introductory and closing chapters seek to provide a common background and synthesise the findings. However, the volume also proves that one size does not fit all – not only in the case of work–family reconciliation policies but also when one tries to select theoretical concepts and research methods for several country studies. As a result, some chapters use additional theories, like the capability approach of Amartya Sen for Sweden and Hungary, the theory of social production function complemented by the life-course approach and new home economics for Germany, and the preference theory, gender equity theory and social capital theory in the case of Poland. Moreover, childbearing choices and the employment situation of women are conceptualised and measured somewhat differently in each of the five countries, and the Hungarian analysis is the only one which makes use of qualitative data. However, these differences do not endanger the comparability of the findings across countries.

Lívía Murinkó

TOMKA, BÉLA (2013): *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe*. London – New York: Routledge, XIX + 526 pages.

Béla Tomka's monumental summary of Europe's twentieth-century social history was published in English in 2013, four years after the Hungarian original. It seems quite natural to see such a volume, dealing with urgent problems European societies have had to face for decades, finding its way to a broader audience in Hungary and Europe. Tomka's book focuses on the following issues: gloomy demographic trends, 'lowest-low' fertility, ageing of the population, migration that is hardly controlled and all of its resultant social, political and cultural consequences, changing family life and interpersonal relations, altering gender roles, values and norms, weakening social cohesion, individualism, secularism, post-industrial and/or post-modern societies, post-materialism, the future of the welfare state, consumer societies and Americanisation, urbanisation and the mass media. It is obvious that all these trends and concepts are vague, controversial and sometimes rejected by experts. Writing such a comprehensive volume calls for a brave heart and deep knowledge, yet such an endeavour frequently results in criticism that mostly focuses on specific details. So it is not surprising that few books with such ambitious goals make it to the market.