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WELLCHI NETWORK

The well-being of children: The impact of challenging family forms, working conditions of parents, social policy and legislative measures

COORDINATION ACTION

Priority 7: Citizens and governance in a knowledge – based society

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Report on the contribution to the Workshop
“Transmission of inequalities from generation to generation”

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WELLCHI NETWORK PROJECT

Workshop 5: Transmission of inequalities from generation to generation

Goteborg, 13-14 September, 2006

Place: Göteborg University, Ågrenska Villan

Organiser: Ulla Björnberg, professor, department of Sociology

The workshop gathered highly qualified European researchers who provided substantial empirical research on intergenerational mobility and inequalities between generations but also on family change. They covered different parts of Europe from North to South.

Ethnic mobility was covered in two papers (Mårten Palme, professor, Stockholm School of Economics, Lucinda Platt, Dphil, University of Essex). Education and mobility was discussed in four papers (Jo Blanden, professor, London School of Economics, Chiara Saraceno, professor, University of Torino, Robert Eriksson, professor, Stockholm University and Louis Chauvel, professor of the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris). Education and health over the life course were discussed by Viveka Östberg, Centre for Health Equity Studies, Stockholm. The role of social capital in youth transition was discussed in a paper by Janet Holland, professor, London South Bank University. First births and labour market participation were discussed in a paper by Cecilie Wetzel, PhD, University of Amsterdam. In the paper immigrant patterns were compared with native patterns in the Netherlands. Theoretical and methodological perspectives on intergenerational, longitudinal research were discussed in a paper by Lynn Jamieson, professor, University of Edinburgh

For the full titles of papers – see Programme. Below the presentations of the participants are presented.

Brief summary of presentations

Ethnicity and mobility in earnings

Overall research on ethnic mobility seem to depend on ethnic origin. The Swedish study by Mårten Palme shows that the earnings differential between immigrants and natives in Sweden is smaller in the second generation than in the first. However, the results also show that groups arriving after 1970, originating from Africa and the Middle East, deteriorate their average position in the second generation. The results further suggest that for immigrants the family is more important than human capital in the intergenerational transmission. The results also suggest heterogeneity between different immigrant groups. Inequalities can be referred to differences in the transmission of human capital between groups over generations. Lucinda Platt in her paper arrives at a similar conclusion. She suggests that the ethnic dimension is working in different ways among ethnic minority groups in the UK. One of her conclusions is that education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ethnic mobility among immigrants in the UK.

Education and intergenerational persistence or mobility

Jo Blanden shows in a recent longitudinal study that family background is most important in determining the level of intergenerational mobility. She has also shown the important role of noncognitive skills in generating persistence in earnings. Furthermore that attachment to the labour market after leaving full-time education is a substantive driver of intergenerational persistence. The paper also sets out to explain why mobility has declined in UK between 1958 and 1970 cohorts. Higher education has expanded but there has also been a growing imbalance in access to higher education by family background. This imbalance is driving the decline in intergenerational mobility in the UK. There is a strong link between parental income, early unemployment and future earnings. On the basis of the research she suggests that in order to raise mobility the relationship between family background and educational attainment should be weakened. Resources should be directed at programmes to improve the outcomes of those from deprived backgrounds, for instance high quality pre-school childcare or directing resources at poorer schools and communities. Programmes should address both cognitive and non-cognitive skills such as self-esteem, personal efficacy and concentration. Louis Chauvel has arrived at similar results for France. He discusses at length a study on life chances of the young generations in France. His data give evidence that the young generations are facing downward social mobility and clear difference in life chances in different birth cohorts. The age groups 30-35 years old compared to those 50-55 years old show substantial divergence in social mobility. For instance, the earnings of the younger age groups in cohorts from 1960 to 2000 show a marked tendency of decline of earnings level compared to the age group of 50-59 years for whom earnings have increased. Intergenerational transfers within families are no remedy in this development.

Chiara Saraceno shows that in the case of Italy family-mediated access to education has a powerful and gender-specific impact on inequality in the labour market. Compared to other countries the rate of unemployment among the young both with and without a high education is higher compared to UK, US Germany, Portugal and France. In the long run education does have a positive impact on employment and income. She suggests that the crucial factor behind inequalities in schooling and career attainment is not income but parents' education, particularly mothers' education. In Italy there is also a strong regional dimension in inequalities in school achievement and career, the Centre-South doing worse than the North. It is a combined effect of social origin and regional labour market and the ways in which the school system works that produce the different outcomes. In her paper she also highlights the

crucial role of the family resources and in particular of women in the transition into adulthood and in the life chances of the young.

In his presentation on ongoing research Robert Eriksson also shows how selection in the educational system is associated with social background. Children born in higher upper middle class get higher grades and continue to higher education to a higher extent than children from working class. However, given the same grades children from upper middle class also to a higher extent are moving on to further education. The ongoing study comparing two birth cohorts shows that social inequality in transition from elementary school to upper secondary education has decreased in Sweden from 1983 to 1998, i.e. among those born 1967 and 1982, respectively. The reason could perhaps be linked to the expansion of high quality childcare which took place in Sweden during the studied period. The role of non-cognitive factors in education is also highlighted in an ongoing study by Viveka Östberg and Bitte Modin. They study the association between peer status in school and health. It is a longitudinal study which examines health in adulthood and rated emotional health in school age. In the study so far she has found a clear and graded association between peer status and negative emotions. The higher the peer status position the less common are signs of negative emotions. The association can work in both directions. These the associations will be further examined.

The family resources and the school system from early education play a crucial role in the transmission of inequalities across generations and in the transition into adulthood. The research presented by Janet Holland highlights the crucial dimension of social capital in a wider sense. In this research biographical approaches have contributed to deeper insights into the social mechanisms at work in social environments. She discusses bonding or bridging social capital, where bonding could contribute to a solid social base but also to difficulties in getting out from environments that bring a 'pre-determined' life course. Bonding could however also provide a social base from which to bridge out to new networks. Bridging social capital mean to be able to mobilise social resources using connections to different kinds of social networks and the social capital of them. In the studies undertaken, the middle class young turned out to have differentiated networks spanning over various age groups, work and leisure areas, contributing to ability to bridge social networks. The young in working class areas would more often have negative bonding and negative social capital. However, in the opinions of many of the studied young persons from both working class and middle class

origin, education and opportunities were crucial. Also in this research the family relationships remain critical to the wellbeing and transitions of young individuals.

One important part in studies of intergenerational transmissions is linked to family change over time in contemporary society. In a study by Cecilie Wetzel family formation, child birth and participation on the labour market was studied for mothers and fathers with immigrant background compared to native born parents in the Netherlands. The focus was on the first birth. The study show several interesting patterns, in particular regarding parents of first and second generation of immigrant background which raise many new questions regarding the well being of the very young babies. For instance, the study revealed that a large proportion of migrant mothers are single mothers or do not live with the partner (the father). Many mothers start to work early in the life of the baby (3-5 months old). The study shows that there are several complexities in patterns of work and family life linked to the immigrant setup of families which might indicate some interesting findings regarding the process of integration which can be inferred from the study.

Finally, regarding studies of contemporary family change Lynn Jamieson gave a presentation where she reflected on methodological approaches to studies of transmission of resources. She compared two longitudinal studies – the one undertaken with quantitative data, repeated with other samples over time and the other with qualitative data using life histories with different generations, thus covering a long time sequence. Both studies raise criticism against the theoretical assumptions about family change, for instance regarding individualisation and weakening of family relationships over time. The results show that there is little evidence that we notice an ongoing decline in family relationships. The experience of divorces has had some effect on educational and occupational aspirations of some children. Some gender differences has also been noted. The role of the mother for the self esteem on children seem to have increased. Maternal investment in children has not declined over time.

The results also indicate that transmission of resources are linked to family cultures of giving and receiving. Social change occurs because historical conditions can affect the availability of resources for different cohorts and thereby change the culture of giving and receiving. With more prosperity there can be a growth in gift giving. So according to the results there is a fluent link in the balance between giving and receiving due to specific circumstances over time and over the life course. Intergenerational transmission is thus adapting to overall social change over time. The strength of it can not be taken for given, but family relationships seem

to create continuity over time and families are acting as strong mediating factors behind social mobility in both directions.