

A Diploma and Children; Having Both: A Case Study

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Abstract

In her essay, the author discusses the wider context of reproductive decisions in the university educated in Slovenia. Given that the lowest fertility rates on the national level have been recorded among them, those couples whose educational levels are university graduate or higher, and whose families are statistically above-average, with two or more children are of interest to the arguments offered. By comparing two generations of each selected family, the author sought to identify the *differentia specifica* between these people's wider context of reproductive decisions before and after the generally-evidenced trend of below-replacement fertility in Slovenia. These contexts, therefore, go back into socialism times, and extend into post-socialism. Outlined and highlighted are those accents in the studies of the education-fertility relationship that determine both the topic and methodology employed in the research. A 'bottom-up' explanation of the background of 'non-typical' couples' reproductive decisions could prove conducive to better understanding of complex fertility behaviour. Presenting the life histories of the collocutors, the author sought to determine which life events or circumstances are formative for the university-educated couples' decisions to have both their degrees and several children, and how these events and circumstances interrelate.

KEYWORDS: fertility, university-educated, Slovenia, qualitative approach

Introduction

In Slovenia, the press has been reporting heavily on the circumstances and consequences of low fertility since the 1980s. However, after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the declaration of Slovenian independence in 1991, the popular press has paid even more attention than ever before to the issue, yet the topic is presented in a specific way. The decrease in the fertility rate is no longer interpreted as a statistical fact confirming the assumption according to which low fertility rates of a given population are typical for the 'developed European populations'. Quite to the contrary, the rhetoric of the press stresses the menace of the numerical smallness of Slovenians that is allegedly dangerous to the point where the 'real national substance' is threatened (Knežević Hočevar 2004: 24, Cukut 2006: 69-70).

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It is not surprising that the present government has put much effort into improving the conditions for building families and raising fertility in Slovenia, nor that the issue was made a priority for the 2004 – 2008 mandate. In the Coalition Treaty,¹ the media are explicitly listed as responsible for the creation of positive attitudes towards parenthood and family in the general public (p. 23). The ex-Minister of Family, Labour and Social Affairs also sought to pass through the Parliament a policy implementation strategy wherein the media were to 'return to the society the basic social values: life, family and children' (*Strategija rodnosti v Republiki Sloveniji* 2006: 18). Finally, demography is cited as a priority of the Slovenian presidency in the EU.²

The role ascribed to media in popularising fertility is by no means a Slovenian invention. In their cross-national analysis on press reporting in eleven 'developed countries' in the late 1990s, Stark and Kohler (2003: 544-552) demonstrated that the majority of clippings in the relevant national presses employed alarmist rhetoric when describing the consequences of low fertility, and were calling for state interventions to improve the demographic condition. The media often portray educated women who prefer career and paid work to motherhood as 'irresponsible' towards the national body (Krause 2001: 586). Moreover, media headlines on the 'population implosion' announced the termination of a clear boundary between developed and developing countries because now, 'fertility levels are dropping all over the earth' (Douglass et al. 2005: 4).

Dramatic post-socialism media rhetoric on low fertility in Slovenia aside, the latter does belong into the group of countries with the lowest-low fertility³ (Council of Europe 2002: 16; ESA/P/WP.177 2003: 2). In the period from 1980 - 2003, the total fertility rate dropped from 2.1 to 1.2 children per woman (Šircelj 2006: 116, 118). The recent international *Family and Fertility Survey* conducted in Slovenia in the mid- 1990s showed that below-replacement rates were registered in all sectors of educated women, but that the lowest recorded was among university graduates (Obersnel Kveder et al. 2001: 95). This result was in line with Beets' interpretation of the Survey's reports on other European countries that education still explained a significant portion of variance in the number of children among individuals; highly educated women decide to marry later in life, have children later, and have fewer children than women of lower education (Beets 1999).

Despite a more than fifty-year long tradition of studying the relationship between women's levels of education and fertility worldwide, the relationship *per se* is not the focus of this essay. Rather, I wish to discuss a wider context of reproductive decisions in couples whose educational level is university graduate or higher. Given that the year 1980 is widely accepted as the watershed year of below-replacement fertility trend in

¹ *The Coalition Treaty on Membership in the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in the 2004 – 2008 Mandate.*

² Personal communication with the Director of the *Directorate for Family* at the *Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs*, November 2006.

³ The emergence of lowest-low fertility is one of the most significant novelties of the 1990s in Europe. Kohler, Billari and Ortega (2002: 641) coined the term 'lowest-low fertility' to denote total fertility rate below 1.3 children per woman.

Slovenia, I was interested in those couples who, independently of the general trend, obtained both high levels of education and statistically above-average number of children before and after the reference point: the year 1980. By comparing two generations – the highly educated parents of numerous children, and their own parents – I was trying to identify the distinguishing characteristics between these people's wider context of reproductive decisions before and after the generally evidenced trend of below-replacement fertility in Slovenia.

My curiosity piqued by both the rich evidence and the methodological limits of the still prevalent quantitative studies of the education-fertility link, I opted for a qualitative approach. In view of mainstream studies on the education-fertility relationship, the selected couples can be identified as negligible exceptions to a rule. It was assumed, however, that a 'bottom-up' explanation of the background of 'non-typical' couples' reproductive decisions could prove conducive to better understanding of complex fertility behaviour. Rather than reviewing the literature pertinent to the problem, I shall outline and contextualise those emphases in studies of the education-fertility relationship that determine both the topic, and methodology of the research.

Theoretical background

It is not an exaggeration to say that the relationship between women's education and fertility has been in the centre of attention since the classic theory of demographic transition was articulated in the first half of the 20th century. Discussing major societal processes that were to underlay the radical drop in birth rates in almost all European countries in the period from roughly 1870 to 1930, demographers and other social scientists gave special attention to women's changing roles, particularly in the context of spreading universal education, contraceptive methods, and 'the European marriage pattern' (women's late age at marriage and women who never married). At the same time, inspired by the theory of modernization, demographers and other population scholars simply translated the simplistic modernist formula which held that societies advanced from traditional to modern, to a demographic phenomenon, and postulated a transition from high to low rates in fertility and mortality. The broadly discussed change from 'natural fertility' to 'family limitation at the higher parities'⁴ inspired some demographers to apply this theory to non-Western parts of the world that they considered overpopulated. Such endeavours were certainly politically inspired and policy oriented. Family planning programmes that promoted women's education in developing countries were introduced worldwide, particularly in the Cold War context (Hodgson 1983; Szreter 1993; Demeny 1988; Greenhalgh 1995; Greenhalgh 1996; Friedlander, Okun and Segal 1999).

Further explanations of the relationship between women's education and fertility have been heavily influenced by some unexpected findings of the grand *European Fertility Project*. This twenty-year long effort, launched in 1963 by Princeton scholars, mostly demographers, was designed to present a systematic collection of statistical data docu-

⁴ Parity refers to the number of children ever born to a woman.

menting fertility and related socioeconomic changes in seven hundred provinces of Europe during periods of major fertility decline, in order to test the model of demographic transition. The least-expected result was that 'culture', defined in the model as being composed of language, ethnicity and geographic region, was significantly related to the timing of fertility decline rather than 'socioeconomic development' (Friedlander, Okun, Segal 1999: 497-498). Consequently, other approaches gained prominence in further examination of fertility decline.

The first approach, known as cultural or diffusion interpretation, still holds that the ideational change, i.e. change in ideas about birth control, better explains the drop in fertility than changes in the economics of child rearing. The second considered micro-level changes in family organisation. Yet another focused on women's roles and their status in the family and household. Finally, some attempted to theorise fertility through the theory of rational consumer choice focusing on household based decisions about the optimal number of offspring given the costs, household income, and household's relative preferences for children and other goods (cf. Greenhalgh 1995: 6-8).

Since the mid-1970s, more systematic studies on the relationship between women's education and lower birth rates appeared. Despite ample evidence obtained both in 'developed' and 'developing' countries, the researchers also reported several flaws encountered during research, either due to the absence of a coherent theory on the relationship or the quality of data. Several analysts who tested the relationship on various data sets in the US pointed to incomplete educational histories of women in question. As a consequence, their research was limited to the relationship between education and age at first childbirth, the time sequence of subsequent births, and desired family sizes. Deploying a set of available data on exogenous factors (e.g. family income, household composition, fecundity, etc.) in their analyses, the results 'as a rule' showed that once the process of childbearing begins, education no longer affects fertility; the former affected merely the age of the women at first childbirth. It was widely accepted that the effects of education on fertility behaviour hardly accounted for values or aspirations that could be seen as stemming from advanced schooling (e.g. Rindfuss, Bumpass and St. John 1980: 444-445). Moreover, in the absence of sufficient data and an adequate theory, one could not properly say whether educated women had lower fertility because of what they learned in school, or because of the type, and extent, of schooling they had (Scott Smith 1996: 386).

The too narrowly-defined, simplistic causal flow from education to fertility was at the centre of several critiques by social scientists who investigated the relation in the 'developing world'. In the introduction to the influential volume *Critical perspectives on schooling and fertility in the developing world*, the editors (Bledsoe, Casterline, Johnson-Kuhn and Haaga) stated (1999: 4) that despite strong global evidence on the inverse relationship between education and fertility, the contrary cases should not be neglected. Education may well be only one of many possible precipitates of fertility decline, and it may well co-occur with fertility decline and other societal changes. Therefore, it would be more important to investigate 'under what conditions education or some aspect of it might be a sufficient cause for fertility decline' (1999: 5). If not, researchers may fall prey to the 'selection effects' – when levels of any two variables are affected by unobserved charac-

teristics of individuals or groups that were known to those involved but not to the researcher (1999: 12). In this vein, Diamond, Newby and Varle (1999: 23) commented on Jejeebhoy's four-type categorization of education-fertility relations based on the results of 59 studies worldwide. Jejeebhoy argued that negative relations characterise countries with higher *per capita* income and higher levels of female literacy. The authors agreed that this finding supported the view that economic development and mass education influenced childbearing behaviour. But they also emphasised that one needed to know what it was about education that led to these behavioural changes (p. 25), and to explore the mechanisms behind this relationship (Basu 2002: 1779).

However, researchers in European countries explored the relationship between education and fertility in the context of sustained fertility decline below replacement level (2.1 births per women). These changes have not occurred in isolation, but as part of a major transformation of familial and household relationships, conjointly labelled the 'second demographic transition'. Assessing several studies on the issue, Van de Kaa, the author of the term (1987: 4),⁵ sought to explain the background of this phenomenon with the dramatic shift in values of young adults from 'altruism', which supposedly prevailed in the first demographic transition, to 'individualism' in the second: 'The first transition to low fertility was dominated by concerns for family and offspring, but the second emphasizes the rights and self-fulfilment of individuals' (*ibid.*: 5). Huge changes in norms and attitudes were to lead to a changed sequence of events in family formation, somewhat schematically described as the shifts from marriage to cohabitation, from child to partner as the focus of the family, from contraception to prevent unwanted births to deliberate choices whether and when to conceive a child, and finally, from uniform to diversified families and households (*ibid.*: 9).

But, despite uniformly low fertility statistics throughout Europe, wide variations in fertility behaviour surprised many demographers who had assumed that one pattern would explain all (Douglass et al. 2005: 17). For instance, it was impossible to satisfactorily explain low fertility in Italy and Spain with the ideology of 'individualism and self-fulfilment' which supposedly determines the break with the traditional Roman Catholic family-oriented norms in these countries (Chesnais in Kertzer et al. 2006: 4).

Given the aging society and population decline as the most negative consequences of sustained below-replacement fertility for the nation-state, some scholars turned their attention to a few studies that reported positive relationship between education and high-order births. Despite warnings that this relationship should not be overstated in comparison to the evidence on childlessness, it seems that education was re-considered, somewhat in opposition to the idea of education as a factor which inhibits human repro-

⁵ It is worth mentioning that the stage of long-term population decline had been already considered by demographers as the stage 'beyond demographic transition'. Nevertheless, Van de Kaa argued that special features of this transition in Europe merited a new label. He somewhat arbitrarily situated the beginning of the second demographic transition in 1965 when declining birth rates below replacement levels were first registered in Northern and Western Europe, and a bit later in Southern Europe; for Eastern Europe there were no comparable data (1987: 5).

duction. Researchers contested the more conventional expectations of the second demographic transition theory with regard to the effect of education levels on childbearing behaviour. They expressed doubts about heightened individualism, particularly among women, that automatically leads to lower fertility (e.g. Hoem, Prskawetz, Neyer 2001: 253). The 'Swedish case' has become an example of a 'demographic forerunner' (Popenoe in Kravdal 1992: 460), this time for the discovered positive relation between the mothers' education and third-order births (Hoem and Hoem 1989).

Inspired by this Swedish study, some scholars plunged into comparable analyses, e.g. Kravdal in Norway (1992), Hoem, Prskawetz, Neyer in Austria (2001), Kreyenfeld in West Germany (2002), Rendall and Smallwood in England and Wales (2003). Conscious of various factors that could influence parity progression more than education itself, the researchers analysed data on educational attainment, reproduction, marriage and employment histories, and, when available, data on public policies, partners' characteristics and finally, the participation of both partners in household duties. To verify the positive effect of female education on higher-order births, the analysts hypothesised about the various factors (e.g. income effect, partner effect, selection effect, time-squeeze effect) that could outweigh education.⁶ However, such complex, though mostly descriptive analyses failed to make any persuasive conclusions about education's causal effect on parity progression. Instead, it was argued that positive correlation between education and higher-order births could be better explained by other variables that may connect, directly or indirectly, to higher fertility.

Four families in Ljubljana: a case study⁷

With this short excursion into quantitatively oriented studies, I wish to outline the rationales for employing qualitative approach in investigating the background of fertility decisions in the university educated. First, the contribution of quantitative, mostly state-centred studies, to the understanding of education-fertility link is not underestimated. Quite to the contrary: the initial themes of the semi-structured interview were shaped with full consideration of the repertoire of observed variables in mind, and their indirect or direct links to other kinds of data considered in these studies. Second, I also took under

⁶ In general, the income effect refers to the assumption that highly educated women earn higher wages and can therefore afford larger families. The partner effect stands for the presumption that educational *homogamy* between partners cannot be neglected in studying the education-fertility relationship. The selection effect stems from the assumption that women who are candidates for higher-order births are a select group of individuals who already have at least one child and are therefore child-oriented *per se*. The 'time-squeeze' effect (the term coined by Kreyenfeld, 2002: 22) implies the situation where having the first child late in one's life involves having less time at one's disposal before reaching the biological limits of fertility.

⁷ The case study - the social context of reproductive decisions in two generations of collocutors - was a part of the project *Social background of low fertility in university-educated in Slovenia*. The project (code J6-6364) was executed by the Sociomedical Institute of the Scientific Research Centre at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, between 2004 and 2006. In spring and summer of 2006, I carried out repetitive in-depth interviews with fifteen out of ninety collocutors.

advisement the above-discussed ‘hidden effect’ of unobserved variables or relationships that can be falsely ascribed to the observed variables and links. To escape this effect as much as possible, life histories of the collocutors were collected. Rather than testing the education-fertility link, I attempted to determine which life events or circumstances are involved in forming the university-educated couples’ decision to have two or more children, and how these events/circumstances interrelate. Emphasizing that education-fertility studies should be considered with their particular historical moment of scientific articulation and social embeddedness in view, my decision to interview two generations of each family was intentional. The elder generation’s reproductive period coincides with the socialism times when Slovenia was one of the republics of Socialist Yugoslavia. This was also the period when fertility levels in Slovenia were above replacement rate. The younger generation of collocutors, however, belongs to the post-socialism or ‘transition times’ – they all conceived their children after Slovenian independence in 1991, i.e. in the period of the lowest-low fertility in Slovenia. Also exploring the significance of one’s family of origin in his/her life course towards a certain educational degree or family planning (Josipovič 2004: 137), the unit research purposely consists of two inter-generational couples of parents: the younger one with two or more children, and either the wife’s or the husband’s parents. The main topic under discussion revolved around the question of which life-events and social circumstances were significant in the informants’ decisions to have both diploma university degree and children.

I chose interlocutors whose current place of residence is in the administrative unit of Ljubljana with the oldest Slovenian university (established in 1919). In the student times of the older generation, in the 1950s and the 1960s, the only university in Slovenia was in Ljubljana.⁸

Given the criteria (university degree, two or more children, living in Ljubljana for most of one’s life), I selected the collocutors by snow-ball. Sixteen collocutors suited the criteria, but only fifteen of them agreed to participate in the interviewing.

In the below schematic (Graph 1), all family names are pseudonyms. The sample of interviewees slightly differs from the initial criteria in the following: GrayF completed her university course work, but never obtained her degree; GreenM commenced his university studies, but stopped halfway through; BrownM did not participate in the interview for health reasons.

It is also evident that the majority of the older generation was born outside Ljubljana. However, they came to the capital during the 1950s and 1960s to study at the University, and settled there afterwards.

The use of terms ‘older’ and ‘younger generation’ pertains merely to the family sequence, not the chronological age of the family members. An additional criterion for the selection of collocutors was that the younger generation has children who still live at

⁸ Two other state universities were established much later; the University of Maribor in the year 1975 and the University of Primorska in 2003. Currently, there also exist several private universities and institutes of higher education, all established after 1991.

Graph 1: Selected families of collocutors, 2006

THE WHITES								
		BORN	AGE	BIRTHPLACE	EDUCATION	STATUS	RELIGION	CHILDREN
GENERATION 1	F	1935	71	SW SLO	GRAD. MEDICINE	PENSION	ROMAN CATHOLIC	2
	M	1934	72	NE SLO	GRAD. SOCIAL SC.	PENSION	ROMAN CATHOLIC	
GENERATION 2	FA	1965	41	LJUBLJANA	PH.D. TECH. SC.	ACTIVE UNIVERSITY	ROMAN CATHOLIC	5
	M	1962	44	SW SLO	MA. MEDICINE	ACTIVE HEALTH CARE	ROMAN CATHOLIC	

THE GRAYS								
		BORN	AGE	BIRTHPLACE	EDUCATION	STATUS	RELIGION	CHILDREN
GENERATION 1	F	1939	67	LJUBLJANA	ABSOL. HUMAN.	PENSION	PRIVATE	3
	M	1936	70	EX-YU	GRAD. TECH. SC.	PENSION	PRIVATE	
GENERATION 2	F	1964	42	LJUBLJANA	GRAD. SOC. SC.	ACTIVE UNIVERSITY	PRIVATE	3
	MA	1949	57	LJUBLJANA	GRAD. ARTS	ACTIVE FREELANCE GYMNASIUM	PRIVATE	

THE GREENS								
		BORN	AGE	BIRTHPLACE	EDUCATION	STATUS	RELIGION	CHILDREN
GENERATION 1	F	1944	62	SW SLO	GRAD. HUMAN.	PENSION	ROMAN CATHOLIC	2
	M	1945	61	LJUBLJANA	ABSOL. TECH. SC.	PENSION	ROMAN CATHOLIC	
GENERATION 2	F	1970	36	LJUBLJANA	GRAD. HUMAN.	ACTIVE UNIVERSITY	ROMAN CATHOLIC	2
	MA	1969	37	LJUBLJANA	GRAD. HUMAN.	ACTIVE UNIVERSITY	ROMAN CATHOLIC	

THE BROWNS								
		BORN	AGE	BIRTHPLACE	EDUCATION	STATUS	RELIGION	CHILDREN
GENERATION 1	F	1927	79	NW SLO	ABSOL. NAT. SC.	HOME	PRIVATE	2
	M	1923	83	NW SLO	PH.D. TECH. SC.	PENSION	PRIVATE	
GENERATION 2	F	1970	53	LJUBLJANA	GRAD. SOC. SC.	HOME PRIVATELY	ATHEIST	5
	MA	1969	68	LJUBLJANA	PH.D. SOC. SC.	ACTIVE UNIVERSITY	PRIVATE	

home and are themselves as yet childless. Thus, irrespective of their age, the younger Browns belong to the younger generation. Their five children are still attending secondary schools, university and post-graduate programs and are all still living with their parents in the same household.

The preliminary results given below revolve around the major divergences between the two generations of collocutors. Given their life-course narratives, I discuss only those themes that I initially specified on basis of the literature reviewed. The relevance of each topic for determining the various contexts of reproductive decisions are roughly categorised into two sections: the informants' lives in the parents' families, and in their own conjugal families. The repertoire of questions includes themes and presumed variables that usually feature in education-fertility studies. However, following the acknowledged interrelatedness of various factors that presumably determine fertility behaviour, special attention was paid to unforeseen contents that, during the interviews, turned out to be significant in the collocutors' narratives.

Living in the parents' family

The oldest couple within the older generation of collocutors was born at the end of the 19th century; the rest were born within the first decades of the 20th century. The snapshots of the social contexts of the three generations show that the parent generation and some individuals from among the offspring generation, collocutors, were born during the 1930s and the 1940s. With the above-mentioned exception of the younger generation of the Browns, and GrayM2a, the majority of the offspring generation couples were born in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In the interviews, the collocutors of the parent generation lingered on their descriptions of hardships in the inter-war and post-war times which they experienced as youth people. The majority suffered due to confiscation of their families' property, either during the war by invaders, or immediately after the war by authorities of the socialist regime. They experienced poor housing conditions in families with many siblings. Irrespective of various labels and social positions they ascribed to their parent families ('worker's family', 'peasant family', or 'middle-class family'), they all stressed that their parents worked merely for their survival. The majority of their parents had numerous jobs simultaneously. After the war, few could afford hiring household help or help with outdoor chores. For these collocutors, it was natural to help their parents out by doing chores and running errands. As young children, they were left to themselves, lacking parental emotional warmth and support, guidance and companionship, and even communication. Their parents' upbringing methods did not refrain from using physical punishment that was believed to produce responsible adults. The majority of interlocutors denied the normalcy of such methods of upbringing, and rejected their parents' practices as ones they did not follow in their lives as parents. Some collocutors lived only with their mothers and in some cases with their aunts. They too described them as relentless authoritarians:

My mother was a harsh woman. I had a rough rearing with a stick. Actually, I was beaten daily. Perhaps I was a naughty boy, I do not deny it, but my mother beat me for no reason. She always settled everything by beating (WhiteM).

All among these collocutors described their parents' upbringing as 'traditionally patriarchal' and 'very severe', somewhat in line with the clear and indisputable division of labour between the parents in the household. All confirmed that their mothers alone, without any help from their spouse, did all the work in the house irrespective of whether or not they were at the same time employed. As children, these collocutors took their parents' daily work burden for granted.

Those male collocutors of the older generation who lived with their mothers/aunts alone stressed that they missed their fathers, and consequently they labelled their parental families as not 'real' families.

Despite authoritarian parents, all collocutors expressed respect for them. After all, their parents enabled them to have regular schooling in their home towns, and later on, to study in Ljubljana.

Quite the opposite was the stories of the younger generation of collocutors, mostly born during the 1960s. Compared to their parents' generation, the majority of them did not experience the harsh post-war social conditions; the only exceptions were GrayM2a, born in 1949, and BrownM2a, born in 1938. This generation described their childhood and youth as carefree times in good social conditions that enabled relatively decent lives. Although the majority still talked about fathers being more strict than mothers, they described their upbringing as a 'practice of principle' free of physical punishment. They used adjectives such as 'democratic', 'liberal' and 'consensual'. Two atypical collocutors of the younger generation (GrayM2a and BrownM2a), however, described their parents' upbringing as 'not an upbringing at all'. Poor communication in their parent's family was indicated by GrayF2, but she immediately ascribed this failure to the separate lives of their parents; her father left the family twice during her youth due to temporary work abroad.

Despite the fact that all the parents of the younger generation are university educated, the household chores were the domain of their mothers; only one father (WhiteM) more actively participated in domestic chores, following his own mother's example. Few among them said that they consciously followed their parents' way of life.

Only one collocutor (WhiteM2) among the younger generation was born outside Ljubljana. In accordance with their childhood and youth in a socialism times, the younger generation labelled their families as 'standard' without substantial 'class differences'. The majority had at least one sibling, so they lived in what they described as typical and normal two-child family of the post-war times.

The life course of all the collocutors' schooling period was nearly the same in all its sequences: after elementary school they attended secondary school, and then they enrolled in university. Yet two collocutors of the older generation did not complete their studies due to childbirth. GrayF did not attain her degree; however, she became employed after she could place her second child into a kindergarten. BrownF was the only one who permanently stayed unemployed after her first child was born. The only male collocutor of the first generation who did not complete his university studies, GreenM, got employment soon after he had completed his military service.

In comparison with the younger generation, the collocutors of the older generation emphasized that in the socialism times, there were many opportunities to study: 'If

somebody from my generation says that he or she could not study due to financial reasons, he or she is a liar. They pushed you to school. Pushed you!' (WhiteF).

Due to the post-war economic circumstances, a grant was the precondition for studying at the university in the 1950s, particularly for those students who arrived to Ljubljana from other parts of Slovenia. Parental help was moderate, so they had to find occasional jobs in Ljubljana to pay the rent and daily meals. Grant-givers had fellowship holders at their disposal. They could employ them at their discretion. All the same, in comparison to the younger generation, the collocutors of the older generation felt that they could always get the employment befitting their education.

All collocutors placed the formation of more stable partnerships in their university times. It was at this time of life that they also got informed about contraception methods and devices. In comparison to the younger generation, the older did not practice contraception. Moreover, the majority resolutely argued that in their younger days, they knew nothing about contraception. The younger interlocutors, however, were well-informed about contraception in their formative years, but had no use for it until they entered stable partnerships. The majority of collocutors of both generations had no 'steady' partnerships prior to the present one. The present relation with their spouse was in most cases the only permanent relationship they have ever had.

Talking about their image of an ideal partner, and ideal parenthood when they were youngsters, the majority told me that before their stable partnership, they did not think about ideal partners or parenthood at all. The older blamed their authoritarian parents: fathers did not allow their daughters to keep company of male schoolmates, while boys did not discuss such things in their peer groups at all. It simply 'happened'. Dreaming up ideal partners, or envisioning parenthood, was not a taboo in the younger generation at all. However, most of them did not think about either seriously until they met their present spouses. The majority affirmed that imagining a perfect partner and an ideal parenthood was a normal part of one's growing up and maturing, changing constantly during the process.

For the older generation, studying at the university meant leaving home. After that, they usually found employment in Ljubljana, and consequently settled in the capital. The younger collocutors did not complain about financial difficulties during their student years. They all lived in their parents' homes and left late after completing their studies.

Formation of own families

Although the older generation lived in families with many siblings, all but one pair gave birth to two children in their own families; the Grays alone have three. The decision to stick with two was explained by societal circumstances in the times of forming their own families. All of them share the view that in the 1960s and the 1970s, the socio-economic conditions in Slovenia were much more favourable in comparison to the post-war times of hardships for their parents. Their parents could not help them out because they simply did not own anything after the war. So, without parental support, it was only possible to live a 'decent life' with a maximum of two children. Typically, they had children before they could create 'the necessary conditions' for having a family: 'Today, young people set up many things before they marry. We married first, and saw to the rest afterwards' (GrayF).

From this point of view, the above-average number of children in the second generation of interviewees is clear: their parents all helped them to get appropriate housing in the time when their first children were born.

However, it would be too simplistic to conclude that appropriate housing is the basic condition in the decision to have a child. Irrespective of generation, all interviewees indicated that at least four conditions had to be fulfilled when they decided to have the first child: proper partnership, housing, employment or regular source of income, and convenient child care.

Proper partnership

What 'proper partnership' is in the view of the collocutors was gathered from the discrepancies between the interviewees' expectations regarding ideal partnerships, and the descriptions of their present ones. As the older generation stated that they did not entertain any particular notions about ideal partners before their present spouses, they also thought that in their youth, it was not a common practice to share such private thoughts with other people. They did, however, have clear ideas about the kind of partners they did not wish to have. In most cases, they did not wish for partners that would resemble their parents in one aspect: severity. Therefore, nearly all described their present partners as the exact opposites in character to their own parents.

The younger interviewees, however, generally thought that they came to think about who their partner should be only when they were students. More eloquently than their parents, they maintained that a proper partnership is something one needs to nurture and re-build throughout one's life. A proper partnership is not something that can be easily defined once and for all, and then automatically followed. The majority defined a 'mature' partnership as an unceasing dialogue and mutual effort to achieve the best consensual agreement for both partners. They repeatedly stressed that appropriate partnership should be re-built and re-defined at every new circumstance in one's life caused by unplanned events such as childbirth, return to work, job difficulties, home duties, etc. They judge their expectations of partnership met or failed depending on how well their partner is able to accommodate such new circumstances.

In this regard, it is telling how the collocutors see their planning of parenthood. All members of the older generation stated that they never planned it. WhiteF was explicit: 'We did not plan a family. Actually, we were reckless. But we were not afraid of the future!' The first child usually 'arrived out of the blue'. In most cases, this happened before the couple was able to provide the 'basic conditions' for raising a family. However, in all couples, at least one of the spouses had already completed his/her education and was employed by the time the first child was born. The majority lived with their parents or in a rented room at the time their first child was born. Appropriate housing was not provided until the birth of the second child. In comparison to the younger generation, the older emphasised that obtaining an apartment was not a difficulty in their times. Socialist enterprises had at their disposal a fund of so-called social apartments for their employees and in some cases they offered loans for building houses. According to the older informants, to get employment in socialism times as a rule meant to be placed on the waiting list for an

apartment as well: 'Sooner or later, you got it.' It seems that getting an apartment was the main motivation for the parents to have a second child; irrespective of the length of intervals between births, all second children of the older generation were born soon after their parents got their apartments. In this regard it is significant to note that the few couples from the first generation who practiced contraception at all did so only after the first child was born.

Proper housing

The interviewees of the second generation did not plan their first child either. The majority already lived in their own apartment before the birth of their first child, so they have already fulfilled one of their own basic conditions for raising the family at the very beginning. In turn, the younger Whites got their house from their parents after their third child was born. The Grays inherited the GrayM2a's father's apartment before they had any children. Both parents of the younger Greens took loans for their apartments after marriage. Finally, the Browns got their apartment from an aunt of BrownM2a before they had any children.

It is obvious from the above that the motivation for the second child did not depend on getting an apartment, though. As shown below, in the younger generation, various interrelated factors conditioned the decision for second and subsequent child-births. With the exception of GrayM2a, the entire younger generation attained masters or doctoral degrees. The younger Whites, Grays and the Greens have five, three and two children respectively. The latter couple is still in the reproductive period, particularly given that they wish for more than two children. All of the second generation collocutors have been employed and all but a few have had their second child at the time they completed their post-graduate studies. Aside from continuous consultations between partners about daily chores and errands and their mutual willingness to harmonise their daily duties, the younger collocutors emphasised their parents' assistance, particularly related to the child care, as very precious.

The story of BrownF2 is somewhat special. She did not complete her master's degree, which she enrolled in after the birth of her first child. She gave up her postgraduate studies entirely, close to completion, after she had her third child. Although she obtained a variant of a status of junior researcher under a state-sponsored programme⁹ as did all other collocutors of the second generation, she did so in 1979 when maternity leave, eight months in duration, did not prolong the time afforded for the completion of the studies under contract. The other collocutors were fortunate to obtain the status of state-sponsored junior researchers during the 1990s when maternity leave automatically pro-

⁹ Financing postgraduate study and research training for junior researchers is a policy at the Slovenian state Agency for Research, officially introduced in 1985. The programme of junior researchers aimed at increasing the amount of research in Slovenia and reducing the age profile of research group. Junior researchers participate in research work on basic research or applied research projects during their postgraduate studies. They have regular, fixed-term employment contracts, and the Agency finances their pay, social contributions, as well as material and non-material costs for research and postdoctoral study.

longed the deadlines for the completion of the postgraduate degree. BrownF2, giving birth to three children, did not succeed in completing all the requirements for her degree on time. Without her partner's and her parents' assistance, and following her mother's example, she decided to stay at home.

Thus, all the collocutors of the second generation, with the exceptions of BrownF2 and GrayM2a, completed their postgraduate studies. While doing so, they were all employed, and gained appropriate housing with their parents' assistance. All of them also stated that they live in proper partnerships.

What would the second generation have chosen if forced to prioritise between education, employment and parenthood? Female collocutors of both generations were convinced that, had been they forced to choose, they would probably have chosen their family, although they all very much appreciate their education. WhiteF was very clear:

I would not mind staying at home. I furthered my studies not because of my job, but because of my own interests. While I studied, I put my studies above all else. But when I had my family, I preferred my family.

Today a mother of five, BrownF2 once a junior researcher at the university, never thought she would ever have more than one child. She explained her subsequent decisions to have more children thusly: 'I was very satisfied with my job at the university. But the first child probably did the right thing.'

The male collocutors, however, differ substantially in their order of priorities. The interviewees of the older generation preferred their job positions to fatherhood. The majority admitted that they never participated in household tasks. This was exclusively the domain of their spouses, and sometimes, of their mothers. Conversely, the collocutors of the second generation, with the exception of BrownM2a, participated in household chores and as caretakers of children, although they generally admitted that their spouses contributed more. At first, they hesitated in ranking the preferences, but finally they explained that they were family-oriented and at the same time, very job oriented. As WhiteM2 put it:

The philosophy of my parents was quite clear: first, you finish your studies, then get a job, and finally, make a family. In my case, it happened in the American way: the events were all intertwined.

Life changes after the first childbirth

Irrespective of generation and gender, all collocutors defined parenthood as the event when 'suddenly, all difficulties become trivial'. Very illustrative is GrayM2a's comment:

Social life changed, though. Parents in love with their child cannot talk about anything but the kid. Childless friends and colleagues are bored with it and they don't want to come to see you anymore. My sense of responsibility changed, as well. My wife is like a live wire. Sometimes she scolded me so bad that if any other ex-girlfriend would have do so, she probably would've never seen me again. But with my wife, I didn't go. A child needs both. Once you have a kid, there's no way of being petty at all.

The older generation of male collocutors indicated that due to new duties at home once the first child was born, they paradoxically engaged in work more and partici-

pated in child rearing less. The older generation of female collocutors emphasized the end of their career ambitions; those who stayed at home after childbirth explained this decision with the lack of their husbands' or parents' assistance. The younger generation interviewees highly ranked parenthood, but were nevertheless unwilling to give up their careers. On the contrary, when experiencing motherhood, they economise their time in reconciling work and family. The child got them 'down to earth'.

Women of the older generation pointed out the difficulties related to the public child care system, which in the 1960s was not organized at the level of nurseries. Public kindergartens were usually full, and a child had to be at least three years old in order to be admitted. After two subsequent childbirths, GrayF stayed at home for four years because there was no nursery and her husband was more often than not 'on fieldwork'. GreenF was fortunate: living with her mother-in-law at the time her first child was born, the grandmother took care of the child. The oldest interviewee, BrownF, decided to stay at home after her first childbirth. Her husband was absent for the most part of the day, working as full professor at the university, and she had to look after her sick father-in-law as well. Her daughter, BrownF2, also stayed at home, but only after her third childbirth. GrayF2 obtained the status of junior researcher in the 1990s when the status already allowed researchers to prolong the deadline for the duration of maternity leave. GrayF2, however, felt guilty towards her mentor:

I felt guilty. It seemed as if I got pregnant on purpose once I got the status. It looked somewhat like I tried to cheat the system. I am telling you, I had a stomach-ache for two months before I told my mentor that I was pregnant.

How to harmonise work and family

The collocutors shared explicit thoughts about reconciling work and family when describing their typical working day. When children were of age for school, they all complained that they daily 'fought with time'. The older generation's working hours, typical of the socialism times, were usually from 6 a.m. till 2 p.m. and thus adjusted to that of kindergartens. However, the early working hours did not permit them to have breakfast with their children; they remembered incessant morning dashes to school and work. The only advantage of the fixed working hours was seen in their free afternoon time which they could spend with their families. The few older informants who worked an alternate schedule usually delegated home and child care to their spouses entirely.

The younger generation saw some advantages in flexible work hours. The majority that is employed at universities mentioned that such schedule allowed them to 'calmly' take their kids to kindergartens, to their parents' homes or to school. When children fell ill, they could arrange to work from home. As the main disadvantage, they cited inflexible work hours in public child care, and children's extra-curricular activities.

Recounting a normal working day, the collocutors revealed the division of labour at home between spouses and major differences between generations in this respect. Although the majority of male interviewees of the older generation retrospectively regretted such gender-based labour division, they did also justify it as a matter of 'social norm'. Conversely, the younger generation of male informants, with the exception of BrownM2a, argued in favour of unconventional division of labour at home. Partners constantly work

on harmonizing work at home and child rearing, which is, among other things, made possible when one of the partners is on flexible work hours. As a result, in younger families there are no 'typical' female and male chores, although most of men admitted that their wives are better suited to simultaneous 'work at home, cooking, and helping kids with homework'.

Younger collocutors stressed their parents' assistance as crucial in harmonising their own work and home lives. A typical story is that of the Whites. WhiteF2a trusted her parents-in-law the most: 'As a mother, I know that I can trust my children's grandparents the most. They will absolutely do their very best for their grandchildren.' Her husband, WhiteM2, in turn explained the help of his parents:

The most typical day is Tuesday. On Tuesdays, we usually do seventy kilometres to transport our five kids to different places. First, my wife and I agreed on the necessary children's activities. She insisted that all kids have to attend church, I insisted on gym, my mother-in-law paid for all the grandchildren's English classes, one daughter attended music lessons, and that was that. Fortunately, my parents live nearby, and my father is like a taxi-driver for us. He drives kids back and forth to activities all around Ljubljana. When this is over, my wife and I drive all of them back. It is interesting that my parents are much more occupied with my children than they were with my sister and me. It is incredible how they adapted to the present way of life.

With the exception of BrownF2 who did not receive her parents' or husband's help with her work at home, all other interviewees of younger generation confirmed that in these 'competitive times', the assistance of parents is indispensable. Grandparents are baby-sitters, taxi drivers, they look after sick grandchildren, they pick them from kindergartens when the parents are too busy or still at work, not to mention their crucial input in providing their own children with suitable housing. WhiteM2 acknowledged that he could not imagine having five kids without the new house, which the parents simply gave them. Said his wife:

Honestly, the one-room apartment was all my husband and I could afford when I was pregnant for the third time, and we were both working. Living in a sitting room that turned to bedroom at night, we desperately needed a bigger apartment. But how could we afford it? Very likely by means of long-terms loans, but at that time, it was impossible for us to get such a loan. We would definitely spend a lot of energy solving our housing problem.

The older generation was not as lucky. They had to rely on themselves alone. Their parents or close relatives helped them only at the births of their first children. Usually they watched over their firstborns for a short period of time. Generally, the first generation of interviewees lived a much poorer life compared to their children. At the birth of their first child, the majority of them could not afford a telephone or household appliances such as a washing machine. A car was unthinkable, and public nurseries have not been organised yet. All these factors determined their decisions for the second child, who usually coincided with the acquisition of suitable housing.

The way to do it

How to have more than two children and at least graduate from university, I finally tried find out from those section of informants' narratives that related to their understanding of the low fertility problem in Slovenia. The majority of interviewees commented on it through their own experience. Comparing the situation in public child care in 1964, 1965 and 1980 when her children were born, GrayF noted that there were more children in kindergartens when her first two attended than at the time of her third child. Moreover, in the mid- 1980s she was surprised to see more fathers picking up their children, a practice not common fifteen years earlier. However, GrayF was surprised that her 26-year-old daughter 'still' had not thought about having a child at all. GreenF was also concerned that her 31-year-old son and his girlfriend, working on their doctorates, do not plan for babies. Her daughter, GreenF2, observed that nowadays there are many more families with four, five or even six children, a situation quite uncommon in her youth. Yet, she also meets more and more colleagues at her workplace who are childless.

The older generation was convinced that despite lower living standards in socialism, the state nevertheless provided employment and housing, and public child care was harmonised with the working hours:

When I asked, it was sometimes during the 1960s, one of my female associates in my firm to prolong the working schedule from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. to complete a business task, they made an incredible protest. Today, they wouldn't say a word (WhiteM).

Some of older generation interviewees exposed the 'levelling of wages' in the socialism times, which has survived until today. In the past, the state sought to devalue the university educated in the employment market, and unfortunately, today the situation is the same. Compatible judgements were expressed by the younger generation who argued that today's housing market is a disaster. The prices for renting or buying an apartment are beyond reach for young families given their salaries. Without the parents' or relatives' help, one cannot afford a decent apartment nowadays. Some of the younger generation of women stressed the low maternity leave substitutes, particularly when calculated on the basis of first salaries that, as a rule, are very low. Others complained on today's more expensive public child care and schools. BrownF2, who gave birth to her five children between 1980 and 1988, experienced substantially better subsidized kindergartens and schools in socialism compared to the situation in the times of transition. Finally, with the exception of BrownF2, all younger collocutors approved of the role of the state in awarding the status of junior researcher that allowed them to have their children while studying in graduate school.

At the end of the interviews, the collocutors were asked to suggest policy improvements regarding fertility. The majority of older collocutors stressed that public child care system has to be free for all, and adjusted to the working hours of the parents. Referring to good practices of the socialism times, they thought that young people should be provided with more secure jobs and suitable apartments. BrownM2 was convinced that 'today's greedy capitalism has no sense for the culture of employment. Employers behave like sharks towards women.' At the same time, in BrownM2's view, paternity leave is

ineffective in Slovenia due to the still prevalent patriarchal mentality. However, the majority of the younger generation of interlocutors thought that part-time work for the university educated during the early years of their children would help. Yet they simultaneously contradicted this suggestion by stressing that in view of the relatively low salaries, this is no solution.

Since the postponement of childbirth among the university educated represents the major difficulty, the majority of female collocutors recommended non-profit student apartments for all students who decide to have children while still studying.

Finally, male members of the younger generation opposed the thought that their children should be the concern of the state. As one of them put it: 'Rather, we should discuss the limits of state intervention into our private sphere.'

Conclusions

The results of the above case study offer the first conclusion in line with the bulk of studies on family formation, which argue that the decision for the first child significantly depends on attainment of education, economic independence, housing conditions, and stability of partnership. At the same time, the case study results also cannot oppose the conclusions of those studies whose authors pointed out that the motivation for the second child depends on various dynamic conditions from the change of living conditions of the couple after the first childbirth to the demographic characteristics of the couple, e.g. their age. We can also fully agree with the assumption that 'investigation into each parity demands separate assumptions' (Černič Istenič, Obersnel Kveder, Kveder 2000: 2). However, the case study also shows that interrelatedness and complexity of factors determine a couple's reproductive decisions.

The analysis of the collocutors' lives in their parents' families clearly proves that their subsequent reproductive decisions were determined *ad hoc* rather than *a priori*. All interviewees said that they had never planned for a pre-desired number of children, which goes for the first ones as well as the subsequent. However, they also stressed that they always, even in their young age, liked children and wished to have them at one point in their lives. Irrespective of generation, their decisions were the results of both partners' incessant negotiation of their current condition, which they identified as decisive for family formation. Even those rare couples of the younger generation who practiced contraception resolutely asserted that they did not use contraception as a means of planning childbirths, but rather in order to prevent pregnancies in close succession.

The collocutors decided to have a child when they estimated that it was the right time and context for the pregnancy. Although those of the older generation assured me that their first child 'arrived out of the blue', it is important to keep in mind that they, at the same time, experienced the climate of the socialism times as promising with regard to employment possibilities and appropriate housing. Furthermore, the estimated conditions for family formation include, among other, the partners' ability to mutually harmonise and agree upon work and family demands. One informant of the younger generation, for instance, admitted that the last thing she and her partner could agree about was abortion, but that they nevertheless decided to abort when they assessed their life circumstances as inappropriate for having a third child.

If we were to assess any given couple's reproductive behaviour as implicitly 'inherited' from their own parents, it should be admitted that such inheritance does not exist in the present cases. Their decisions were by far more influenced by a broader social context in any given time. If life in dire circumstances after WWII caused the 'stringent upbringing' that the older interviewees experienced in their youth, the more promising circumstances in the socialism times affected another kind of upbringing. A similar argument can be made with respect to the division of labour between partners in the household. If representatives of the older generation experienced the unquestioned clear-cut division of labour between their parents, they certainly did not automatically transmit this 'pattern' into their own families. The majority of female interlocutors, however, admitted that they were mostly alone for the housework; however, they were equally adamant that they would not 'stand my husband in the kitchen'. Although at the first glance it seemed that the distribution of home duties between spouses in the first generation was the same as in their parents, further analysis showed that it was, if disproportionate, basically consensual; even more so are their children in their own partnerships. The representatives of the older generation especially noticed the shift in their daughters' spouses towards greater cooperation in household chores and upbringing of their children.

While the older generation explained their choice of spouse in direct opposite to their mother's or father's negative characteristics, the younger preferred a partner with whom they have 'lots in common'. They all, however, particularly exposed their partner's capability to resolve daily competitive demands by constant mutual communication and cooperation.

The absence of public nurseries, i.e. socially organised parent help in child care, turned out to be quite an influential factor that prevented some informants from coupling their career with their families. All the female interviewees of the second generation enrolled in post-graduate studies, and the majority of them successfully completed their education. However, they had the luxury of taking time off their studies to give birth without losing financial support or their student status. The flexible working hours enabled the majority of them to more successfully harmonise work and family compared to their mothers or mothers-in-law.

The parents' assistance somewhat unexpectedly turned out to be a very important factor that, according to the interviewees, substantially influenced their reproductive decisions in the highly competitive and insecure transition times. Parents of the younger generation also provided crucial help in housing. Actually, with their daily engagement, grandparents considerably contribute to the younger couple's reconciliation of their work and family. Although both generations exposed appropriate housing as one among the basic conditions for family formation, which is still in line with the decade-old study on the process of family formation in Slovenia (Černič Istenič 1998), an important distinction became evident in the cases of this study. The collocutors of the second generation emphasised that in the socialism times, to get an employment automatically meant getting an apartment. Yet in transition times, it is almost impossible to buy a new apartment solely on the couple's salaries. It is all but a coincidence that the informants who bore an above-average number of children had their housing problem solved to begin with. Somewhat allegorically, one could conclude that going for a big family is not primarily a function of education, times and views, but also of space in both the literal and the symbolic sense of the word.

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Povzetek

V pričujočem prispevku avtorica presoja širši kontekst reproduktivnih odločitev univerzitetno izobraženih v Sloveniji. Čeprav je na nacionalni ravni zabeležena najnižja rodnost prav med univerzitetno izobraženimi, so v središču zanimanja pari z univerzitetno ali podiplomsko izobrazbo in s statističnega vidika nadpovprečnim številom otrok. S primerjavo dveh generacij izbranih družin avtorica preiskuje vsakokrat posebna ozadja njihovih reproduktivnih odločitev v obdobjih pred zabeleženo rodnostjo pod enostavno obnovo prebivalstva v državi in po njej; opazovani obdobji hkrati sovpadata s socializmom in post-socializmom. Izbor metodologije in vsebin raziskave utemeljuje z orisom in kontekstualizacijo pomanjkljivosti bolj uveljavljenih kvantitativnih študij o povezavi med izobrazbo in rodnostjo. Avtorica se namreč loti razkrivanja specifičnih kontekstov reproduktivnih odločitev pri 'netipičnih' parih s pristopom 'od spodaj navzgor', s čimer prispeva k bolj celovitemu razumevanju rodnostnega vedenja. Z analizo nabora življenjskih zgodovin sogovornic in sogovornikov opredeli tiste življenjske dogodke in okoliščine in njihovo medsebojno prepletenost, ki podlagajo njihove vsakokratne odločitve o tem, kako imeti oboje - univerzitetno izobrazbo in otroke.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: rodnost, univerzitetno izobraženi, Slovenija, kvalitativen pristop