

Call for Papers

Demographic Change, Women's Emancipation and Public Policy: Interrogating a Divisive Nexus – Gender and Intersectional Perspectives

International Workshop
organised by the Chair of Sociology/Social Inequality and Gender
with the Marie Jahoda Visiting Professor Programme in International Gender Studies
Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany), 18-20 April 2018

Women have been the subject of demographic research and politics for the last 200 years. Based on the unquestioned assumption of procreation as a 'natural fact,' women became the primary objects of study of demography as well as – involuntarily – causal agents of demographic imbalances. Their 'fertility behaviour' further became the main indicator for demographic developments. Not only does this limited perspective contribute to the naturalisation of the gender order, it also implies that women's emancipation is the cause of low reproduction rates in Western nation states. At the same time, under the surface, not all women are addressed in the same way in demography. Instead, such 'interpellations' are structured by race, class, ability and age.

Against this backdrop, the workshop aims to widen and strengthen the discussion about demography, gender order and public policy by developing new approaches and explanations informed by gender and intersectional perspectives as well as critically examine the epistemological and methodological foundations of current demography. Another aim is to establish a European-wide network of critical gender and intersectionality researchers with respect to these issues.

We are interested in contributions for the themes named below and for which we propose the following **crosscutting issues**: Contributions that

- deal with historical and/or contemporary perspectives;
- are substantiated in, or linked to, concepts of intersectionality, feminist theory and gender studies, critical race theory and postcolonial studies, approaches for analysing classism;
- have a regional or national or European focus and compare regions or nation-states from post-socialist perspectives;
- examine social practices and/or social and/or symbolic structures (discourses) at an analytical level;
- study specific social fields and/or relations between different social fields, such as: politics, media, science and research, economics, medicine;
- study specific policies and/or their relations to one another, especially: family, demographics, migration, reproductive technologies, gender equality, and/or the state, at either a European or global level;
- analyse critiques, concepts and/or the influence of social movements.

We welcome both theoretical and empirical proposals, in particular those concerning the following **themes**:

- **Challenging Theories and Methods in Demographic Research:** The focus on women in demographic research is embedded in a – regularly self-diagnosed – limited range of theory and methods like the "Theory of Demographic Transition," rational choice theories and quantitative methods. Therefore, we are looking for contributions addressing (1) critical discussions of established theories and methods in demographic research, e.g. works that examine the epistemological foundations or the restrictions of quantitative methods. Especially we are looking for (2) historical and contemporary insights into social categorisations through statistics, the main methodological instrument and a legitimizing tool in demographic research and policies. We are also interested in (3) new perspectives and approaches that challenge current positions in demographic research and/or that innovatively link demographics with critical approaches such as intersectionality, feminist studies and postcolonial studies.

- **Social Constructions of Gender, Parenthood and ‘Having a Child’ in Demographic Discourses:** As mentioned above, ‘women as mothers’ are the focus of demographics, whereas men and ‘men as fathers’ are seen to be of minor importance. Hence, we are looking for explorations of the social construction of femininity and masculinity, as well as motherhood and fatherhood and/or heteronormativity in demographic discourses. Inherently connected with the construction of gender is the societal perception of having children or not having them. Based on an understanding of procreation as ‘natural fact’ and the norm of ‘having a child’, child-free women have experienced severe discrimination just like non-conformist negotiations of motherhood (e.g. “regretting motherhood”) have been marginalized. Therefore, we ask for contributions illuminating processes of normalisation and/or comparing perceptions of having children and living child-free in different (trans)national contexts.
- **Reproductive Technologies (RTs) Between Individual Salvation and Pro-natalist Governance:** ‘Involuntary childlessness’ has functioned as legitimation for promoting and funding reproductive technologies like artificial insemination, in vitro fertilisation or surrogacy. However, due to ethical concerns, any medical developments have been continuously accompanied by negotiations about appropriate policy frameworks. At the same time, nation-states integrated RTs into their population policies. We are looking for contributions discussing these tensions. In what way are RTs instruments of pro-natalist governance? How are feminist perspectives dealing with the ambivalence of women’s reproductive rights and state interests in stabilising a ‘traditional’ gender order? We are also looking for contributions that consider RTs to more broadly include contraception and termination of pregnancy, as the use of contraception by women is often named a further ‘cause’ for declining fertility rates.
- **Policy Analyses on Demographic Change and Women’s Emancipation:** Demographics is an inherently political topic; in particular, discussions about ‘care chains’ and ‘a crisis of reproduction’ since they raise questions about the alignment, justification and efficiency of past and current policies. Here, we are looking for contributions dealing with the following questions: How is the ‘demographic challenge’ balanced with efforts of women’s emancipation and gender equality, especially in vital political fields of Western welfare states like family, labour and internal affairs? How are global perspectives, particularly migration and the global south, incorporated into (Western-)national and European population policies? What are the positions and influences of social movements and NGOs?

Both junior and senior scholars are invited to submit an abstract (between 500 and 800 words on the topic, objectives and research questions, plus, if applicable, the empirical background of the paper) in the form of a word- or pdf-document. Abstracts should include FULL contact details, especially your name, institutional affiliation, plus mailing and e-mail address. **Abstracts should be sent to Heike Kahlert and Daniela Heitzmann (conference-sozsug@rub.de) by September 15th, 2017 (for more information about the organising chair, see: <http://www.sowi.rub.de/sozsug/index.html.en>).** Authors will be notified of the acceptance or rejection of their proposal by October 15th, 2017.

The workshop is an opportunity to discuss work in progress and research results, as well as form networks for further international collaboration. Therefore, papers will be discussed in small groups. These groups will work together throughout the whole workshop. The papers (with a maximum length of 7.000 words) are due on January 31st, 2018, and will be delivered to participants of a given working group. All participants are expected to have read the papers in advance. During the workshop, the authors will introduce their papers briefly, and each participant will comment on one paper. Selected papers will be published.

Note: Unfortunately, no funding, fee waiver, travel or other bursaries can be offered for attending the workshop. The workshop fee (approx. 100 €) will cover conference materials and catering during coffee and lunch breaks.