

POPULATION-RELATED ATTITUDES:  
EVIDENCE FROM ESTONIAN FFS

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The working paper examines the opinion data covering the population's life careers in four mutually complementary topics, focusing on partnership formation, fertility preferences, abortion history and family planning, and the combining of family and employment careers. The data for the paper come from the Estonian Family and Fertility Survey which is a national part in the framework of the European FFS. The main objective of the FFS was to shed light on the population's principal life careers from the event history perspective. The research programme reserved a rather modest role for the opinion data, which traditionally deserve major attention in any sociological research; the said focus was shaped and defined by methodological deliberations, in the first place by the cross-sectional nature of the opinion data. The paper has been prepared in the framework of the research theme No.03-77893 *Population-Related Policy Acceptance in Estonian Society* and supported by the John and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although opinions and attitudes hardly remain stable and tend to undergo transformations throughout a life career, the only way they can be fixed and recorded with situation during the survey period. Unlike in the case of population events, which by definition are discreet and determined by a specific time of occurrence, an analogous dating of opinion transformations proves utterly impracticable, despite the best of intentions [Blossfeld, Rohwer 1995; Sudman, Bradburn 1986]. Apart from the incompatibility with the event historical framework, the secondary role of the subjective information was also prescribed by the long-standing experience accumulated in the field of demographic research, which suggests that the actual process trends and the respective opinions and attitudes, more often than not, fail to fall into step.

Despite reservations, the opinion data reflecting the public attitudes without doubt have their value. A knowledge of public expectations and preferences is certainly instrumental in political planning, facilitating the ability to anticipate and comprehend the reception of possible measures that might be applied in society as a whole as well as in individual population groups. The role of such knowledge has increased rather than diminished in modern days, when the picture painted by the mass media and opinion leaders has a good chance to detach itself from reality and acquire an elevated status of a phenomenon *per se*. Within the FFS frame, the opinion questions were clustered into a separate module within the core questionnaire; additionally, the regulations envisaged a possibility to make the FFS congruent with the Population Policy Acceptance Survey<sup>1</sup>, which is heavily opinion data-oriented. From the viewpoint of Estonia, and broadly speaking, Central and Eastern European nations, two factors complicated the development of the relevant subject matter and its inclusion in the national FFS programme. First, the core questionnaire primarily targeted the social context of welfare states and proved mostly inapplicable under the circumstances of an economic transition. Second, the value of the opinion data was lessened by the extremely fast transformation of the situation in the first half of the past decade.

Despite certain complications, the Scientific Council of the Estonian FFS held it indispensable to cover the more important opinion-related issues. As a separate element of the subjective dimension, Toivo Kitvel suggested the use of the concept of "locus of control", which provided a means for a rather apt generalisation of the population's

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<sup>1</sup> The Population Policy Acceptance Survey is an international project focusing on the popular opinion of the crucial issues of population development, public awareness of the problems as well as on the expectations/preferences about the pertinent policies. The first round of the survey (1988-1995) included a total of nine states; simultaneously with the second FFS round, preparations started for the new interrogation cycle. Also Estonia has been invited to join the project, preparations on the national scale are coordinated by the Scientific Council of the Estonian FFS.

psychological disposition. Although the said standard variable is part of any event historical model, the subject matter deserves to be discussed in the paper. The second subsection focuses on the opinions and attitudes associated with concrete life careers. It should be stressed that, unlike the event historical approach of FFS, which applied a homogeneous system of indicators throughout the life careers, the following analysis does not aspire to create a comparable integral picture, but restricts itself to mapping the public attitudes towards the selected key problems, fitting in with the rest of the chapters via the common cohort angle and systematic juxtaposition of the native- and foreign-origin populations.

## **2. STABILITY OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S LOCUS OF CONTROL**

To draw a general outline of the personality traits crucial for the population's life careers, the Estonian FFS applied the *locus of control* concept, which was first used in scientific literature by American psychologist Julian Rotter (1954). To put it plainly, the locus of control defines the personality aspects determining the level of personal independence, ability to set and accomplish goals. The concept distinguishes between two opposite poles – internal and external locus of control. The individuals featuring an internal locus of control, or the internals, tend to have strong faith in themselves, and are convinced of their ability to control their own life course and make their own luck. The individuals with external locus of control, or the externals, on the other hand, tend to believe that nothing much depends on their efforts, and that their destiny is actually determined by chance and external forces. Much more important than either of these beliefs is, of course, the fact that the locus of control manifests itself in the actual behaviour of an individual, wherefore the concept has earned general recognition and has been widely applied in social research [Laird, Thompson 1991].

To determine the position of the locus of control, the Estonian FFS employed three mutually complementary pairs of statements, which the respondents were asked to voice their opinion about [EKDK 1995a]. Dividing the population into groups according to their locus of control, the respondents choosing all three answers displaying independence were classified as "internals", while those opting for three answers displaying dependence, were considered "externals". In order to more explicitly reveal the locus of control, the respondents not demonstrating a homogeneous attitude were left unclassified in the analysis. Figure 1, however, displays this particular population segment, distinguishing between the groups leaning towards the internal locus of control on one hand, and towards the external locus of control on the other. Understandably, the limited measuring instrument was unable to provide an absolutely truthful picture of the exact position of

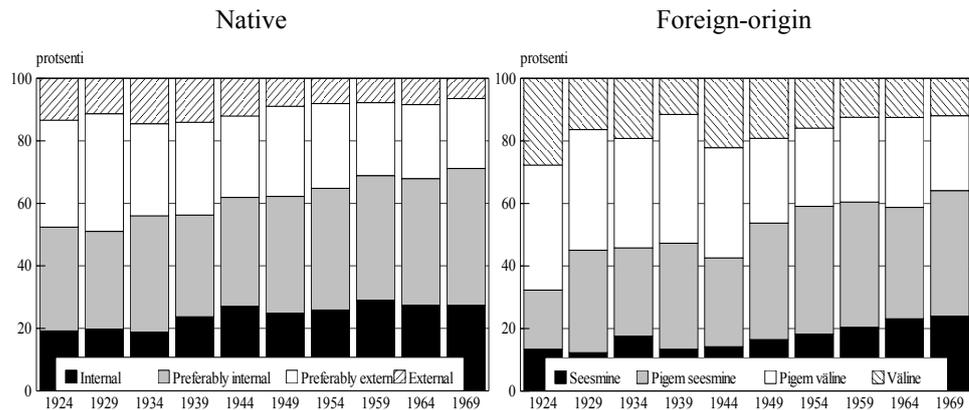
each individual's locus of control, yet the population division clearly demonstrates the cohort trend as well as the difference between the replacement groups [Kitvel 1999].

As a general tendency, an increase in the proportion of internally controlled individuals, and a decrease in the proportion of the externals towards the younger cohorts can be observed in both the native- and foreign-origin populations. This shift applies to not just the population segment featuring a well-defined position, but is equally expanded to the individuals leaning towards one or the other type of locus of control. It is interesting to note that the relative proportions of the groups displaying a more or less clearly defined locus of control – with an approximate ratio of 1:2 in favour of the externals – remains practically stable across the cohorts as well as subpopulations. From the methodological viewpoint, the phenomenon is a proof of the uniform sensitivity of the applied instrument throughout the whole scale, attesting to the prudence of setting apart the intermediate group. The modification of the proportion of the internals/externals across the FFS cohort range is rather extraordinary in numerical terms, nearly doubling in the scale extremes.

However, caution should be exercised in assessing this rather explicit change, as the measuring result, like the rest of opinion data, is associated with only one point in time (the interview period). Since the FFS cohorts were at the time undergoing vastly different phases in their lives – from student to senior citizen – the result need not reflect the relocation of the locus of control, but rather the diversity of these phases of life. After all, younger people can be expected to exhibit high levels of dynamism and self-confidence, while energy and vigour tend to abate at a more advanced age. In the case of Estonia the said differentiation has been boosted by the fast social changes, which have exerted contrasting period effect influence on the younger, middle-aged and older population segments, say, through the occupational sphere or economic resources. The pattern presented in Figure 1 is presumably shaped by the cohort trend as well as the cohort's life cycle, although it proves impossible to distinguish between the specific contributions of these two factors.

Figure 1

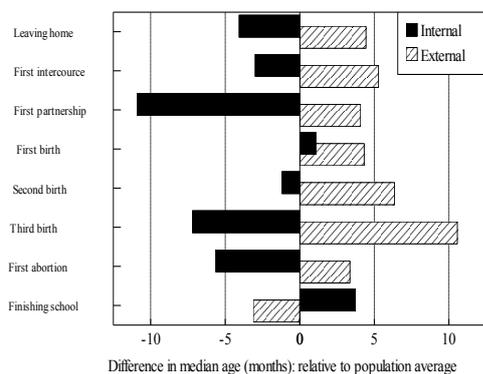
Locus of control  
Birth cohorts 1924-1973



A prominent feature manifesting itself across the whole FFS cohort range is the higher frequency of externality among the foreign-origin population. Although "pure" externals make up a relatively small group in either subpopulation, their number was an average of 1.7 times higher among the immigrants, the difference being more than twofold in the oldest cohort. The general proportion of the internal and external locus of control in favour of the internals, which has been featured in all the native-origin cohorts, including the intermediate groups, did not become manifest in the foreign-origin population until in the 1949-1953 birth cohort. Having become less marked over the years, the difference between the two subpopulations nevertheless persisted up to the youngest FFS cohort. The picture agrees well with the population development expectation, which associates the more conspicuous internality exhibited by the native-origin population with the earlier timing of the demographic transition and thus with a more advanced process of individualisation. It is also possible that the ideological propaganda, which the foreign-origin population had been subjected to for a long period, could have had its impact on this population subgroup.

*Figure 2*

*Difference in timing of major life course events  
by locus of control  
Native-born population, birth cohorts 1924-1973*



The position of the locus of control is indeed manifest in most of the population's life careers; Figure 2 illustrates the difference between the internals and the externals through the timing of vital events. Considering their higher level of independence, the internally controlled individuals, as may be anticipated, display a tendency towards leaving the parental home at an earlier age, thus demonstrating lower rates of residential immobility and higher migration intensity. Throughout the FFS

cohort range, the internals also stand out with their earlier entry into the first partnership and stronger orientation towards the novel forms of cohabitation, predominantly consensual union. As could be expected, the internal locus of control is also associated with a higher divorce rate; this, however, could explain the higher than average satisfaction of internally controlled individuals with their partnership relations. Due to their earlier entry into the first partnership and higher divorce rate, the internals, not surprisingly, exhibit a tendency towards a higher number of partnerships.

The internally controlled individuals are also characterised by the earlier timing of childbirth and abortions and earlier entry into sexual relations as compared to the whole population and the group of externally controlled individuals. While the total number of live births is almost equal in both groups, the internals display a higher abortion rate. It would be interesting to note, however, that the ratio has been clearly reversed in a couple of youngest cohorts of the native-origin population, probably due to more effective family planning through a regular use of contraceptives by the internally controlled individuals. The individuals who feature the internal locus of control are inclined to set themselves higher goals in education, which means a longer than average educational history, later graduation (unlike the timing of other vital events), and eventually a higher educational attainment. In the employment sphere, the internals are characterised by a higher level of labour force participation, greater representation in professionally demanding occupations, and slightly longer working hours. The greater occupational contribution observed among the internally controlled population is in correlation with their higher levels of material welfare.

The list of differences between the externals and the internals could be extended further using the FFS tables, which employ the locus of control in the capacity of a standard variable [EKDK 1995b]. Although the differences between the two population groups are quantitatively negligible, they follow a certain pattern by individual life careers

and, as a rule, remain stable throughout the whole cohort range under discussion. From the individual viewpoint, the result unambiguously confirms a stronger inclination of the internals towards independence and purposefulness. In the context of population development, however, several traits give evidence of a certain pioneering role that the internally controlled group has played in the spread of new partnership forms and extra-marital fertility, which in turn harmonises well with the lesser conformity of the internals. From the methodological viewpoint, the homogeneity of the results in the breakdown of events occurring during different phases of life eloquently proves that the above-discussed cohort difference pertaining to the locus of control indeed reflects a growing trend of internality rather than the impact of any concrete life phase. Should this hypothesis hold true, the population segment featuring the internal locus of control certainly deserves greater attention in the future owing to its trend-shaping role.

### **3. A MEDLEY OF SUBJECTIVITY**

The following subchapter clusters the opinion data covering the population's life careers into four mutually complementary topics, focusing on partnership formation, fertility preferences, abortion history and family planning, and the combining of family and employment careers, respectively.

#### **3.1 Marriage and sexuality**

The process analysis revealed considerable shifts in the population's partnership formation pattern, primarily the emergence of consensual union as a form of cohabitation, which in the younger cohorts successfully rivals the formally registered marriage, and an increase in the partnership dissolution. The said tendencies have fuelled the idea that the family and marital relations are undergoing a crisis. In order to establish how this concept is reflected in public attitudes, the respondents were interviewed about their perception of the importance of marriage as a vital event. The possible answers' scale comprised four positions ranking from "very important" to "completely unimportant", omitting the neutral intermediate grade to make it more complicated for the interviewees to evade taking a stance. From the methodological viewpoint, the applied scale division could be considered appropriate – the non-response rate was less than one per cent, which is to be estimated as low or even very low in the opinion survey system.

The analysis revealed that the respondents set a relatively high value on marriage. In the FFS cohorts, an average of 84 per cent of the native-born population deemed

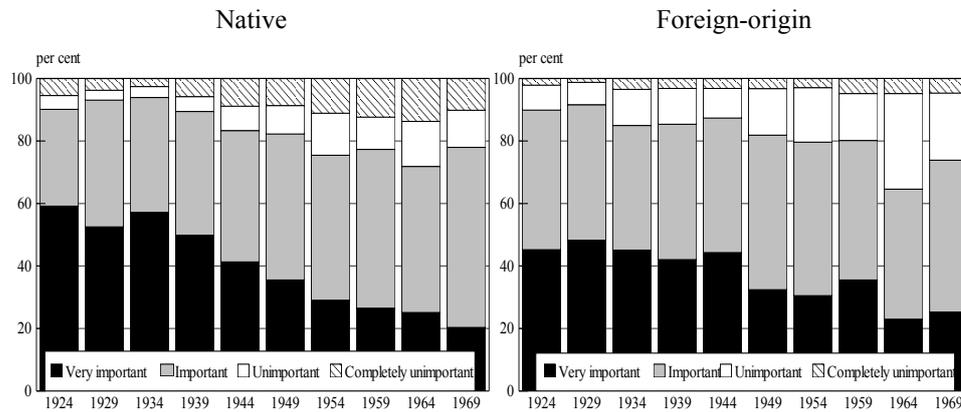
marriage important or very important. The respondents upholding a diametrically opposite position, declaring that marriage has no importance whatsoever, make up a negligible proportion of eight per cent. A closer scrutiny of this minority group reveals, as could be expected, an obvious correlation between the opinion voiced by the respondents and their personal life experience. Thus marriage is more frequently perceived as unimportant by the individuals who have, for one reason or another, remained outside marital relations, or whose marriage has ended in failure. Although in either case a positive opinion prevails eventually, the difference associated with personal experience nevertheless amounts to two times.

What strikes the eye in a cohort perspective is the rather substantial decline in the importance attached to marriage (Figure 3). The tendency is not manifest in the three oldest cohorts of 1924-1938, and the proportion of respondents who perceived marriage as important remained stable above 90 per cent. In these cohorts nearly three fifths of the interviewees considered marriage a crucial event in a woman's life-career. From the 1939-1943 cohort onwards, however, this group began to gradually but steadily shrink in proportion, dropping to one fifth in the youngest FFS cohort. At the same time, the share of all the remaining opinion groups has displayed a growing tendency. In the absolute meaning, the sentiment that has acquired dominance in the younger segment of the cohort range views marriage as a significant vital event, albeit one whose contribution has been declining over the years.

The proportion of the more radically minded population group has been even faster to rise: from the 6-7 per cent minimum level featured in the second and the third FFS cohorts, the share of the respondents who deem marriage more or less unimportant has soared to 30 per cent in the 1964-1968 cohort. A certain throwback occurs in the youngest FFS cohort; however, this probably does not signal a trend reversal but rather the impact of a concrete phase of life. Namely, during the FFS interviews, the 1969-1973 birth cohort fell into the age group 20-24, which is characterised by the highest intensity of partnership formation and extreme focus on finding a life mate.

Figure 3

*Value of marriage*  
*Birth cohorts 1924-1973*



The attitude of the foreign-origin population towards marriage has followed the above-described trend in broad outline, yet a comparison of the right and left sides of the double figure exposes a number of significant dissimilarities. In the first place, mention should be made of the slightly more reserved attitude of the immigrants towards marriage in the older cohorts of 1924-1943. This deviation is mostly featured in the extreme position of the opinion scale reflecting the (very) high value set on the particular vital event – in the native-origin population, the proportion of the group sharing the opinion is fifteen percentage points higher. The logic of demographic development would suggest an inverse ratio, considering the later timing of the demographic transition and the non-existence of the European marriage pattern in the home regions of the foreign-origin population. Hypothetically, the said deviation could be associated with the ideology cultivated in the Soviet Union, which endeavoured to oppose itself to the traditional idea of gender roles and stressed the active participation of women in work outside the home [Lapidus 1978].

The other peculiarity featured in the foreign-origin population is associated with an opposite trend, which attaches no importance to marriage whatsoever. Although the proportion of this group is rather modest in either subpopulation, the negative attitude is featured nearly three times more frequently in the native-origin population. Both deviations can be summed up with the generally weaker differentiation of attitudes among the foreign-origin population and the clustering around the middle positions of the scale. This trend appears to exhibit relative stability across the cohorts, showing no inclination to disappear any time soon. As a matter of course, the interpretation of results must proceed from the fact that the survey covered marriage as a formally registered partnership, which should not be confused with how the respondents perceive the importance of partnership as such.

Another partnership formation-related issue addressed by FFS was the attitude towards pre-marital sexual relations. As discussed above, the traditional type of population replacement was characterised by an almost total homogeneity of fertility, marriage and sexual behaviours, with occasional deviations manifesting themselves in exceptional cases and/or in specific population groups. Thus pre-marital sexual relations had no place in the conventional population replacement, and the prevailing traditions and morals, including church dogmatics, had adopted an unambiguously condemnatory attitude towards the practice. The situation, however, began to transform during the second demographic transition, when the individual processes gradually acquired significance *per se*. In the region west of the Hajnal line, which Estonia has historically belonged to, the disconnecting of marriage and sexuality started quite early on, and is in a sense associated with the evolution of the European marriage pattern. However, the differentiation of these processes did not reach completion until after the end of the demographic transition, in other words, within the FFS cohort range – hence the focus on its reflections in the cohort attitudes.

The respondents were able to choose between three answers, the first of which considered pre-marital sexual relations completely acceptable and dependent on personal preferences alone. The second option also deemed pre-marital sex permissible, albeit under certain conditions, while the third perceived pre-marital sexual activity as condemnable in any event. Figure 4 reveals, as could be anticipated, an increase in tolerance levels towards the younger FFS cohorts. Thus, while in the oldest, 1924-1928 cohort, less than two fifths of the native-origin population treated pre-marital sex as an entirely private affair, the said attitude is already prevalent in the younger cohorts, nearing 60 per cent in the 1969-1973 cohort. Between these two extremes, the growth trend has exhibited remarkable stability, suggesting that both the beginning and end of the transformation are actually located outside the FFS cohort frame.

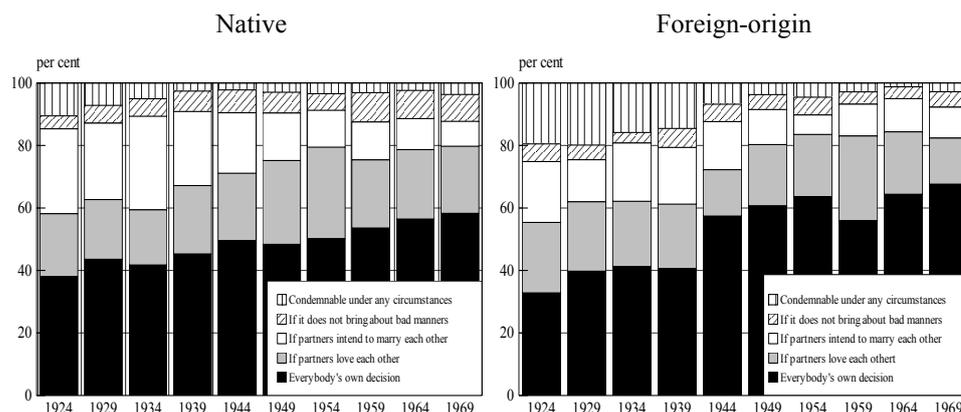
The stance, which accepts pre-marital sex on certain terms, plays a somewhat smaller role in the cohort range under discussion, yet has featured prominently in the earlier cohorts. While in the three or four older cohorts, more than half of the cohort shared the position, the percentage has been on the decline ever since, initially at a slower pace, then stepping up speed. The figure distinguishes between three subgroups, which bound the acceptability of pre-marital sexual relations to marriage plans, mutual love of partners, and avoidance of promiscuity, respectively. It is interesting to note that the dynamics of the indicator is far from homogeneous across the cohorts. The first subgroup has experienced the greatest decline: the proportion of respondents who associated the permissibility of sexual relations with the intention to marry had by the 1969-1973 cohort dropped three times from nearly 30 per cent in the older part of the cohort range. The percentage of those who perceived mutual love of the partners as a premise for sexual relationship has, on the

other hand, remained fairly stable at the level of 20 per cent throughout the cohort range, with the exception of a brief rise.

The only subgroup featuring a rising trend was the one stressing the importance to avoid promiscuity. Although its relative proportion remains lower in general than those of the other two groups, the actual increase exhibited by this subgroup is nearly twofold. It is interesting to note that in a couple of younger cohorts this subgroup catches up with and even surpasses the group, which justified pre-marital sex with marriage plans. This seems to point at the growing concern in the younger population about rampant promiscuity, which, however, is not the case – the growth of this particular subgroup in fact reflects the general spread of tolerance, for it is hardly believable that even those who perceive the said problem as a private affair are ready to accept promiscuity. In other words, the third subgroup could be in principle combined with the population segment that sets no preconditions to pre-marital sex. Such a merger, which is also supported by the similar dynamics exhibited by both groups, pushes the proportion of the group expressing all-round approval of pre-marital sex up to at least two thirds of the total population.

Figure 4

*Acceptance of pre-marital sex  
Birth cohorts 1924-1973*



The diametrically opposite position – unconditional condemnation of pre-marital sex – was shared by a group of negligible size, around four per cent in the native-origin population. As suggested by Figure 4, the FFS managed to capture the final stage of the retreat of this viewpoint in Estonia. While in the 1924-1928 cohort, one third of the respondents perceived pre-marital sex as condemnable, their share dwindled to two or three per cent after just a few cohorts. This group does not fully disappear, however, and can be encountered in all the subsequent cohorts as a marginal minority. Such groups are often conspicuous for their selectivity. An analysis shows that in the case of Estonia, the selectivity factor towering above the rest of the conventional background characteristics is

religiousness, which raises the probability of a negative attitude towards pre-marital sex three or four times. It is interesting to note that while in the beginning of the cohort range such selectivity is rather modest, its role more than decuples in the younger cohorts. Nevertheless, even among the young Christian believers the proportion of condemnatory attitude does not exceed 15 per cent.

From the demographic development aspect, a comparison of the native- and foreign-origin populations calls attention to the difference between the starting positions of these two subpopulations. Among the immigrants, the proportion of respondents negatively disposed towards pre-marital sex was nearly twice as high, amounting to one fifth in the 1924-1933 cohorts. The proportion of the upholders of the so-called traditional values among the foreign-origin population does not drop below the ten per cent level observed in the oldest native-origin cohort until the 1944-1948 birth cohort, thus generating a twenty-year timing shift between the two subpopulations. From that point onwards, the change has been slightly faster in the foreign-origin population, and by the end of the FFS cohort range the attitudes towards pre-marital sex have evened out, which coincides with the prevailing trend within either replacement group

### **3.2. Number of children expected, ideal number of children**

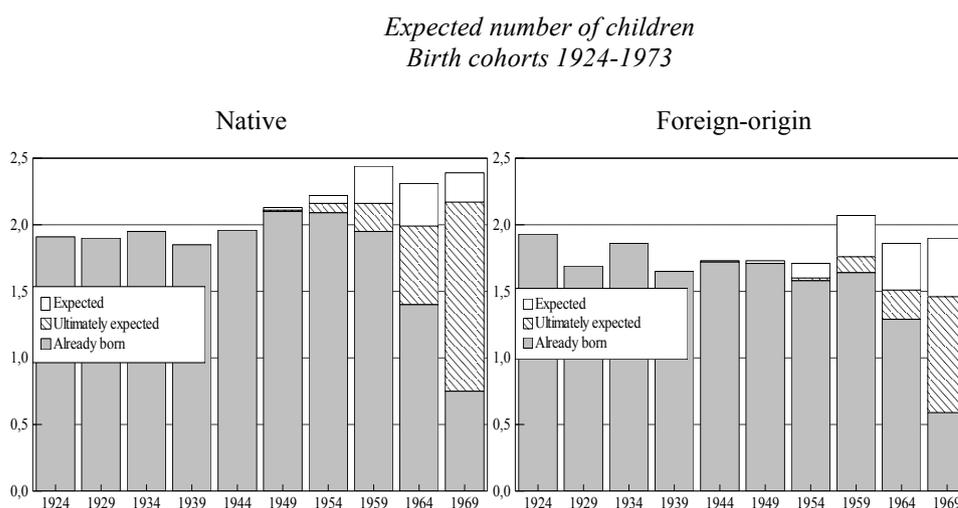
The fertility and family oriented surveys traditionally inquire about childbearing plans. This tradition dates back to nearly fifty years, when the corresponding methodology was first developed and applied. The individual future plans were expected to create a foundation upon which the population's fertility trend forecasts could be built. In the 1950s and early 1960s the fieldwork results were still fairly exact and it seemed that demography had at its disposal a simple and effective prognosticating instrument. The period of success did not last long, however, as the childbearing plans did not give the slightest hint of the pending fertility decline characteristic of demographically developed nations in the second half of the 1960s.

This failure launched a discussion on the operationalisation of childbearing plans, and in a wider sense, on the overall reliability of the opinion method in demography as a whole [Ryder 1973; Westhoff 1981 et al]. The discussion eventually led to the elaboration of several nuances and details of the method, yet the generalisation of the specific analyses, including the results of longitudinal validity research, unambiguously proved the impossibility of any dependable forecasting of the future trends of a certain population process from individual opinions.

Surveys on attitude towards the childbearing career conducted among demographically developed nations have for the past three decades persistently confirmed

the excessive optimism of childbearing plans, as the actual number of children born by the end of the reproductive career has systematically failed to meet the popular expectations. This poor match between the plans and reality is the principal reason why most countries and international organisations now refrain from applying the childbearing expectations in population forecasts [Van Giessen 1992; Van Hoorn, Keilman 1997]. Regardless, these questions have persisted in the surveys covering family and fertility statistics, and the FFS is no exception in this respect – the series of questions concerning childbearing plans were part of the core questionnaire.

Figure 5



The Estonian FFS collected data on childbearing plans, making a classical distinction between the ideal, ultimately wanted, and ultimately expected number of children. Of these, the first reflects the idea of the optimum parity in society as a whole and is not associated with a concrete individual, while the second represents the number of children the respondent perceives as suitable for her in the presence of all necessary conditions. The third indicator – the number of ultimately expected children – differs from the ultimately wanted number of children in the sense that it considers the circumstances dictated by a concrete situation in life [Bongaarts 1990]. The Estonian FFS collected the respective data from the female population in the fertile age irrespective of their age, number of children already born, family status or other circumstances. At the same time the arrangement of concrete questions reckoned with the said circumstances, prescribing a different approach for women in different stages of their childbearing careers [EKDK 1995a]. The following analysis mainly focuses on the expected number of children as an indicator that takes into consideration the actual circumstances and restrictions, while the ideal number of children is also touched upon.

In order to guarantee the comparability of the female cohorts in the different stages of their childbearing careers, Figure 5 presents the expected number of children in combination with the number of children already born. It should be noted that the traditional sociological approach, which ignores the second component, would provide a distorted picture of the cohorts' fertility level – featured separately, the number of expected children exhibits a heavy concentration of the process in the youngest cohort, and a fast decline to non-existence in the oldest cohorts. To demonstrate the different degrees of realism of the childbearing plans, in the cohorts in their fertile age additional distinction is made between the children certainly expected and the children probably expected.

The highest number of ultimately expected children can be found in the 1959-1963 native-origin birth cohort, where the combined average of children already born and ultimately expected children amounts to nearly two and a half, which is far above replacement level as well as above the fertility levels displayed by all the preceding FFS cohorts, including those of 1949-1958, which were the only cohorts to actually reach the replacement level. It was quite unlikely that such a high fertility level could be achieved during the survey period – which became perfectly obvious eight years later, reflecting the typical over-optimism of childbearing plans.

It is a matter apart, however, whether or not the 1959-1963 cohort is able to surpass the preceding cohort, at least to a certain extent. The process analysis indicated that in the last comparable point of the reproductive career (thirtieth year), the women in the said cohort had a somewhat higher average number of children than women in the preceding cohorts. Also, the parity distribution provides a rather good premise for reaching the replacement level, although, on the other hand, the contribution of ultimately expected births towards the final process level, and the ensuing indeterminacy, are fairly considerable. It is, however, indisputable that the female cohort with the highest fertility level in the 20th century hails from the period between 1954 and 1963.

In the two youngest FFS cohorts the childbearing plans exhibit a dramatic divergence from the reality. Judging by the plans, also the 1964-1973 cohorts should be characterised by the above-replacement-level fertility – if this held true, the population's fertility level in Estonia ought to have increased slightly in the 1990s instead of posting a nearly twofold decline. A comparison of the two cohorts under observation reveals a growing divergence between the expressed attitudes and the actual fertility trend. While in the 1964-1968 cohort the total number of children already born and children ultimately wanted exhibited a slight, albeit much smaller decline than in reality as compared to the previous cohort, in the 1969-1973 cohort the number of expected births went up again. It is interesting to note that a similar increase is featured also in case the survey is restricted to

firm childbearing intentions and a conservative estimate of the number of children<sup>2</sup>. The ever deepening irreality of childbearing plans is emphasised by the expected parity distribution in the youngest cohort, in which the proportion of zero parity women and women of parity one is the lowest across the whole FFS range. It is important to note that despite the said fluctuation, the increasing divergence between the childbearing plans and reality is determined by a change in behaviour that occurred in these cohorts, although the plans expressed by the younger FFS cohorts have followed the example of the preceding cohorts. The foreign-origin population exhibits a similar disagreement between the plans and actual fertility behaviour.

Theoretically, it is possible to interpret the discrepancy between the childbearing plans and the actual number of children born in two rather different ways. On one hand, the divergence can be explained by various obstacles, which keep people from accomplishing their reproductive intentions. The other hypothesis puts the blame on the unfeasibility of the future plans. Understandably, each of these interpretations has different implications: in the former case, the demographic political measures should focus on the removal of the obstacles in question, while a bigger investment into the said measures is presumably expected to yield a proportionally weightier result. In the latter case it proves difficult to suggest any straightforward action, and indirect instruments should be applied to guide the process.

Although common sense would suggest that the former interpretation probably appears more logical from the viewpoint of the individual who has to make the respective choices, it is the latter hypothesis that clearly prevails in demographic science, as a generalisation of the analysis results. It has transpired, in the case of theories pertaining to concrete impediments, that an analysis of the process development or differentiation of population groups eventually leads to the conclusion that the factor under discussion need not actually function as a real handicap. The same is in a roundabout manner implied by the circumstances the female respondents brought up to justify their decision to end the childbearing career – the most frequently cited motive in both the native- and foreign-origin population is the lack of desire to have more children (the respondent already has the planned number of children), rather than the precarious financial situation, poor health status, relations with the life partner, an earlier negative experience, etc. However, this does not eliminate the need to attempt the removal of various inhibiting factors, but rather stresses the existence of a general framework conditioned by the regularities of population development, which among other aspects also defines the boundaries of demographic policy.

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of ultimately wanted children, the respondents were able to state their intentions with a certain margin, e.g. one or two children, two or three children, etc. A conservative estimate is based on the smallest number rather than on the average.

Answers to the question concerning the ideal number of children in an average family reflect the public opinion of the general parity in a family under ideal circumstances. Unlike the case of the other elements of childbearing plans, the field work was not restricted to the female population of reproductive age, but also covered the older FFS cohorts. Figure 6 presents the said ideal through parity distribution. Unlike the actual parity distribution, in addition to a fixed family model, the respondents were offered a greater degree of flexibility in stating their preferences (a family of one or two children, two or three children, etc.). The figure reveals a two-way difference in the ideal in the FFS analytical framework: in the breakdown of the native- and foreign-origin populations on one hand, and in the breakdown of birth cohorts on the other hand.

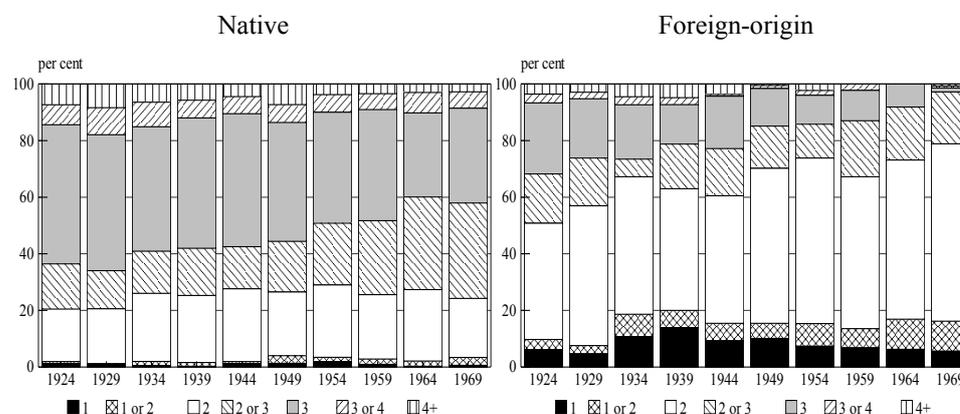
The preferred model in the native-origin population is a family with three children, the respective proportion amounting to two thirds as the cohort range average. Follow the preference for a two-child family, and the two-three-child family with slightly more than one fifth each. The preference for all the remaining parities was restricted to a total of 15 per cent, while the preference for one-child family was notably low, not above the 2.3 per cent level. The most frequently stated preference in the foreign-origin population was the two-child family (more than half of the female population). The preference for a larger family remained more than three times lower among the immigrants as compared to the native-origin population. On the other hand, in the foreign-origin population the proportion of respondents giving preference to a small, one-child or two-child family was six times bigger (15 per cent) than in the native-origin population. The difference between the averages of the ideal amounted to 0.5-2.7 children in the native-origin population against the 2.2 children in the foreign-origin population. It is important to note that the discrepancy is not reducible to structural factors and indeed characterises the divergence of opinions.

Notwithstanding the difference, the preference changes in both subpopulations are similar in nature – in either case, a shift towards a smaller ideal number of children has occurred. Expressed as an average, the decline in the ideal number of children is in fact insignificant – a total of 0.2-0.3 across the FFS cohort range –, albeit very steady as a trend, and well observable through all the cohorts. In both subpopulations the 3+ parity as an ideal features a declining trend, while the foreign-origin population is characterised by a particularly steep plunge with the corresponding proportion dropping from one third in the 1924-1928 cohort to just a couple of per cent in the 1969-1973 cohort. In the native-origin population the proportion of respondents who prefer three or more children has declined from two thirds to 40 per cent. At the same time, preference given to a smaller family has grown stronger respectively, each subpopulation exhibiting a different pattern, however. In the native-origin population the growth is distributed more or less evenly between the parities two and three. In the foreign-origin population, on the contrary, the already

preponderant preference given to the two-child family grows stronger very early in the cohort range, and approaches two thirds in the youngest cohort. In comparison with the native-origin population it means a greater homogeneity of the ideal model.

Figure 6

*Ideal number of children  
Birth cohorts 1924-1973*



In respect to the ideal number of children, it has to be concluded that there is next to no cohesion between the opinion expressed and the actual population process. Thus the trend of the ideal number of children in the family does not reflect the cohort differences in fertility, like the stability of the fertility level in the older part of the FFS cohort range in the native-origin population and the rise to the replacement level in the 1949-1963 cohorts. A comparison of the stated ideal and the actual (expected) parities reveals a mere 23 per cent coincidence in the native-origin population. The coincidence is slightly bigger in the foreign-origin population, yet never rises above one third. As indicated by the comparison of the averages, the ideal typically exceeds the number of children born, while the opposite is three to four times less frequent.

### 3.3. Family planning/Fertility regulation

The abortion rate being extremely high among the Estonian population, it is not an issue that could be easily overlooked in terms of opinion analysis. The crucial problem, which in most states divides the public opinion rather sharply, is the permissibility of abortion *per se*. An abortion inevitably means that a new life is destroyed, even though the intervention takes place at a very early stage, when the human being has not yet acquired a social quality. On the other hand, the legalisation of abortion has been interpreted as a progressive move enhancing a woman's sovereignty in making decisions that define her

life's career. Under the circumstances of modern population replacement, where there is demand, to a greater or lesser extent, for the particular contraceptive measure, the legalisation of abortion could be taken as another example of the normative regulation brought into consonance with the population process development and daily practice. The indisputably positive outcome of the legalisation of abortion is the general medical safety of the procedure, although induced abortion inevitably involves considerable risk to reproductive health.

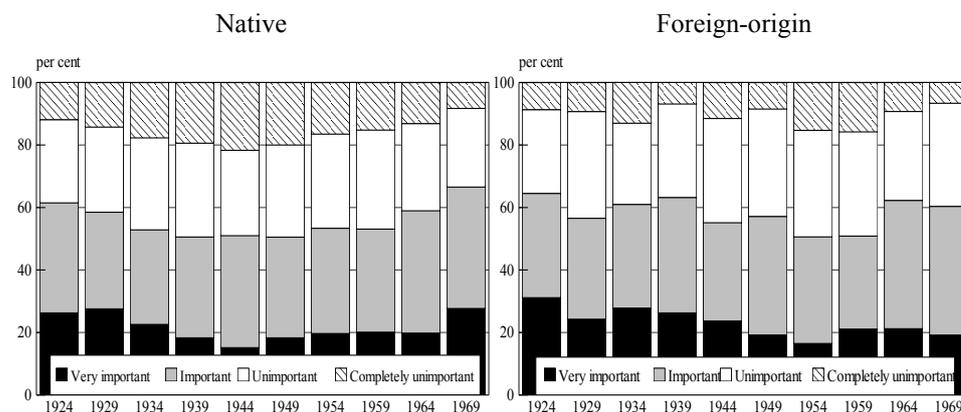
Similarly to the states on a comparable level of population development, the legal permissibility of induced abortion is not perceived as a focal attitudinal issue in Estonia. Throughout the reproductive careers of most FFS cohorts, abortion has been legal in Estonia, and probably also too readily accessible for women, mostly due to the restricted availability of modern contraceptives during the period. Also in the public opinion, the legality of abortion is beyond doubt. With the non-existence of formal restriction, greater significance is attached to the ethical aspect and the underlying meaning of the event. The FFS inquired about the importance of moral objections affecting the abortion decision, applying a four-tier scale from "very important" to "completely unimportant".

The results indicated a predominantly pragmatic attitude, which, considering the high level of abortion, was fully predictable. As the FFS cohort average, slightly more than one fifth of the respondents in the native-origin population considered moral restrictions very important, while one third of the respondents perceived them as important rather than unimportant. For the remaining 45 per cent of the female population, ethical considerations against abortion did not count as a serious argument, although a mere 16 per cent of the interviewees described them as completely unimportant. Figure 7, which juxtaposes the cohort differences in both subpopulations, calls attention to a peculiar curve featured in the native-origin population, which rather closely reflects the actual abortion behaviour of the female population.

A gradual strengthening of the more pragmatic attitude has taken place in the older half of the cohort range, peaking in the 1944-1948 cohort. Although not very conspicuous due to the smoothness of the curve, the extent of the change in the extreme positions on the scale is nearly twofold. From that point onwards, however, a shift in the opposite direction can be observed, and in the youngest cohort the moral arguments acquired an even greater importance than in the earliest part of the cohort range.

Figure 7

*Acceptance of abortion  
Birth cohorts 1924-1973*



The negative attitude towards abortion is encountered more frequently among the immigrant population. If the actual reproductive behaviour were consistent with the expressed attitudes, the correlation of abortion indicators for the two subpopulations ought to be diametrically opposite to the real situation<sup>3</sup>. Given the timing of demographic development, it was not unexpected of the foreign-origin population to display a more conservative attitude, at the same time evidencing the rather high degree of independence that opinions have of objective processes. The trend featured in the foreign-origin population lacks the curvilinearity, which is characteristic of the cohort differences in the native-origin population – even though a gradual decline of the moral considerations against abortion can be observed up to the 1954-1963 cohort, there is no clear evidence of a shift in the opposite direction in the youngest cohorts. The process analysis confirms that the decline in abortions has been somewhat slower in the foreign-origin population.

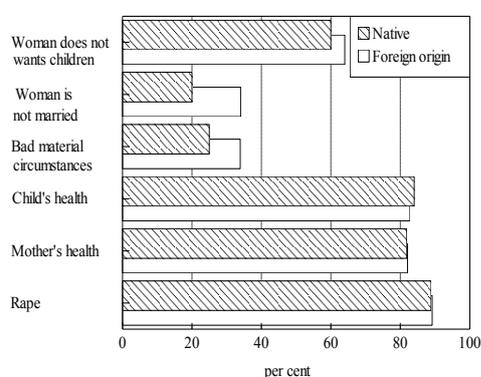
Additionally, the Estonian FFS posed a question concerning the circumstances under which abortion is perceived as justified. The situations observed were divided into three broad groups – first, threat to the health of the mother or the unborn child; second, poor economic conditions or absence of legally registered marriage; and third, the conscious decision not to have any more children. An infrequent situation where pregnancy was the result of a forced sexual intercourse was thrown in for good measure. In each case the respondent was asked to decide whether, under the cited circumstances, abortion was completely justified, partly justified, or completely unjustified. Figure 8

<sup>3</sup> The divergence of the abortion attitudes and the actual reproductive behaviour was confirmed by the direct response to (hypothetical) unplanned pregnancy ("What would you do if you became pregnant within the next six months?"). Despite the generally negative attitude, nearly half of the female population of reproductive age in the foreign-origin population would decide in favour of an abortion. In the native-origin population the respective proportion remains below one third.

presents the proportion of the first opinion group in the breakdown of the native- and foreign-origin populations.

*Figure 8*

*Justification of abortion under various circumstances  
Birth cohorts 1924-1973*



As could be expected, threat to the health of the mother or the unborn child was a sufficient reason for an overwhelming majority of the respondents to resort to abortion. By way of remark, the termination of pregnancy for medical indications to save the life or health of the mother is allowed also in most countries, where abortion under any other circumstances is illegal. Across the FFS cohort range, over 95 per cent of the respondents perceived abortion for medical indicators as completely or partly justified, while no distinction was made between saving the life of the mother or the child. The proportion of respondents expressing the opposite opinion remained low at an insignificant three or four per cent; in the breakdown of population segments, the percentage rose above the average among religious believers. The opinions voiced about the termination of pregnancy resulting from rape follow a similar pattern, opposition was expressed by a mere two or three per cent of the respondents. The homogeneity of the answers is also stressed by the virtual non-existence of any discrepancy between the native- and foreign-origin populations on one hand, and between cohorts on the other.

The decision not to have any more children was considered sufficient justification for abortion by three fifths of the female population. With the addition of the respondents who considered abortion under these circumstances partly justified, the proportion of tolerant attitude rises to 90 per cent. From the life career's viewpoint, the wording of the question refers to the final phase of the reproductive career with the desired family size and planned number of children already achieved. In this phase the adverse effect of abortion on reproductive health is without doubt weaker than prior to or between the births. However, in all likelihood it is not the rational considerations alone that were responsible for shaping the predominantly tolerant attitude – the distribution of opinions also stresses the fundamental right of every woman to plan the size of her family.

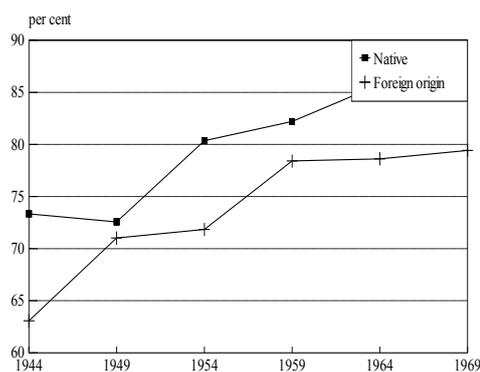
Opinions expressed about concrete circumstances, however, exhibited a more diffuse pattern. The poor economic situation of the partners was cited as a completely valid reason for abortion by only one quarter of the native-origin population as the cohort range average, while an equal percentage of respondents expressed the diametrically

opposite opinion. The absence of (registered) marriage was perceived as even more irrelevant, as it was considered sufficient justification for abortion by merely one fifth of the respondents, while the number of respondents who explicitly supported the opposite position was one and a half times higher. Additionally, attitudes towards the concrete circumstances described above demonstrate the heterogeneity of the native- and foreign-origin populations. The immigrants have more frequently regarded these circumstances as valid enough reasons for abortion, the difference being particularly prominent in treating formally registered marriage as a necessary prerequisite to the birth of a child. In concordance with the faster rooting of novel forms of partnership in the native-origin population, the relative difference between the two subpopulations has grown rather than diminished towards the younger cohorts.

The Estonian FFS also studied the preferences of the population of reproductive age with regard to the use of contraceptives. Figure 9 presents the preferred means of fertility regulation, which, according to the UNO classification, include the pill, IUD (intra-uterine device), hormone-releasing capsule and condom, in the birth cohorts of 1944-1973. As a positive trend, a gradual rise in the proportion of respondents who preferred the modern contraceptive methods can be observed in the cohort range under discussion, which gives hope of a further decline in the abortion levels. Of the contraceptives under observation, the most popular were the IUD (an average of 55 per cent in the native-origin population), followed by the condom (14 per cent) and the pill (nine per cent). This order appeared stable across all the cohorts, with the condom and the pill named slightly more frequently in a couple of younger cohorts. Of the traditional means of fertility regulation, the rhythm method or periodic abstinence was given clear preference (16 per cent), while the combined popularity of all the remaining devices/methods remained marginal, not exceeding six per cent.

Figure 9

*Preference towards modern birth control  
Birth cohorts 1944-1973*



In the foreign-origin population, predilection for modern contraceptives exhibited a more modest rise within a similarly growing general trend, mostly due to the lower popularity of the IUD. Compared to the Northern and Western European nations, there is still room for development in both subpopulations as regards the preference for modern contraceptive methods. The above analysis confirms that the high abortion level in Estonia can no more be associated with the limited availability of contraceptives, but

rather with the attitudes that dictate the choice and systematic use of means of fertility regulation.

### **3.4. Gender roles**

One of the characteristics of the modern society is the clear-cut distinction made between home and work, which under certain circumstances may grow into a confrontation or even conflict between these two spheres. From the life-course perspective, this problem may arise in case the parallel life-careers require simultaneous substantial contribution to both spheres. On the family level, a division, mostly spontaneous rather than meticulously planned, of the roles adopted by partners provides a way of adaptation. According to a wide-spread model, frequently denounced by feminists, it means a certain shift of the division of roles where the female partner devotes herself to home, while the male partner focuses on work. In modern days this differentiation, as a matter of course, can no more be reduced to the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model, which has been observable in many countries, including Estonia, as a shorter- or longer-term concomitant feature of demographic transition.

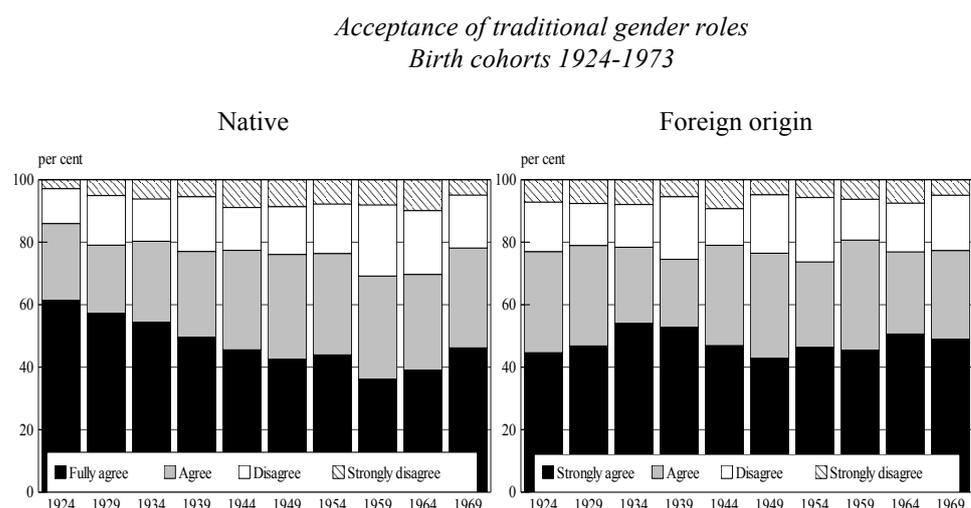
In the case of Estonia, the interrelation of work orientation and gender roles is of particular interest owing to a unique intertwining of diverse effects. Belonging to the region of the European marriage pattern and the status of a pioneering nation of demographic transition also marked early progress towards gender equality, as is evidenced, *inter alia*, by the full reversal of the male-female educational difference at the beginning of the cohort range, and the discernible over-representation of women in *kõrgkutselistes ametites*. This trend was during the societal transformation of the 1940s and 1950s combined by the heavily ideologised general obligation of all citizens to work, whereas the domestic workload continued to be heavy owing to the relatively primitive living conditions and household technologies.

A new turn that occurred about a decade ago initiated yet another transformation, where work ceased to be an obligation, instead becoming an opportunity not automatically guaranteed for everyone, and something to be vied for in the labour market. Although this new take on employment might have been expected to lead to a general weakening of work orientation, in reality only a small population group enjoying a high economic status could afford to stay out of the labour force. For the more ambitious and enterprising individuals, the lifting of restrictions carried a significant broadening of self-realisation opportunities, driven by the need to overcome the social and economic backwardness caused by the occupation regime, and build up a society to fit into modern Europe. Hence the controversial implications of these transformations, which motivated part of the

population to adopt a stronger work orientation, but had a discouraging effect on another part [Puur 2000b].

Mapping the general attitudes, the FFS probed respondents' opinions of the division of roles where, if economically affordable, the male partner would focus on professional career, with the female partner devoting herself to full-time home-making and motherhood. The opinions were measured on a four-tier scale, from complete agreement to complete disagreement (Figure 10). The survey results revealed overwhelming support for the polarisation of gender roles: in the native-origin population, 48 per cent of the female population as the cohort range average expressed complete approval of the given gender-based division of labour. Another 29 per cent of respondents voiced moderate agreement, which takes the proportion of supporters to nearly four fifths. The proportion of respondents who completely disapproved remained below seven per cent. It is not to be concluded, however, that this division represents the actual occupational ambitions of Estonia's female population. Rather, it is an eloquent illustration of how excessive trust in general attitudes may lead to rather erroneous conclusions, of which studies involving the material welfare aspect give further proof – with the economic circumstances improving to the extent of allowing the woman to stay home, the female population tends to adopt a stronger rather than weaker orientation towards employment.

Figure 10

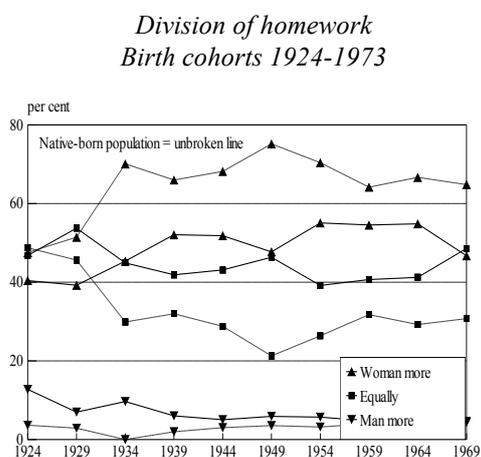


By individual cohorts, support for the traditional division of roles exhibits a distinct curved trend within the FFS time frame. In the 1924-1928 cohort, over 85 per cent of the female respondents preferred the role of a housewife, the proportion gradually declining towards the younger cohorts. The most explicit decline is found in the proportion of the firm supporters of the traditional gender roles, who made up the overwhelming majority of three fifths in the oldest FFS cohort. In the 1959-1963 cohort, the proportion of

the respective group had dropped to one third. To counterbalance this, however, the group of respondents in whose opinion the female partner should not give up her career in favour of home even though an opportunity should present itself, has been expanding steadily. Illustrating the divergence between the opinions voiced and the population processes, the actual duration of employment in these cohorts displays a tendency towards shortening, while the opinions expressed at the same time reveal a stronger orientation towards employment instead. In the two youngest cohorts, withdrawal from the traditional division of roles has, remarkably, come to a halt, and experienced a reverse shift. As a result, the distribution of opinions in the 1969-1973 cohort is comparable to the pattern featured in the 1939-1943 cohort. This, however, probably signals but a temporary halt/turn rather than the end of the long-term trend – a hypothesis that remains to be confirmed by a new FFS round.

In the foreign-origin population, the general proportion of opinion groups is almost identical to that in the native-origin population, the difference not exceeding one percentage point as the cohort range average for all scale positions. The crucial characteristic of the immigrant population is the non-existence of a distinct trend in the distribution of opinions; in other words, all the cohort variations can be reduced to random fluctuations. This could possibly be explained with an impact of the earlier/stronger ideologically rooted idea of "woman's role", which has levelled the cohort differences. The more traditional attitude featured in the older cohorts is, against expectations, characteristic of the native-origin population. In the middle cohorts the opinion distributions followed a near identical pattern, while in a couple of youngest cohorts the positions of subpopulations were switched, and homemaking career has acquired greater popularity among the foreign-origin population.

Figure 11



The survey also presents opinions of the female population of the division of domestic labour, focusing on three situations: (1) the female partner has more domestic responsibilities than the male partner, (2) the domestic responsibilities are divided equally between partners, and (3) the female partner has fewer domestic responsibilities than the male partner. The division of domestic labour reflects the situation at the time of data collection, and the survey understandably covers only the

part of the population living in a marital or consensual union. Not surprisingly, the survey

results reveal that women bear disproportionate burden in the household responsibilities. Thus in the native-origin population, about one half of the female respondents estimated that their burden of domestic chores was bigger than their partners'. Merely six per cent of the respondents reported exactly the opposite, and 44 per cent perceived the division of household chores between partners as equal. More specific data sources are required to analyse these proportions and the actual contribution of various household chores. An analysis of the allocation of time (time use research) without doubt offers the most precise and detailed picture, this, however, is beyond the subject matter of this paper. At the same time, the general public opinion of the division of domestic labour casts some additional light on the phenomenon *per se* in the breakdown of cohorts and subpopulations.

Figure 11 presents the cohort difference with regard to the division of household chores between partners for the native- and foreign-origin populations on the age scale, which is in this particular case preferred over the traditional cohort scale. Even a brief glimpse at the graph indicates a general homogeneity of the age-specific distribution of household chores between males and females. The only fluctuation in the proportion of age groups occurs between age 50 and 60, when the division of domestic responsibilities undergoes a shift towards equalisation. The proportion of women who do more housework than their male partners declines by ten or more percentage points, the other groups' relative shares increasing correspondingly. As a result, in the 65-69 age group the equal division of domestic responsibilities becomes the most typical, albeit hardly predominant, option. The timing of the said shift can be associated with retirement, obviously that of the male partner, from the labour force.

The rather modest fluctuation within the working age suggests that the family's life cycle plays a relatively small role in shaping the division of domestic responsibilities. This result, however, seems to be somewhat questionable as the amount of household work is larger in the phase of family life where children are small and the bulk of the chores characteristic of the period is classified as so-called "woman's work". Thus the age curve homogeneity could also be explained with the mutually counterbalancing effect of the impact of the life cycle and the cohort trend of the domestic labour division. This hypothesis is indirectly supported by the predictable divergence between the foreign- and native-origin populations. Within the generally similar age-specific frame, the answers of immigrant respondents indicate a substantially greater proportion of women taking care of household chores, i.e. the domestic division of labour among the foreign-origin population appears to be more traditional. As a cohort range average, nearly two thirds of the foreign-origin female population had more domestic responsibilities than their male partners, while the division of labour was perceived as equal by merely 30 per cent of the respondents.

The more conservative views of the foreign-origin respondents were also manifest in their opinions of combining paid work with family commitments. While in the native-origin population, 70 per cent of the female population covered by FFS completely or partly agreed that a working mother was able to create a home environment on a par with the environment created by a non-working mother, the respective percentage in the foreign-origin population stood at 49. The observed difference has proved extremely stable across cohorts, it is only in the couple of youngest cohorts that the indicators for the two subpopulations exhibit a certain converging tendency. Indirectly, the divergence testifies to a relatively sharper conflict of roles, which the foreign-origin population may have developed while adapting to the stringent female labour force participation requirements under the Soviet regime. The difference in the degree of conflict sharpness obviously arises from the timing of the population development rather than from the social context, which is often cited in demographic research as the underlying cause.

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