



# **Socio-historical paths of the male breadwinner model – an explanation of cross-national differences<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

It is often assumed that in the historical transformation to modern industrial society, the integration of women into the economy occurred everywhere as a three-phase process: in pre-modern societies, the extensive integration of women into societal production; then, their wide exclusion with the shift to industrial society; and finally, their re-integration into paid work during the further course of modernization. Results from the author's own international comparative study of the historical development of the family and the economic integration of women have shown that this was decidedly not the case even for western Europe.

Hence the question arises: why is there such historical variation in the development and importance of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family? In the article, an explanation is presented. It is argued that the historical development of the urban bourgeoisie was especially significant for the historical destiny of this cultural model: the social and political strength of the urban bourgeoisie had central societal importance in the imposition of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family as the dominant family form in a given society. In this, it is necessary to distinguish between the imposition of the breadwinner marriage at the cultural level on the one hand, and at the level of social practice in the family on the other.

**Keywords:** Male breadwinner model; comparative family research; classification family models; socio-historical family research; historical variation of gender arrangements; urban bourgeoisie

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## **1. Introduction**

In sociological thinking on the historical development of the family, the supposition has tended to prevail that the private household, and housework, as

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independent societal spheres, differentiated themselves together with the development of modern industrial society. In this paradigm, wives were charged, in society, with family care and housework, husbands with participation in the labour force as the family providers. The establishment of the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage as the dominant family model was, according to this, an inevitable result of the evolution of modern western, i.e. capitalist, society.<sup>2</sup>

This supposition is also often fundamental to sociological investigations of recent changes in family structures. In this light, the housewife model of the family was the point of departure for the family development in the second half of the twentieth century. In recent times, in view of increasing (women's) employment and one-parent families, this model is seen to be disintegrating, and there is international feminist discussion about egalitarian forms of the family increasingly replacing the male breadwinner model – especially in Scandinavia, where there is extensive integration of women into the labour market, and state childcare (Ellingsaeter 1999; Crompton 1998; Leira 2002; Siim 2000). It is often assumed that the integration of women into the economy has occurred everywhere as a three-phase process: from the extensive integration of women into societal production in pre-modern societies, to their wide exclusion with the shift to industrial society, and finally to their re-integration into paid work during the further course of modernization.

Until now however, little interest has been shown in the question of how far the housewife marriage model was really the family form which historically developed together with the transition to modern industrial society.

Results from the author's own international comparative study of the historical development of the family and the economic integration of women have shown that this was decidedly not the case even for western Europe. Instead, there have emerged inconsistencies in two respects:

- the period during which the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage became the dominant family form was clearly not always concurrent with that of the transition to modern industrial society;
- and it was definitely not everywhere that the housewife model become the dominant form of the family.

Hence the question results: why is there such historical variation in the development and importance of housewife model of the male breadwinner family? In what follows I would like to present my approach to an explanation. I argue that the historical development of the urban bourgeoisie was especially significant for the historical destiny of this cultural model: the social and political strength of the urban bourgeoisie had central societal importance in the imposition of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family as the dominant family form in a given society. In this, it is necessary to distinguish

between the imposition of the breadwinner marriage at the cultural level on the one hand, and at the level of social practice in the family on the other.

In Section 2 I present the theoretical assumptions about the inseparability of the housewife model of the breadwinner marriage and the transition to modern industrial society. The discussion surrounding this thesis is treated briefly. In Section 3, a theoretical model for the classification of family models is introduced which allows the analysis of different developmental paths. This is used for the analysis in an historical and internationally comparative empirical study of Finland, the Netherlands and Germany. I show how the development of the male breadwinner family model in these countries differed. Section 4 includes a discussion of the role of differences in economic development for the explanation. In a final part (Section 5), theoretical considerations in relation to a more complex historical and international comparative study approach are presented. This approach is used to identify main factors which were primarily responsible for the historical evolution of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family as dominating family form as such, and for its emergence in a particular historical phase. A brief résumé concludes the article (Section 6).

## **2. The paradigm of the essential relation of modern industrial society to the male breadwinner marriage**

Only sporadically in sociological literature is the premise still found that the separation of the 'private' and 'public' spheres, and the division of housework and gainful employment, accompanied by a corresponding gender division of labour, are an essential historical constituent of human societies (see for example Hardsock 1983; Rosaldo 1974). Instead the supposition has tended to prevail that the private household, and housework, as independent societal spheres, first differentiated themselves together with the development of modern industrial society. The establishment of the male breadwinner marriage as the dominant family model was, according to this, an inevitable result of the evolution of modern western, i.e. capitalist society. This opinion in mainstream sociology was strongly marked by a differentialist mode of thought based particularly on structural–functionalist theory. In structural–functionalist theory the gender-specific division of labour is, in terms of family and occupation, functional for modern society. The transition from the traditional extended family to the nuclear family was, in this theory, a functional part of the differentiation process in the transition to modern society. Accordingly the nuclear family in modern society represents a specialized sphere, irreplaceable in this societal system (Goode 1963; Parsons 1955; Parsons and Bales 1955; Tyrell 1979). A labour-division-related differentiation of roles for women

and men within the nuclear family – the ‘male-breadwinner’ model – is seen as functional for modern societies. Role acquisition takes place by the internalization of the family role-structure during the process of socialization. In Parsons and Bates (1955) this role differentiation is unavoidable because different behavioural components and functions cannot be optimized in one person; for them, gender role differentiation implies further a normative function, necessary to the stability of modern societies.

The argumentation in feminist-oriented theories based on the patriarchy approach often took a similar direction, but here the dominance of the male breadwinner marriage is criticized as the basis of discrimination against women in modern capitalistic societies. According to Walby, who led the development of this type of socialist–feminist approach in Great Britain, every society has a comprehensive ‘patriarchal system’, defined as a ‘system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women’ (Walby 1990: 20). Male dominance, resulting from the control of social resources, is thought here to have led to the historical evolution of a ‘private patriarchy’ in industrial society, in which wives work primarily in the household, while husbands are employed elsewhere for money. Women are, thus, liable to control and exploitation by their husbands in the family setting (Walby 1990, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

In feminist research, also the concept of the ‘separate spheres’ was developed for historical analysis, in order to describe the development of the male-breadwinner family model, in which the husband is active in the public realm and the wife in the private sphere of the household. Usually the nineteenth century is seen as the period in which this separation took place (see Scott and Tilly 1978). Accordingly, the feminist historian Karin Hausen argues

Indeed, industrial societies in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became increasingly structured so that men in all groups of the population were to be in paid employment outside of their families as well as responsible for extra-familial matters, but at the same time recognized within their families as head of the house, breadwinner and protector of wife and children. . . . In contrast to men, women – without regard to the time and energy they invested in their own work, or whether they in fact lived within marriage or not – were increasingly obligated to be the caring housewife, marriage-partner and mother. (Hausen 2000: 349)

The view that this concept adequately describes the dominant family form of modern industrial society was however challenged by feminist researchers in historical sciences. Here, a key article relating to the case of the USA in the nineteenth century was published by Linda K. Kerber at the end of the 1980s. She pointed to the constraints of using the dualisms inherent in the concept of the two different spheres of women and men – public and private, household and market – for historical analysis (Kerber 1988).<sup>4</sup> Also, empirical

historical research has provided a richer view of the development, showing that, for example, even in the golden age of the housewife marriage in the UK or West Germany, blue-collar working-class women often could not afford to act as housewives, but had to take waged work (Hall 1999; Krueger, Born and Lorenz-Meyer 1996). Susan Pedersen has also shown how, as in the case of Great Britain and France, the European welfare states' family policies in the first half of the twentieth century were decidedly not uniformly oriented to the family model of the housewife/male breadwinner marriage. She argued that in France a 'patriarchal' concept of the family dominated instead, in which the paid employment of mothers was completely accepted (Pedersen 1993).

Nevertheless, the assumption is still rather common in sociological discussion that there was an inseparable connection between the transition to industrial society and the dominance of the housewife family model in western societies. Accordingly it is usually assumed that everywhere in the western world, or in modern society in general, the housewife model formed the starting point for the more recent development of the labour-force integration of women. The book *Careers of Couples in Contemporary Society. From Male Breadwinner to Dual Earner Families*, edited by Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Sonja Drobnic, is an example. The editors took the findings of a West German study as starting point for an international comparative study in 12 countries. They argue that the male breadwinner family form in all countries was the beginning, in the 1960s, of the change towards a dual-earner model: 'In all countries, there has been a shift from a male-breadwinner to a dual-earner model' (Blossfeld and Drobnic 2002: 379). A systematic analysis of the family forms of the 1960s in the 12 countries is however not included. As far as data are presented, the picture is contradictory. The work cites the former socialist states as an example of where the dual-earner model traditionally prevailed in the 1960s (Blossfeld and Drobnic 2002: 379), and the country-specific studies – in Hungary (Róbert, P., Bukodi, E. and Luijkx, R. 2002: 309 ff.), Poland (Drobnic and Fratzczak 2002: 286 ff.), and Sweden in the 1960s and 70s (Henz and Sundström 2002) – revealed that married women in several countries were then already participating to a large degree in the labour force. In sum, the assumption that in all countries the housewife marriage was the starting point for change is not supported in the book by empirical evidence.

### **3. Differing historical paths of family evolution during the transition to modern western society**

The following are the results of an international comparative socio-historical analysis of family evolution in Finland, the Netherlands and West Germany, in which the socio-historical development of the family up to the beginning

of the postwar period is examined comparatively (see Pfau-Effinger 1998, 2004a).<sup>5</sup> These countries were selected for the study because they vary considerably with respect to the actual role and strength of, on the one hand, the male breadwinner family model, and a more egalitarian dual breadwinner model of the family on the other (Pfau-Effinger 1998).

### *3.1. A theoretical model for the classification of development paths of the family*

In the following it is argued that the socio-historical analysis of the development of the family can be made sufficiently comprehensible in an international comparison only when the fundamental significance of the dominant (and possibly existing competing or marginalized) cultural model(s) of the family is (are) taken into account; cultural and structural developments are studied separately and in their reciprocal relations; and both are analysed as the product of conflicts and negotiation processes taking place between the relevant groups of social actors.

In this way differing paths of development of the family in different countries can be compared with one another. It is reasonable to make this comparison using a system for classifying types of family model. In such a classification the presumption should not be made that development was always away from a 'private' to a 'public' form of patriarchy (as in Walby 1990), or, for modern industrial societies, that there were always just variously explicit forms of the male breadwinner marriage. The classification should be more broadly approached, and leave room for processes having a direction towards more egalitarian gender relations within the family.

Such a classification scheme was developed by the author in other publications. Because of the important role of the cultural models – the *Leitbilder* or 'guiding images' – of the family, it is suggested they be taken as the fundamental criteria for the classification, in which several variants are distinguished. The models refer to the prevalent ideas in a society about the suitable way of sharing the work in a family, and also to specific expectations about gender relations and relations between generations. The concept of 'model' means typical societal ideal representations, norms and values regarding the family and the societal integration of women and men. One or several such models in combination can dominate culturally in the gender arrangement of a society (Pfau-Effinger 1998, 1999, 2004a).

The models can be classified on the basis of four theoretical dimensions which are measures of the generational and gender relations within the family. These are:

- (a) society's ideas about which social spheres should be the main areas of work for women and men respectively, and how the relations of

- these areas to each other should be arranged (symmetrically or complementarily);
- (b) society's valuation of these societal spheres (equally or hierarchically valued);
  - (c) the cultural models surrounding the relations between generations, that is, concerning childhood, motherhood and fatherhood; and
  - (d) the structure of the dependencies between women and men (autonomy; mutual or unilateral dependency)

For western Europe at least five different cultural models of the family can be identified which vary in the five dimensions given above: (1) the family-economy model, (2) the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage, (3) the part-time carer model of the male breadwinner marriage, (4) the dual breadwinner model with external childcare, and (5) the dual breadwinner model with partner-shared childcare (Pfau-Effinger 1999, 2004a). An extension of this analysis to the historical transition to modern society of other west European countries, central and east European societies, as well as of societies outside Europe, would result in still more types of cultural models of the family.

In the context of the socio-historical analysis in this article, mainly the first two are relevant:

- (1) The family-economy model is based on the notion of work of women and men performed together in a family agricultural operation or skilled trade. Women as well as men have a significant role in the survival of the family economy, of which children are also an integral part, participating in agricultural production as soon as they are physically capable. Even though there can be a gender-specific labour division in the family-economy setting, women and men work in the same sphere, and are not – as in the model of the male breadwinner marriage – in completely different societal spheres. Here, women and men in their tasks are in an explicit relation and mutually dependent. Because the work of the wife in the family economy is considered in general just as important as that of the husband for the survival of the family, the position of the wife and her societal recognition can be comparable to that of the husband (Scott and Tilly 1981).
- (2) The housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage (or, 'housewife model') is based on the premise of a fundamental separation of 'public' and 'private' life and complementary locations of the genders: the husband is seen as primarily responsible for work in the 'public' sphere, where as the employed breadwinner he earns the family's income; the wife is responsible for running the private household with all its tasks including childcare, and is dependent on the income of the husband. This separation of workplace location is the basis for the specific



cultural construct of childhood, in which children are held to need special care and comprehensive, individual guidance – as a principle the task of the private household. Complementary to this is the powerful cultural construct of ‘motherhood’, which fundamentally stipulates that the mother’s job is the care and upbringing of her children in the home.

An extension of this analysis to the historical transition to modern society of other west European countries, central and east European societies, as well as of societies outside Europe, would result in still more types of gender cultural models.

This classification lends itself to ‘cross-sectional’ analysis: different societies can be compared with respect to the cultural basis of their family models; it also permits the historical evolution of the family in various countries to be analysed and compared longitudinally.

### *3.2. Variations in the historical role of the housewife model*

It emerged that the development of the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage and its importance in the historical transition to modern industrial society differed substantially among the countries studied. The decisive shift towards the male breadwinner marriage as the dominant family model did not always occur together with industrialization; in one of the three countries the male breadwinner marriage never even became the dominant family model at all.

The type of family development considered generally paradigmatic in functionalist argumentation took place practically only in Germany, where various versions of the family-economy model dominated before industrialization. With industrialization, but after a certain delay, the housewife model of the breadwinner marriage became the culturally dominant model (Hagemann-White 1995; Hausen 2000). In the 1950s the housewife model of the male breadwinner family was the basis of West-German family culture. Other orientations were not welcome and were essentially taboo, as e.g. Pfeil (1966) and Sommerkorn (Sommerkorn 1988; Sommerkorn and Liebsch 2002) have argued on the basis of surveys regarding women’s employment orientations. It was also firmly established in the institutions of the newly-created Federal Republic of Germany and strongly promoted by the government. Although the main idea of the ‘correct’ family form was already based on the housewife model since the turn of the century, it became widespread social practice for the first time only in the 1950s (cf. Kaufmann 1995; Nave-Herz 2002; Rosenbaum 1982). Exceptions were mainly restricted to the agrarian family-economy where the wife’s co-operation in the family economic model was traditionally accepted. Furthermore, female factory workers whose family income was relatively low were often forced to engage in gainful employment



even though this contradicted their ideas of the role of a mother (cf. Willms-Herget 1985).

In seventeenth-century Holland, by contrast, the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage had already become the culturally dominant family model long before there was any question of a transition to industrialization. The family in the form of the nuclear family based on a married couple formed the cultural core of society. This model was applied in broad sections of the population, in cities as well as rural areas, with the exception of the poorer sandy regions. It had become firmly established here much earlier historically and more profoundly than in any other country, as is shown in the cultural-historical study *Embarrassment of Riches* (1988) by Simon Schama. It was accompanied by the separation of gainful employment and housework. In many cases this initially meant only the physical separation, in the households of the merchant urban bourgeoisie, of the living and commercial areas (Lestaeghe 1991; Pott-Buter 1993; Schama 1988).

This family model remained dominant into the twentieth century, when Holland was transformed into a modern industrial society (Ishwaran 1959; Knijn 1994). Up to the 1950s it was a much more deeply rooted and exclusively obligatory family model than was the case in West Germany. The paid employment of wives was not accepted societally in Holland (Ishwaran 1959).

In Finland on the other hand the male breadwinner marriage never had great societal relevance, either on the cultural level or in social practice. During the first phase of Finland's slow industrialization – from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century – the traditionally prevalent agrarian, family-economy model – though clearly a relatively egalitarian variant – remained the dominant family model (Anttonen 1997; Julkunen 1999). Although in farm families there was to some extent a gender division of labour, this is not a contradiction; of decisive importance rather was that both women's and men's areas of work enjoyed a largely equal and high respect in the society, and that marriage was treated fundamentally as a partnership (Haavio-Mannila 1972: 95). It is true that the housewife model, introduced by transnational cultural influences, was repeatedly brought into public discussion, especially in the 1920s. Some social groups of urban women – industrial workers and middle-class women – attempted to establish this model more firmly. However, these groups were too small and politically weak in the 1920s for this family form to have become a cultural model for the whole society (Markkola 1994; Saarikangas 1993). Accordingly, it never achieved a notable cultural relevance in Finnish society (Julkunen 1991; Voipio-Juvas 1949). In practice as well, the 'housewife' hardly played a role at all. The proportion of housewives (in the sense of the housewife model in a male breadwinner family) among female residents between 16 and 65 years of age has remained between 5 and 6 per cent since its inclusion in official statistics in 1960 (Koistinen and Suikkanen

TABLE I: *Historical development of labour force participation rates of married women<sup>1</sup> in the Netherlands and Germany (1947 and 1960 for West Germany)<sup>2</sup>*

|           | Netherlands (2) | Germany (3) | Finland         |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1895/1899 | 5               | 12          | Relatively high |
| 1907/1909 | 8               | 26          | Relatively high |
| 1930/1933 | 6               | 29          | Relatively high |
| 1947/1950 | 10              | 25 (4)      | Relatively high |
| 1959/1960 | 6               | 33          | 66              |

*Source:* Pott-Buter 1993: 190, 200; OECD 1996: 211; Voipio-Juvas/Ruohtula 1947; corrected data for Finland for 1960 by Allen 1991: 55, 56; for the Netherlands by Pott-Buter 1993: 200.

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> Married women in the labour force as a percentage of the total female married population.

<sup>2</sup> Actual census years for Germany: 1895; 1907; 1933; 1950 and 1960; until 1933: Territory of the 'Deutsches Reich'; since 1950: West Germany. The decrease in the year 1950 was not caused by a decrease in the number of employed women but by the increase in the female refugee population.

Actual census years for the Netherlands: 1899; 1909; 1930; 1947; 1960.

Actual census year for Finland: 1959.

1992).<sup>6</sup> Hence, neither in terms of cultural models nor economically was there ever an historical 'interim period' with large groups of women excluded from production in society (cf. also Anttonen 1997; Julkunen 1999). When in the course of the drastic industrialization of the 1950s and 60s the society was transformed into a service-providing economy, the traditional model was replaced by a dual-breadwinner model with state-run childcare. This type of family is based on comprehensive, full-time integration of both genders into paid employment. Childhood is considered a life-phase requiring special care and instruction for which the state is mainly responsible. That the male breadwinner marriage in Finland never became widespread apparently was an especially good precondition for the broad adoption of a relatively egalitarian model which encouraged the full integration of women into the labour market (Anttonen 1997; Julkunen 1999).

These differences in the development of the family until the 1960s are reflected in the data on married women's labour force participation in Table I.

As seen in Table I, the labour force participation rates of married women in the first half of the twentieth century were very low in the Netherlands, moderate in West Germany, and rather high in Finland. Such historical data are in principle to be treated with care. Deviations in the real proportions might mainly also be caused by reporting some women as non-active in the employment statistics who were actually involved in farm work. It is well known that women employed in the agrarian sector have been underreported in the public statistics until recently (OECD 1998). The data presented here however were at least in part corrected by using additional historical data on women's employment outside the formal employment system by Allen (1991: 55, 56) for Finland and Pott-Buter (1993) for the Netherlands and Germany.

For Finland, official data on women's labour force participation rates only exist since 1959. However, the contributions to Voipio-Juvas and Ruotula (1947) indicate that the labour force participation rates of married women were always at least as high as in 1959 since the beginning of the twentieth century.

#### **4. Differences in economic development as causal factors?**

What explanation is there for such different paths in the development of family models? Why did the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage in the Netherlands, in contrast to Germany, develop long before industrialization, while in Finland it never became a dominant model? Until now, the question of how differing geographical factors might explain why a particular family form established itself historically during the transition to modern society has hardly been empirically researched. One of the few exceptions is the regional comparative study by Sackmann and Häußermann (1994) of the historical development of women's employment. According to this study, the historical transition to the housewife family model in Germany did not occur uniformly, but rather was marked by delays and other variations within the country. The authors concluded, after comparing women's employment in three German industrial regions, that where industrialization proceeded rather slowly and was decentralized, i.e. taking place in small firms and without great structural transformations, the employment of women was favoured more than in a transition marked by major industrial growth. This was due, in their explanation, to the fact that women in general have much greater chances of finding employment in small enterprises than in large ones which are usually based on the employment of men (Häußermann and Sackmann 1994). Thus the variation in economic development could account for the differences in the employment of women, and with that also in the forms of the family observed. Here however the question remains, in an account of the adoption of the housewife model, whether there were not perhaps other differences between the regions studied, possibly cultural factors, which also could have had significance for family evolution.

How far can these results be applied to an international comparison? In earlier works (Pfau-Effinger 1993, 1994) the present author proceeded from the standpoint that the way in which industrialization progressed in a society was an important historical factor in the development of societal ideas about the desirable form of the family (even if, often, it could only partly be put into social practice). How industrialization came about in a given region was considered decisive for which family model would become, in the process, the most prevalent type: whether industrialization occurred slowly, was decentralized and bound to traditional structures, or, in a sudden, powerful upheaval, bringing cultural and structural ruptures.

The comparative socio-historical analysis of family evolution in the Netherlands, Finland and Germany has shown, however, that the differences in family evolution are not essentially explainable by the way the transition to industrialization took place. Thus, the transition in Finland and the Netherlands proceeded relatively similarly, that is, late, occurring only in the mid-twentieth century in both countries, and was at first only gradual and of low intensity, until, in a very short period, it changed them into modern service economies (Kaelble 2002; Pfau-Effinger 2004a). Even so, the role of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family in these processes differed substantially in the two countries. The fact of whether, historically, industrialization took place sooner or later, only gradually or rather quickly in a profound restructuring, was thus found not decisive for the primacy of particular cultural ideals of the family which would become fundamental to the evolving modern industrial society.

## **5. The role of social, cultural and structural factors in an explanation of the dominance of the male breadwinner model**

How can we then proceed to explain cross-national differences in the socio-historical development of the family?

### *5.1. The theoretical approach to an explanatory framework*

It should be considered here that significant time lags are possible between developments at various levels, e.g. between the level of cultural models of the family and that of family structures and social practices (Pfau-Effinger 2004a). This applies especially to developments in Germany: the housewife model of the family attained hegemony in Germany on the cultural level and was promoted in state policy as the family norm around the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century but only much later reached the position of predominant family form.

Therefore two processes should be explained consecutively:

- How the cultural model of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family became the dominant 'family model'. This would involve understanding, in a given society, the relevant sense-constructions surrounding the family, gender relations and childhood. As it was argued in Section 3.1, such 'family-models' are images specifying the criteria for the 'right' or 'suitable' areas for societal integration and occupations of women, men and children. Consequently they refer in modern societies to the way in which two central societal institutions, the family and the labour market,

should be linked on the basis of the gender division of labour. They are connected to cultural values regarding biological reproduction and generational relations and thus imply suppositions about how the family with its caring tasks should function with other societal institutions (Pfau-Effinger 1998, 2004). The preconditions should be identified that enabled the housewife model of the male breadwinner family to develop into the dominant cultural model of the family;

- Moreover, it should be investigated what was necessary to make this cultural model *also* the prevalent form of the family in terms of social practice of the family and family structures.

In my argument, cultural developments should be studied for the ways they are influenced by and interact with social, political and economic factors. Further, it is necessary to identify the societal actors who play key roles in establishing, propagating and changing the dominant family models. In emphasizing the mutual relations between cultural and structural levels and the actions of the social actors, I refer to theoretical premises of Max Weber, David Lockwood (1964) and Margaret Archer (1995), in which the conceptualization of these interrelations is considered the basis for analysing social change (Pfau-Effinger 2004a, 2004b).<sup>7</sup>

## *5.2. Main factors influencing the development of the housewife model of the family*

In the following, differences among the developmental paths of the family in the three countries are explained on the basis of mutual interrelations between cultural models of the family, structural developments and social actors, which together determined whether – or, in which historical phase – the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage became the dominant cultural model, and was also widely practised.

*(a) Main factors which have influenced the development of the cultural model of the housewife marriage:* From historical research it is known that the urban bourgeoisie was the decisive ‘social carrier’ (after Max Weber) for the housewife version of the male breadwinner family model (see for example Rosenbaum 1982). It is to be suspected therefore that the development of the urban bourgeoisie provides an important explanation for the direction of change in the cultural foundations of the family during industrialization.

The urban bourgeoisie in west Europe developed its own independent view of the world which was to serve as a cultural barrier to other social strata (see Elias 2000; Kocka 1996; Therborn 1995). Because here the individual was all-important, it was also necessary to evolve new cultural ideas about the way

children, as individuals, were to be socialized into society. The proper place for this was to be the private sphere, and specifically, the nuclear family. On this basis the male-breadwinner-with-housewife model developed, which assigned the wife the responsibility for housework and child-raising in the private family environment (Ariès 1998; Kocka 1996). This model became available in the cultural system as an alternative to the previously dominant images of the family, which until then had been largely heterogeneous.

An important principle underlying the central role of the urban bourgeoisie in Europe – in contrast to other social strata such as the feudal aristocracy – was its claim that its cultural values should become the leading values for the whole society.

In contrast to the culture of all earlier social classes, the bourgeois does not appear claiming a special social right for its position among the others, but rather claiming to be the superior and right culture for all classes and hence, for everybody. (Tenbruck 1986: 261).

This would require fundamentally that the society first exist as a national state, and that its urban bourgeoisie has a social position strong enough to impose its cultural ideals.

I argue that, because the urban bourgeoisie was so important to the development of modern society, it was the development of that socially and culturally predominating class itself which was primarily relevant for the evolution of the male breadwinner model into the dominant cultural model, rather than the historical process of the transition to modern industrial society, which, largely, did not occur anyway within the same time frame.

In countries where urbanization and a powerful urban bourgeoisie had developed long before industrialization, such as in the Netherlands, the male breadwinner model had already assumed, in the pre-industrial society, a great cultural and practical significance in daily life. By contrast, as in the case of Finland, where the transition to industrial society took place without the social and cultural predominance of the urban bourgeoisie, the housewife model of the male breadwinner model never became a significant societal ideal, either in a cultural or practical sense. The success of this cultural model of the family was therefore closely bound to the historical emergence of the urban bourgeoisie and its attainment of a strong societal position as a precondition (see also Table II).

Accordingly, the differences observed in the three countries as to the societal position of the urban bourgeoisie, its cultural strength, and the chronological setting of its emergence, contribute decisively to a cogent explanation of the variations in the development of the cultural basis of the family in each case.

In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands was the most important and richest trading nation in the world. It had thriving towns where a broad urban

TABLE II: *Transition to modern industrial society and family forms in Germany, the Netherlands and Finland*

| Housewife marriage as dominating cultural model of the family | Role of the urban bourgeoisie during transition to modern industrial society   |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| Long before the transition to modern industrial society       | Cultural and political dominance long before the transition<br>The Netherlands | Dominance at the cultural level during transition to modern industrial society | Weak, cultural and political dominance of the class of free farmers |
| During transition to modern industrial society                | Germany  |  |   |
| Never   | Finland  |  |   |

bourgeoisie already set the tone and achieved social and cultural hegemony lasting well into the following centuries. This class had adapted the housewife model of the family as a cultural model, and to a substantial degree was living according to it in its social practices (Lestaeghe 1991: 2). Moreover, the urban bourgeoisie had managed to establish it as the predominant ideal image of the family also in the rural classes (see Schama 1988). What favoured this was also the close contact – above all because of the high population density – between city and countryside (Lestaeghe 1991). According to Schama, the roots of the ideal of faithful marriage and close family life practised by the population can be traced back to the fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century it had become the general model for the family, and marriage as an institution was respected by the large majority of the population. In this respect there was already a cultural homogeneity which other countries did not evidence in the same way (Schama 1988).

A major prerequisite was the existence of a large and strong urban bourgeoisie. Further important factors were the relatively high level of prosperity shared by large parts of the population, and the close physical and social links between town and country due to the high population density (Schama 1988). In the following centuries the housewife model maintained its central cultural importance and its unchallenged position as the main form of the family and played an important role in social practice until the 1960s (Pott-Buter 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1996).

This was reinforced by the welfare state which started to be established in the first half of the twentieth century. The almost exclusively male government and administration set up certain legal obstacles for wives to overcome if they wanted to take a job. Martens (1997: 68ff) posits that the cultural orientation of married women to the housewife role was so strong that even without such



restrictions married women would not have engaged in gainful employment in significantly higher numbers.

In Germany by contrast, until the mid-nineteenth century the urban bourgeoisie had always been too weak as a social group to exert a stronger cultural influence (cf. Elias 2000; Kocka 1996). This class in Germany became a significant societal force only after that, when industrialization progressed relatively fast and was accompanied by extensive centralization and urbanization processes.<sup>8</sup> These generated widespread domestic migration – from the country to the cities and from east to west. Due to the resulting, in some cases drastic, societal and cultural fractures, a cultural vacuum often developed in the newly established German industrial regions which was then occupied largely by the values and standards of the urban bourgeoisie, the social class which culturally and economically dominated the process (Häußermann and Siebel 1991). The bourgeoisie possessed their own cultural values and standards which in Germany were significantly shaped by the literate urban bourgeoisie. Their values had emerged in a long historical process of differentiation from the feudal aristocracy. Consequently the housewife model of the family developed there at the end of the nineteenth century into the dominant family ideal. This process was supported by the women's movement of the nineteenth century which was led by women of the urban bourgeoisie (Gerhard 1995). The housewife model was however not so deeply anchored in the culture as it was in the Netherlands, the modern urban bourgeois not having reached any comparably strong position in society (Kocka 1996).

The fact that in Finland by contrast, the male breadwinner model was culturally and practically never relevant, can be explained by the absence of decisive factors essential to its dominance. Until the mid-twentieth century this was a poor agrarian country where an urban bourgeoisie was only in its beginnings; instead the society was dominated socially and culturally by a class of free farmers (Alestalo and Kuhnle 1991). Its family ideal was the family-economy model with a relatively egalitarian structure that determined the way of life of a broad majority of families in the rural areas. The sparse settlement of the countryside meant that separate female and male subcultures had hardly developed (Alanen and Bardy 1991). This family model, in the process of industrialization, was modified in a specific way, and in its turn affected the way in which industrialization took place.

It is true that during this process the male breadwinner model was introduced into public discussion in Finland as a desirable alternative to the then prevailing family form by the 'new' social groups, i.e. women industrial workers and educated urban bourgeoisie (Markkola 1991; Saarikangas 1993). Their influence however was too weak to establish the model. Besides, since around the 1940s another new model was being tried by the evolving social class of educated urban women: the idea of full integration of women into occupational employment outside of home, combined with childcare tasks

being taken over by the welfare state. This concept was compatible with the existing family ideals and generally met with increasing resonance in Finnish society (Haavio-Mannila 1985; Voipio-Juvas and Ruohtula 1949). And it became later, as the society in the 1960s was transformed into a modern industrial and service economy, a basic principle of the Finnish welfare-state policy as well as of individuals' social practice (Pfau-Effinger 1998; 1999; 2004a). The establishment of this model was favoured by large groups of women who, already from the beginnings of the Finnish welfare state in the first decades of the twentieth century, came to have a leading influence on political decision-making and government administration and were involved in public and political discussion (Simonen 1990). Their organizational base comprised large women's associations in which significant numbers of the female population participated (Markkola 1994; Ollila 1993). Thus any cultural model positing the exclusion of women from public life could hardly have been imposed politically under these circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

*(b) Main factors which have influenced the development of the housewife model at the level of family structures and social practices:* What important conditions then enabled the housewife version of the male breadwinner family model to become the prevailing family type also in practical social behaviour? One fundamental requirement was, it seems, the predominance of this model at the cultural level. Moreover, it appears that the achievement of a certain general societal prosperity was important, by which it was possible to 'free' one member of each family from income-generating duties. Also, the welfare states which had developed at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century and which enlarged substantially after World War II, reinforced this cultural model and supported its realization. This was however mainly only true for those welfare states where this family model had already been established as the dominant model at the cultural level, as in (West) Germany in the twentieth century and the Netherlands (Pfau-Effinger 2004c).

## **6. Conclusion: The interplay of culture, structures and social agency in the different developmental paths of the family**

It has been shown that assumptions of an essential connection between the transition to modern industrial society and the dominance of the family form of the housewife marriage, in as far as these have survived in today's sociology, no longer hold. In western Europe this family model did not necessarily emerge together with the transition to modern capitalistic industrial society, and conversely, such a transition was also possible without the rise of this family model, even if the housewife model of the male breadwinner marriage

doubtless had central importance for the development of the nuclear family in western Europe. This means that different historical paths of the family in Europe can be distinguished.

The question was then raised how such variations can be explained.

### *6.1. Explanation with respect to the role of the cultural model of the housewife marriage*

The first question related to the conditions which were historically relevant to the establishment of the housewife marriage as the main cultural ideal of the family. It seems that above all, the role of the urban bourgeoisie in the development of modern society was decisive for the fact that this family model could impose itself in the face of other cultural alternatives, as well as its relation to social classes in rural areas and later to the class of industrial workers. The urban bourgeoisie was historically the social class which developed the male breadwinner model as a cultural *Leitbild* and was its social vector. It is important to determine how far, and in what historical moment the urban bourgeoisie of a society could establish its family model in the place of traditional ideals. It seems that the male breadwinner marriage became especially deep-rooted in modern society and, above all, in countries where the urban bourgeoisie was already early a dominant societal force, and its cultural images were generalized early in the society. The historical evolution of the cultural model of the breadwinner marriage into the dominant image of the family was for this reason generally not chronologically bound to the process of industrialization, but rather tended to be dependent on the evolution of bourgeois society, which in part developed within another set of historical dynamics. In this connection it seems that the type of settlement structure in a given society was a significant factor in the variation. A dense settlement structure was, it seems, a favourable precondition for the implementation of the housewife model in rural areas.

### *6.2. Main conditions for the emergence of the housewife marriage as dominant family form*

Clearly significant to whether the model of the male breadwinner marriage, once dominant on the cultural level, could be established on the level of the social practice of individuals and thus remain stable in the long term, was the degree of general societal prosperity and its distribution. This was above all decisive for whether the housewife model would either remain just a tendency, the private life-style of a minority, or be broadly realized, and with that, come to be firmly anchored in the 'societal memory' of a population. Wherever the housewife marriage developed into the dominant cultural model of the family,

its implementation was also often reinforced by the welfare states which expanded during the twentieth century.

(Date accepted: May 2004)

## Notes

1. The article was translated by Franz Zurbrugg.

2. The term 'housewife model of the male breadwinner model' is used in contrast to other variants of the male breadwinner model which have, according to the findings of the author, developed in the twentieth century (Pfau-Effinger 1998).

3. Walby postulates further that this model, in recent times, has been replaced – as women are increasingly integrated into outside employment – by a 'public' form of patriarchy, in which they are even more intensively exploited collectively by men, in employment or by the state (Walby 1990, 1997).

4. 'To continue to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships' (Kerber 1988: 38).

5. In this article, the theoretical discussion of family development is limited to the two-parent nuclear family. The role of grandparents, widowhood and other changes of family system occurring over the course of life are not included. While these aspects of families are not the focus of the paper, it should be considered that they were relevant to the social practices of most families (see for example Kaufmann 1995).

6. There is some confusion regarding terminology, as in Finnish sociology the term 'housewife' sometimes refers to the work of female farmers.

7. It is important to remember here that besides the models prevailing at the cultural level, other cultural family models may exist specific to certain social classes, ethnic groups or regions. This was the case for example in Germany in the 1960s where a pre-modern type of cultural model of the family had survived partly in relation to farm work, as mentioned above. Another example occurs with the industrialization of the USA. Gerda Lerner has argued that one result of that process was a polarization of lifestyles between women of the middle class and the class of manual workers, as well as of social attitudes toward women and the family (Lerner 1969: 10–12).

8. Compared to England, Germany was also a 'late arrival' with respect to industrialization (e.g. Senghaas 1982), which took place there however considerably earlier than in the Netherlands or Finland.

9. Whether in a given society the male breadwinner model became dominant, and how strongly it was culturally and socially anchored at a given time, would have later an important influence on family change during the second half of the twentieth century (see Pfau-Effinger 1998, 2000).

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