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# JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE FAMILY STUDIES

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## GUEST EDITOR COMMENTS

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The focus of this special issue is encapsulated in three keywords: ‘reshaping,’ ‘families’ and ‘the region.’ Reshaping is a multi-faceted concept with many layers, open to study from multiple perspectives. The contributors to the issue refresh our understanding of the concept of reshaping by exploring the diversity of family forms and relationships, evolving meanings of the family, and emerging family narratives. In an attempt to identify the links between families, institutional contexts and cultural settings, the authors disclose how shifts in individuals’ perceptions of the family life are influenced by global migration, the local and global uncertainties, and risks spawned by contemporary societies.

The articles in the issue look at the region’s countries that contend with different histories and exhibit diverse family practices. They discuss how the concept of reshaping is seen from the Swedish, Finnish, Lithuanian, Estonian and German perspective. Some family matters are further examined by invoking comparative analysis, which—in addition to the mentioned countries—documents experiences from Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Belgium, France and Italy.

The first three articles deal with the diversity of family forms and family narratives. Jan Trost’s article examines how three social institutions—marriage, cohabitation, and LAT relationships—became entrenched among living-together couples in the Nordic countries. By taking the historical perspective, the author discusses how elements that traditionally used to cement the union of two individuals lose their normative power in the contemporary society, leading to all three forms of living together co-existing alongside each other. To demonstrate the interpretative nature of explanations we confront, Jan Trost then introduces alternative ways of understanding the family life changes in Sweden. The term-constructing examples presented by the author points to the importance of linguistic representations of the emerging phenomena, going in line with traditions of the country.

Hannele Forsberg and Ritva Nätkin continue with the future family stories of young Finnish adults. The originality of the article lies in its use of the role-play method to distinguish the interpretative, fictional and narrative perspectives on the future. The narratives utilize young people’s own experiences and wider cultural discourses, unravelling the meanings and values inherent in them. Terms borrowed from different fields of inquiry—values, religion, family policy, economy and ecology—reveal the multi-layered nature of family awareness and future narratives. The results contribute to our knowledge on how culture and values shape family visions. The recent debates about ties between family and community, the need for tolerance,

pluralism, and the promotion of equality, are manifested in different anticipations of the future families that young people exhibit. At the same time, the ethos of individualism remains present in the debate on family change, which is also overshadowed by fears of the future, reminding us of the risks of our time.

Artūras Tereškinas examines the relationship between the imprisoned men's attitudes towards family and their sense of masculinity in the biggest correctional facility of Lithuania. Conceptualizing family both as an object of good life and an incentive to commit crime, the author analyses 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with inmates and their criminal records. As his research demonstrates, men belonging to two different types of masculinity, "distant" complicit masculinity and hyper-masculinity, express divergent commitments to their families. The researcher suggests that, as an important predictor of their masculinity, the incarcerated men's attitudes toward family requires a more comprehensive and multifaceted investigation that could contribute to the discussions on the role of family in reducing recidivism and in fostering rehabilitation programs in prisons.

The next three articles in the issue explore the influence factors reshaping family on the different levels of analysis. Migration processes represent the global level influence on family processes. Testing how family members' educational level affects the likelihood of divorce focus attention towards traditional categories that continue to remain relevant in analyzing contemporary family life. The impact of the parental divorce on the life plans and life course events represents how generational and gender matters affect the reshaping of families.

Irena Juozeliūnienė and Irma Budginaitė examine how global migration influences the family life in the Baltic Sea region countries. The authors highlight the challenges facing family and migration scholarship and make an argument for replacing 'low mobility' family discourses with 'multi-local' perception about families. By outlining the principles of the 'family change' perspective, aimed at analysing migrant families, the article extends our knowledge of how family life across borders should be studied. The analysis of the migratory experience of Lithuanian families illustrates the vectors for applying the 'family change' perspective. The authors demonstrate how intergenerational, kin and personal relationships could be viewed as familial resources and as factors in the 'awareness context' that surrounds and affects migratory behavior. In the course of examining the agency of migrant family members from the perspective of role behavior, the study has established that as family role behavior evolves in migration, a 'role-person merger' takes place leading to the change in subject's identity.

The article co-authored by Allan Puur, Leen Rahnu, Aušra Maslauskaitė and Vlada Stankūnienė focuses on divorce which has substantially reshaped family life in contemporary societies. The authors examine structural predictors of divorce and focus on the effect of women's education. Based on the data of the *Generations and Gender Surveys*, the article provides a wide comparative cross-country and temporal perspective. Overall educational effect on divorce varies among the countries of the region: in Norway and East Germany it is negative, in Lithuania—positive, while in Estonia and West Germany—neutral. The differences are explained highlighting the shaping role of such macro level factors as family de-institutionalization and women's economic roles. The article also demonstrates the changes

of the relationship between women's education and marital stability over time. The general pattern of temporal change reveals a growing importance of higher educational attainment for marital stability in the region.

Kadri Rootalu, Kairi Kasearu and Liina-Mai Tooding attempt to demonstrate the intersections of life plans, life course events and parental family structure in the context of late socialism and rapid overarching societal changes of the 1990s in Estonia. The authors concentrate on such life course events as leaving parental home, getting married and becoming a parent, and examine the generation of youth that graduated from high school in 1983. This study argues that parental divorce has moderate effect on youth's life plans, but significantly impacts their actual life course events. Moreover, gender—as a set of ideas and structures—mediates the parental divorce outcomes for the children's life course. The study proves that girls' life course events are shaped in more disadvantageous ways compared to boys.

Summing up, the articles included in the current edition of the journal discuss the various features of family reshaping: a growing variety of family life forms and their linguistic representations as well as our evolving understanding of the role gender and individual factors play in the family making process. The contributors expose how predominance of the global migration and expression of the intimacy impacts the family life; they demonstrate that ongoing processes shape different expectations individuals entertain about family future and determine divergent life course events.

The listed manifestations of family reshaping interest researchers not only due to their diffusion but also because they challenge the family scholarship. To address these challenges, the contributing authors propose various methodological tools, innovative research approaches or articulate new directions in the family research.

Irena Juozeliūnienė and Aušra Maslauskaitė

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