

Symposium 2008

Symposium: Easing the « rush hour » of life – Diversity of life courses in international comparison

From July 4th to July 6th, 2008, the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) organised a symposium on “Easing the «rush hour» of life – Diversity of life courses in international comparison”. The participants included renowned experts as well as young scientists from several European countries. In the course of the symposium, the FRFG also awarded the 4th Intergenerational Justice Price 2007/08 . The symposium did not single out a specific phase of life but focus on the whole course of life.

The outlined symposium did not pursue the question “How can we use the life-years we gained due to increasing life expectancy?” because there is already a lot of research done (cp. Forschungsgruppe Altern und Lebenslauf, <http://fall-berlin.de/>). Instead it dealt with the issue “To what extent should we change the planning of our life right from the start, knowing that our life expectancy is higher than the one of previous cohorts?” This question focuses on the easing of the so-called « rush hour » of life between the ages of 28 and 38. During this period, people finish their apprenticeships or studies; they begin to work and have to decide whether or not to start a family. It is this crucial period of time we have to examine to detect the underlying causes for the difference between the desired and the actual number of children in Germany. The total fertility rate currently lies at 1.34 children per woman (1.26 in the Eastern part and 1.36 in the Western part of the country), whereas women desire to have 1.74 and men to have 1.57 children. Differences between the numbers for East and West Germany are on average barely detectable. East German women’s desire for children (1.73) exceeds West German women’s (1,78) only to a small extend, whereas East German men desire a little less children (1.46) than West German men (1.59) (Bib 2005, 36). These numbers already show the importance of a gender-specific analysis of the subject.

Therefore it is important to research whether an easing of the third life-decade could achieve a reduction of problematic conditions regarding the compatibility of job and family. Besides a better combination of kids and careers during this decade, the possible options for avoiding a double strain by decoupling (preference of the career, preference of family life, postponement of the career, postponement of the starting of a family) have been analysed during the project.

The symposium was divided into two parts that were in turn examined from international and gender perspectives. In short, we firstly analyse the time budget of the cohorts in question and later on their financial budgets. This approach and the consideration of both aspects allows for comprehensive conclusions.

In consistence with the international and gender perspectives, the experiences of other countries in their attempts to disentangle the « rush-hour » for the individual (both in private and professional life) as well as in relation to the welfare state and society as a whole have been examined carefully in the first part of the symposium. The differing consequences for the sexes were equally analysed. The second part focused on the age specific distribution of income, again from international and gender perspectives.

You can find the concept and programme of the symposium here. In the follow-up of the symposium, a special issue of the Intergenerational Justice Review will be devoted to the topic. Furthermore, a book with contributions of the symposium's participants and other scientists shall be published in 2009.