

Chiara Saraceno (ed.) (2008). *Families, Ageing and Social Policy: Intergenerational Solidarity in European Welfare States*. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 336 pp. ISBN 978 1 84720 648 0 (hardback)

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Families, Ageing and Social Policy overflows with fascinating facts about modern families. The book covers a range of issues relevant to how families are changing in the context of demographic ageing. Chapters examine children and older people as “book ends” of the life course, care giving, marital instability, inter-generational contact, migration and home ownership. Inter-generational relationships within the family form the focus of the volume. Most chapters emanate from the EQUALSOC EU-funded network of excellence. The complete volume bears the hallmark of these origins in that the methodology applied is consistent and of a high quality. Indeed, the main strength of the book is the quality of the empirical analyses. A variety of authors address diverse forms of inter-generational solidarity using clearly described multi-variate regression models. Each author identifies the strengths and limitations of their

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dataset and explains why particular models are used. The result is a compelling range of hard evidence about family solidarity across European states.

Some of the highlights include Hagestad's chapter which provides persuasive arguments for the inclusion of children in life course research and social planning for ageing populations (p. 21). A number of authors find that a generous welfare state has an enabling effect on family support networks (Kohli and Albertini). Moreover, regardless of regime type, the family is a resilient institution. Kalmijn concludes that egalitarian family relationships can have positive effects on father-child relationships, especially in cases of divorce (p. 190). Poggio's study finds that geographical proximity between generations leads to more diverse forms of inter-generational transfer (p. 78).

Of course, there is always room for improvement. The volume would have benefited from greater recognition of the range of different policy contexts investigated across 13 chapters. Some chapters provide some context in the introduction (such as Sarasa and Billingsley), though no author clearly identifies significant policy implications arising from research findings. This is disappointing given that the book highlights many gaps in our knowledge of inter-generational transfer. For instance, a number of authors refer to the difficulty in accurately modelling the extent of mutual support exercised when generations co-reside. This suggests the need for ethnographic work with multi-generational families to establish how gender, age and other factors determine such private exchanges. The quantitative orientation of the larger project evidently precluded such an approach. Even still, the resulting book would have been stronger for recognising this limitation. Perhaps including greater diversity of methodological approaches would have allowed the volume to contribute a more complete perspective on inter-generational solidarity in European welfare states.

While the quality of the work and the consistency of the findings speak for themselves, the editor could have been more assertive in speculating what impact research findings might have for the development of ageing policies in European welfare states. It must be significant that in welfare states as dissimilar as Italy and Sweden the family is resilient. However, this volume does not begin to explore the implications of this finding for

European social policy in the longer term. Perhaps a chapter dedicated to comparing some of the findings may have helped to clarify the significance of the book. Failing that, chapters could have been grouped under key themes such as those that explore the “crowding in/out” debate, or under what type of solidarity each study addresses (i.e. emotional, financial or cultural). Such streamlining would have allowed the immense value of the work presented to be immediately evident to even the most casual reader.

The studies reported in this volume make great strides in expanding our knowledge of modern families within existing European welfare states. However, the title of the book indicates a direct investigation of the role played by social policy in shaping inter-generational transfers. Pure social policy scholars will be disappointed on this front, as many questions are left hanging. Can this research shed any light on which behaviour is cultural and which is the product of policy design? What can seem to be a “cultural” difference between familistic and social democratic regimes could equally be traced to high levels of gender inequality when policy is designed with the male breadwinner in mind. Such analytical points are left unchallenged, as is the key underlying tension of the book: the individual as a family member versus the individual as a citizen. Society’s expectations of an individual as a family member might differ from his or her rights and obligations as a citizen in a particular welfare state. The evidence presented in Saraceno’s volume suggests that how these two identities interact will become an increasingly challenging question for those designing social policy. For instance, Künemund finds that generations tend to make financial transfers downward. Were this finding to be applied to policy planning, the argument could then be made that providing generous pensions has broader social benefits as pensioners are likely to distribute that money within their family. While this implication is not identified in the book, the quality of the evidence presented provides a sound basis on which future policy could be designed.

In summary, the single most significant contribution of this volume is as a coherent presentation of why the family remains at the centre of European ageing societies. Of particular note is the consistency of this finding across social democratic, familistic and conservative welfare systems. Policy-makers should heed the findings of this study as evidence

that investing in the welfare state strengthens and supports existing family solidarity. There is no evidence from the wide range of country-specific and comparative studies presented that generous state benefits crowd out the family's innate ability to care. In short, anyone with an interest in the role of the family in ageing societies should consult this volume. It contains an amount of evidence that fears for "the family in crisis" are unfounded. In fact, the empirical research presented in Saraceno's book provides a range of evidence to counter this claim. It would seem that even in the present age of individualism, inter-generational relationships remain durable, have greater longevity and involve more generations than ever before (Steinbach and Kopp). Promising news for anyone involved in predicting or planning for the certainty of ageing societies into the future.