

Marriage and children as a key to happiness?

A study of cultural differences in the effect of marital status and children on happiness and satisfaction with the family life in 24 countries

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Abstract

This research examines the relationship between the family structure and subjective well-being and the extent to which cultural differences across 24 countries/regions may condition that relationship. Using the ISSP data 2002, we examine how the effect of marriage status and the presence of children on the well-being of men and women differs according to the perceived importance of marriage and parenthood within a society. We find significant cross-country differences in the relationship between presence of young children and the happiness of men, and in the relationship between the marital status of women and their happiness and satisfaction with family life. In addition, our results for the national-level predictors of well-being suggest that prosperity in combination with strong family ties leads to happier citizens.

1. Introduction

While the married couple with children used to be the dominant family model in Western Europe, that "classical" family form now exists along side of single parents, remarried couples, unmarried partners living together, and voluntarily singles. The nuclear family has lost its numerical and normative dominance (Corijn & Matthijs, 2004). These remarkable changes of behaviours and norms are usually considered as part of the long term trend of individualisation whereby people are increasing free to choose lifestyle options according to their own needs and desires (Kuijsten, 2002) without feeling 'obliged' to get married, to have children, or to stay their whole life with one partner. Concomitant reductions in the average family size have been widespread. Childbearing is frequently delayed and often forgone, and the meaning of parenthood has shifted accordingly. Collectively these trends constitute "the second demographical transition" (Wehner & Abrahamson, 2004; Liefbroer, 2005), now quite advanced in parts of Europe but clearly evidenced in many regions of the world. However, marked differences among countries in the prevalence of certain family types, sequences of life course transitions, and normative views about family roles remain (Gelissen, 2003). This

cross-national diversity is at the core of our research questions. We are concerned with how the cultural context can shape the relationships between different family roles and structures and subjective well being. Although many projects have considered the relationship between specific family types and different outcomes, such as happiness, health and financial satisfaction (for example Coombs, 1991; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Waite & Lehrer, 2003; Kim & McKenry, 2002; McLanahan & Adams, 1987), comparative research around this topic is relatively scarce.

Our analyses are based on data from the *International Social Survey Programme* or ISSP 2002 topical module, '*Family and Changing Gender Roles*'. We begin by reporting differences between 24 countries/regions in their general attitudes towards marriage, cohabitation, parenthood, etc. Secondly, we look at how across these countries the family characteristics of men and women in a partner relationship (marital status, presence of children, employment status of both partners) influence their subjective well being. Next, we explore if besides compositional effects, specific national characteristics are also responsible for the differences between countries with respect to the happiness and satisfaction with family life of the inhabitants. Lastly, we examine how the effects of marriage status and the presence of children on the happiness and family satisfaction of men and women may be conditioned by the perceived importance of marriage and parenthood within the countries in our sample.

2. Being happy ...

Subjective well-being is a global concept that may be parsed in a variety of ways. Happiness would certainly be central to most interpretations of subjective well-being, and the subfield of "happiness studies" has been rapidly expanding in recent times with contributions from a number of disciplines. Most of this research assumes that 'happiness' is an internal state of mind and can be measured by explicitly asking people to report on their feelings. Thus the concept is frequently operationalized with a single question that asks people how happy they are with their life in general. (This is in fact how happiness is measured in the ISSP data.) Although measuring such a potentially ephemeral phenomena with a single item may appear controversial, a number of prior studies have provided evidence supporting the reliability and validity of this approach (see, Veenhoven, 2000). The nature of the research that we present here requires that happiness be reliably measured across countries. Fortunately the cumulative evidence on this issue is favourable, demonstrating that there is substantial cross-national reliability in single item measures of happiness: "... *differently phrased questions still produced the same ranking of national averages. Various tests on desirability distortion did not reveal any systematic differences. The concept also appears to be well known everywhere, answers were promptly given and the number of 'don't know' answers was minimal.*" (Veenhoven, 2000, p.97). For additional reviews of the existing measurement literature on happiness and the cross-national comparability of measures of well-being see Headey and Wearing (1992) and Veenhoven (1996a, 1996b).

Other dimensions of subjective well-being include how well "satisfied" people are in specific arenas of their life. Because our research is concerned with the consequences of alternative family configurations for well-being, we also present analyses of the respondents' answers to a question on their satisfaction with their family life. Domain-specific satisfaction assessments may provide us with a sense of the pathways associated with more general well-being and especially in so far as they tap in to qualitatively different aspects of subjective experiences (Diener, Scollon & Lucas, 2003). Below we will devote some attention to how the determinants of this specific measure of satisfaction with the family life differ from these from the more general happiness measure. Haller and Hadler's recent study (2006) comparing

the determinants of a measure of 'happiness' and a measure of 'life satisfaction' is directly relevant to this issue. They found that “ *life satisfaction is more the result of an evaluation of the objective situation in terms of expectations and comparison processes related to objective socioeconomic conditions while high levels of happiness may arise only if “positive” factors (mainly close and gratifying social relations) are present*” (Haller & Hadler, 2006, p. 203)” If these processes are broadly operative across the populations included in our study, we might expect that the general happiness measure will be more influenced by the positive aspects related to marriage and the presence of children, while the influence of the marital status and presence of children on the satisfaction with family life is rather the result of weighing pros and cons related to both family characteristics against each other

3. Marriage and children as determinants of happiness

3.1 Marriage

There is a vast literature on the influence of marriage on the well-being of individuals. Waite and Lehrer (2003) provide a detailed overview of the mechanisms whereby marriage can have a positive influence on men and women. Social integration and social support are two mechanisms highlighted by these authors and others for explaining the benefits of marriage (e.g. Coombs, 1991; Zimmerman & Easterlin, 2006). The direct benefits of having a partner that are posited in the social integration and support hypotheses would appear to pertain to both cohabiting and married couples, but a good deal of research has explored differences between these two modes of life sharing. The biggest difference between married and cohabiting partners is seen in the lifelong commitment symbolized by marriage. In the presence of such commitment we would expect marital partners to invest more in their relationships than cohabiting couples (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Waite & Lehrer, 2003; Mastekaasa, 1994). Several studies confirm hypotheses concerning support and commitment and report a significant lower well-being for cohabiting couples compared to married people (for example Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Evans & Kelley, 2004). Exceptions include a study in Norway by Mastekaasa (1994) and a more recent study by Shields & Wooden (2003) in Australia which find small to negligible differences in subjective well-being between married and cohabiting people. These results point to a greater social approval of cohabitation in respectively Norway in the mid-1980s and in Australia at the beginning of the 21st century. As Evans & Kelley (2004, 331) state: “... *the social and institutional support for commitment in formal marriage is part of what makes it more satisfying*”. In other words, it is possible that the declining social approval of marriage has begun to redefine the meaning of marriage for some individuals in comparison with other living arrangements.

Individual preferences about family formation are in part determined by the cultural context in which people are making important choices with regard to their unfolding life course. Because the way in which individuals direct their goals also determines their life satisfaction (Diener, Gohm, Suh & Oishi 2000), and because the social approval of marriage in part shapes the preferences of individuals, we can expect that the more highly marriage is valued within a society, the bigger the influence of the marital status on the subjective well-being of people will be. Hence, *our first central research hypothesis is that the influence of marital status (married versus cohabiting) on the happiness and satisfaction with the family life of men and women will differ according to the social approval of marriage within a society.*

3.2 Children

Our concern with alternative family configurations leads to a second focus on the presence of children in the household. In the extensive research literature on the influence of children on

the well-being of individuals empirical results and conclusions tend to be more equivocal than those for marriage. For example, Zimmermann & Easterlin (2006) report no effect of children on general life satisfaction. However they report a positive effect of children on the (domain specific) satisfaction with family life and a negative effect of children on the satisfaction with ones economic situation. These two opposite effects of children appear to cancel each other out with respect to the general life satisfaction, so that the influence of children on this measure of well-being is negligible. Shields and Wooden (2003) investigated the relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction in Australia. They emphasize the need to examine the specific conditions of parenthood when assessing what effect children have on their parents' well-being. Their results show that the presence of children below 15 years has a negative influence on the general life satisfaction of men and women, older children who live at home have no influence and adult children that left the house had a positive influence. For a detailed overview of research results concerning the relationship parenthood and subjective well-being we refer to Evenson & Simon (2005).

How is it that children can have an influence on the wellbeing of their fathers and mothers? Research on the relationship between parenthood and children often introduces the 'costs' of children as the mechanism by which children generate a lower wellbeing for parents in comparison with childless men and women. These costs involve supplementary financial expenditures, but also time and opportunity costs. Besides direct costs related to nourishment, clothing, education, ... the presence of children also absorbs time which otherwise can be invested in labour or leisure time, possibly leading to a restriction of earnings and/or a deferral of the satisfaction of individual needs and self-fulfilment. In addition, as Haller and Hadler (2006, p. 189) state: 'to have children and to bring them up is connected also with many burdens and worries'. The implications of all these direct and indirect costs related to children can be manifested as 'role strain', which can neutralize the satisfaction associated with the fulfilment of parenthood as social role (Evenson & Simon, 2005). Nevertheless, based on the *rational choice theory*, Kohler, Behrman & Skytthe (2005, p.407) argue that since people in developed countries still choose to have a partner and children, we could expect that the combination of partner and children makes people happier. The conditions are that individuals 1) do not have systematic erroneous opinions on the advantages of a partner relationship and children and 2) make conscious and informed choices about their fertility behaviour and the involvement in a romantic relationship.

Social demographers have long been concerned with how the costs associated with children may vary according to the normative and institutional structures in which family life takes place. Because there are substantial contextual differences in these costs we could logically also expect similar patterns of differences with respect to the influence of children on the subjective well-being of individuals. In countries in which the cultural value of parenthood has declined and the social approval is lower there may not be adequate compensation for the social and economical costs related to parenthood (Evenson & Simon, 2005). More than twenty years ago, McLanahan & Adams (1987) had already questioned whether the social benefits of meeting the pro-natal norm would remain sufficient to compensate for the increasing costs that children have come to entail. The authors argued that the decreasing importance of parenthood was reflected in the fact that individuals were now willing to recognize and admit the negative sides of the parental role. In addition, increasing numbers of voluntarily childless individuals/couples no longer experience the levels of social disapproval of some decades ago. They now represent a visible and viable reference group by which parents can judge the pro's and con's of parenthood. In sum, we could expect that the social approval of parenthood will have an influence on the balance of pros and cons of parenthood,

with repercussions for the happiness of parents in comparison with childless men and women. Hence, our second research hypothesis is that the influence of the presence of children in the household on the happiness and satisfaction with family life will be different according to the social approval of parenthood in a society.

3.3 Gender differences

Gender is necessarily woven to any discussion of outcomes associated with marriage and parenthood. The literature linking family structure and transitions with well-being covers many decades with many different points of emphasis. This temporal and substantive diversity does not easily yield to definitive generalizations. However, there are two patterns of findings regarding subjective well being with particular relevance for our own research. First, marriage appears to have greater advantages for men than for women, (for an overview; Coombs, 1991). Second, mothers of young children report lower levels of well-being than fathers of young children (see for example Glenn & McLanahan, 1981; Simon, 1998). While we might expect these results in contexts where traditional gender roles continue to hold strong sway, many countries in our analysis have moved in more equalitarian directions.

3.4 Control variables

Several other individual characteristics are taken into account, because of their own influence on the subjective well-being of individuals and because of the possibility that they might affect the relationship between the family configuration and the subjective well-being. Age itself seems to have an important influence on the subjective well-being of people, which is a first reason to include the age of the respondents in the model. Different studies have shown an U-shaped relationship between happiness and age, in which as well younger as older people seem to be happier (e.g. Christoph & Noll, 2003; Hayo & Seifert, 2003). It is also the case that the presence of young and older children or marriage itself can have a different meaning according to the age of the respondents. Therefore, we have systematically tested for interaction effects between the age of the respondents and the variables concerning marriage status and parenthood.

Second, both the employment situation of the respondent and the employment situation of their partner are taken into account. This is in part important because the employment situation can influence the relationship between the family composition and the well-being of individuals, but also because of the positive influence that 'paid work' in general has for the subjective well-being (for example Clark & Oswald, 1994; Hayo & Seifert, 2003; Shields & Wooden, 2003; Veenhoven, 1997; Bouazzaoui & Mullet, 2002). With regard to gender differences, Bouazzaoui & Mullet (2002) found that the effect of the personal employment status is stronger for men, while for women the spouse employment factor is more important, thus reflecting the persistence of the traditional male-breadwinner model.

We also include rough measures of the education level of the respondents and the financial situation of their household in the model. The research results concerning the effect of these factors on the happiness of people are rather mixed (for example Haller & Hadler, 2003; Shields & Wooden, 2003).

4. Cross-national differences in subjective well-being

There is substantial variation in subjective well-being across different contexts. As stressed by Haller and Hadler (2006, p. 171): "*Happiness must be seen as the outcome of an interaction process between individual aspirations and expectations on the one side, and more or less favourable micro and macro-social conditions on the other side*". Veenhoven (1997)

gives an overview of the determinants of happiness on national level. The wealth of a country, the safety, and the freedom that citizens experience are only a few examples of national factors that are positively correlated with the mean happiness in a country. Veenhoven also finds a correlation between the cultural climate in a country and the mean happiness: people seem to be happier in countries with a more modern value orientation, although the strength of this relationship diminishes when the economic prosperity of a country is taken into account. Christoph & Noll (2003) conclude in a study that the differences in satisfaction between a country largely can be explained by differences in the objective life circumstances of individual citizens, but also that, since the significant remaining differences between countries, “ ... there is good reason to assume that both objective living conditions as well as factors like value orientations, national characteristics or cultural traits are needed to explain differences in satisfaction” (Christoph & Noll, 2003, p. 542). Similarly, Haller & Hadler (2006) found a strong positive relationship between the economic prosperity of a country and the happiness of the inhabitants, but they suggest that it would be interesting to explore also cultural differences between nations directly.

In sum, the previous research suggests that differences in the wealth or economic prosperity of nations can help explain cross-national differences in subjective well-being, but other social and cultural factors can also be determinants of happiness. In this research, we will look specifically at how cultural differences regarding marriage, divorce, and parenthood are associated with the well-being of individuals in a nation, net of national economic conditions.

5. Data

Our investigation is based on data from the *International Social Survey Programme*¹ or ISSP from 2002 in which a question module was integrated around the theme *Family and Changing Gender Roles* (Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung, 2004). This module contained 9 questions about the attitudes of respondents towards marriage, cohabitation, divorce and parenthood. We have used these items to calculate a summary measure of national attitudes for each country in the analysis. Respondents were also asked to report on their satisfaction with family life and their general happiness. The 24 industrialized countries included in this study are: Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (East- en West-Germany), Great Britain, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States².

We have focused on persons between the age of 22 and 55 years old who live together with a partner. The age restriction allows us to focus on men and women who are in the most productive years with regard to as well the development of romantic relationships, childbearing and raising kids, as on the labour market. We concentrate on couples because partner relationships and parenthood can have totally different meanings for people not living together with a partner or singles. Hence, when interpreting the results it is important to keep in mind that they are pertain only to persons who were residing with their partner at the time of the survey. For an overview of the number of 22 to 55 years old men and women in a partner relationship in the national samples we refer to appendix 2. Our restricted sample of

¹ [Http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/index.htm](http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/index.htm)

² In the remainder of the text we refer to the macro-level unit of analysis as countries with the recognition that several are in fact regions albeit ones with distinctive and to some extent independent histories. Because the data for Bulgaria, Ireland and New-Zealand do not contain detailed information on the family composition of the respondents, these countries are not included in the analysis. In the following tables and figures countries are referenced with the abbreviations shown in appendix 1.

respondents in current relationship include more women than men for many countries, as is the case in the total samples, (Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung, 2004).

5.1 Dependent variables

The first dependent variable assess global happiness:

“If you were to consider your life in general, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole?”

The respondents could choose between 7 categories: completely happy – very happy – fairly happy – neither happy nor unhappy – fairly unhappy – very unhappy – completely unhappy³. As the frequency counts in the 2 lowest categories were quite low, these categories were combined with the third lowest category, resulting into a scale of 0 to 4 with a higher score indicating a greater happiness.

The second dependent variable refers to the degree in which respondents are satisfied with their family life:

“All things considered, how happy are you with your family life?”

The respondents could choose between 7 answering categories: completely satisfied – very satisfied – fairly satisfied – neither satisfied nor unsatisfied – fairly unsatisfied – very unsatisfied – completely unsatisfied⁴. Similar distributional properties for this variable led us to combine the 2 lowest categories with the third lowest category, resulting into a scale of 0 to 4 with a higher score indicating a greater satisfaction with family life.

5.2 Independent variables at individual level

- *Age*: The variable age is classified in 6 categories: 22 to 27 years old, 28 to 33 years old, 34 to 39 years old, 40 to 45 years old, 46 to 51 years old and 52 to 55 years old.

- *Education*: The variable education is classified in 3 categories: low (no or lowest formal qualification), medium (above lowest qualification or higher secondary completed) and high education level (above higher secondary level or university degree).

- *Cohabitation*: the variable cohabitation is a dichotomous variable with value 1 when the respondent is not married with the partner with whom they live. The reference category (value 0) refers to the people who are married to their coresident partner.

- *The presence of children in the household*: The ISSP data only allows to make a difference between the children younger than the age of 6 in the household and children between the age of 6 and 17 in the household.⁵ For both age groups, a dichotomous variable was created with value 1 when children of that age category are presented in the household and value 0 if no children of that age group are present in the household

- *Employment situation*: Both the personal employment situation and the employment situation of the spouse are taken into account. We make a difference between being full-time employed, being part-time employed (less than 35 hours a week), housewives/men and being unemployed. The category ‘others’ contains for example people who are in a education program, retired people , ...

- *Household income*: The financial situation of the respondent is operationalized according to the income quartile to which the household of the respondents belong relative to the number of people living in the household. (For example, people in the first income quartile belong to the 25% of households with the lowest household income per capita.)

³ Also the answers category ‘Can’t choose’ was explicitly provided in the questionnaire

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⁵ Depending on the country, the age boundary varies from 5 to 6 years old (Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung, 2004)

For an overview of the absolute number and frequencies for these individual variables we refer to appendix 3.

5.3 Independent variables at the national level⁶

On the national level we include the gross domestic product per capita as an indicator of the economic wealth of a country (Christoph & Noll, 2003; Haller & Hadler, 2006). The value for this national variable for each geographic entity in the study can be found in appendix 4.

In addition, the countries are grouped into five general clusters: *liberal welfare states* (AUSTR, GB, N-IRE, USA), *social-democratic welfare states* (DENM, FIN, NOORW, ZWE), *conservative welfare states* (GER, FRA, NETH, AUSTRIA, FLA, SWITZ), *Mediterranean welfare states* (PORT, SPA) and *Eastern European welfare states* (EAST-GE, CZECH, HUNG, LATVIA, POL, SLOVA, SLOVE, RUSSIA). A similar classification was used by Liefbroer and Fokkema (2007) and is derived from the influential welfare typology of Esping-Andersen (1999). In addition, the results from the study of Christoph & Noll (2003) show that there is substantial similarity in the clustering of countries with regard to mean life satisfaction and their classification into welfare state regimes, although there are some exceptions to that general pattern.

We then consider how the 24 countries in this study differ on general attitudes toward marriage, cohabitation, parenthood and divorce. We make use of the 9 questions that measure the individual attitude toward these different family structures and characteristics. To explore whether there are multiple attitude dimensions assessed by this 9 items, a principal component analysis was conducted⁷. The results of this analysis, in which correlation between the components was allowed, show 3 underlying attitude dimensions. This solution was used to compute three component scores for each respondent. In the calculation of these scores, every item is proportionally weighted according to the size of the component loading: the higher the loading, the higher the weight of the item on the score (Rummel, 1967). In a next step, the national means of these three components were calculated from the responses by all 22 to 55 years old, including those with or without a partner. The solution of the principal component analysis is shown in table 1. The highest factor loading for each item is printed in bold.

Table 1: Component loadings for the principal component analyses with promax rotation with the 9 items on family attitudes.

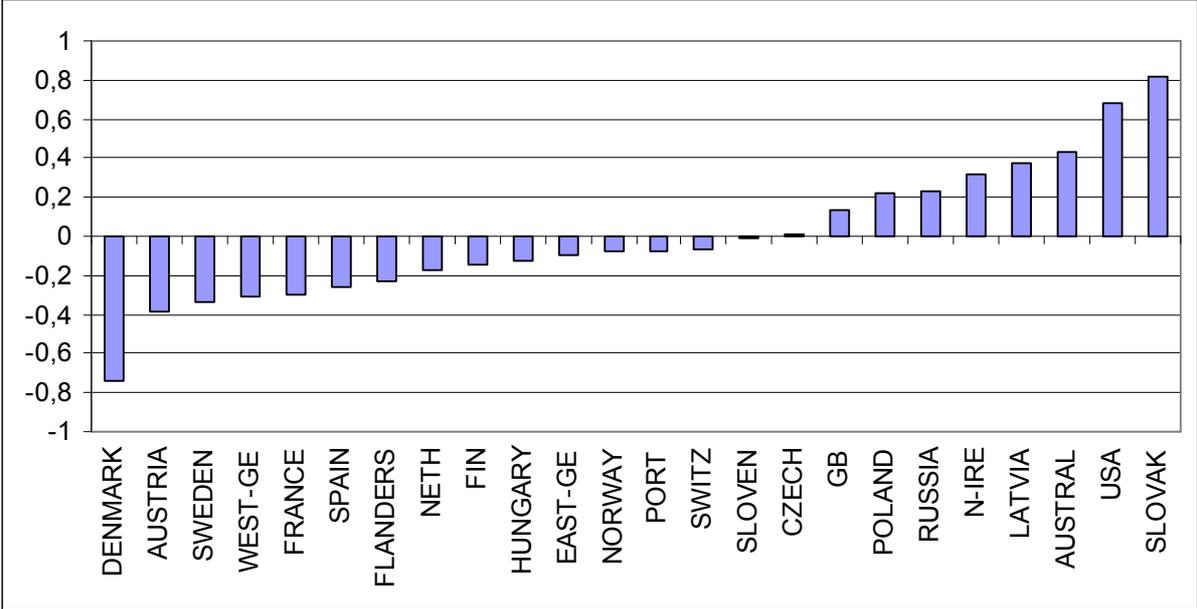
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	Married people are generally happier than unmarried people	0.13670	0.58885	0.29100
2	It is better to have a bad marriage than no marriage at all	-0.06892	0.84361	-0.14331
3	People who want children, ought to get married	0.46221	0.37298	0.18457
4	One parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together	0.54627	-0.31400	0.38677
5	It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married	0.74052	0.21153	-0.00360
6	It is a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first	0.72378	0.12003	-0.20603
7	Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems	0.57772	-0.12261	-0.16619
8	Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy	-0.12966	-0.07866	0.76494
9	People who have never had children lead empty lives	-0.12815	0.35936	0.65526

Note: The respondents had to answer on a 5-point scale: categories were strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The answers for items 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9 were inverted.

⁷ The principal component analysis was conducted on the whole sample.

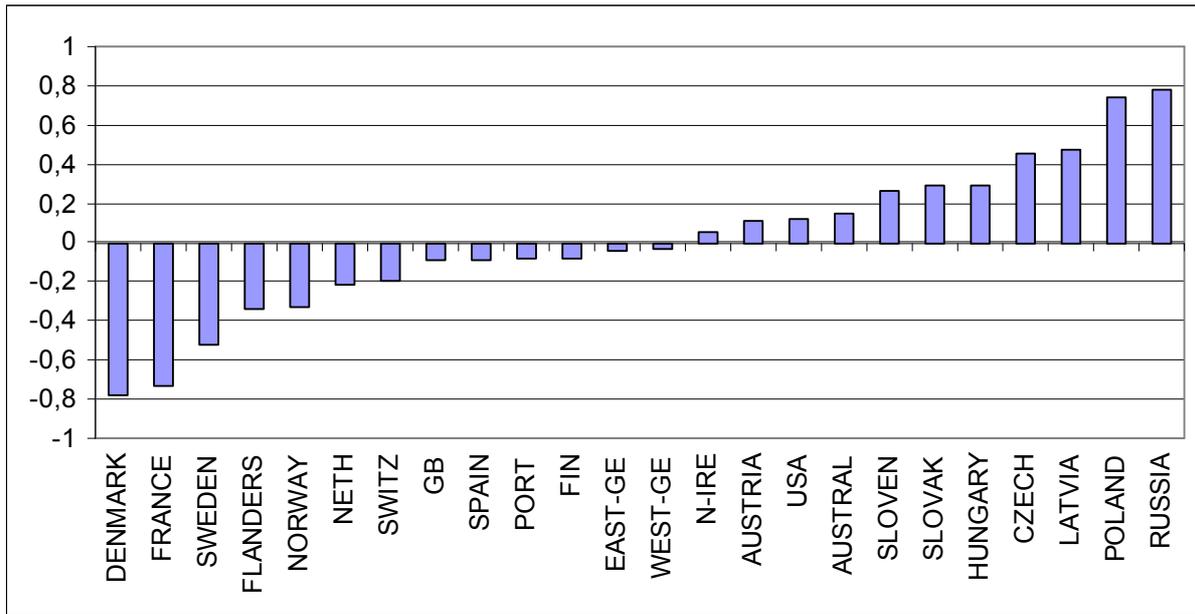
The first factor is primarily based around the items that measure attitudes towards alternative family forms: having children without being married, single parenthood, cohabitation and divorce, and thus it measures the acceptance of alternative family types that deviate from traditional conventions. Countries scoring high on this factor are characterized by a greater disapproval of alternative family forms. In countries with a low score on this factor, cohabitation, divorce and single parenthood are more accepted. Figure 1 shows that especially in the English-speaking countries and in some of the Eastern European countries the disapproval of cohabitation, single parenthood and divorce is greater. The level of disapproval reported by Americans is exceeded only by that of the Slovakian respondents. Denmark, Sweden and Austria on the other hand show the biggest acceptance of alternative family types.

Figure 1: Mean score ‘Disapproval alternative family types’ (22-55 years old) in 24 countries/regions



The second factor in table 1 is directly related to the importance of marriage itself. In countries with a high score on this factor, people in general attach greater importance to marriage than in countries with a lower score. Figure 2 shows a clear tendency of the Eastern-European countries to report traditional support for marriage on this factor. Australia, Northern Ireland and the United States again score relatively high in comparison with Western Europe, but the distinctions between these groups of countries are not as pronounced as in the case of the first factor.

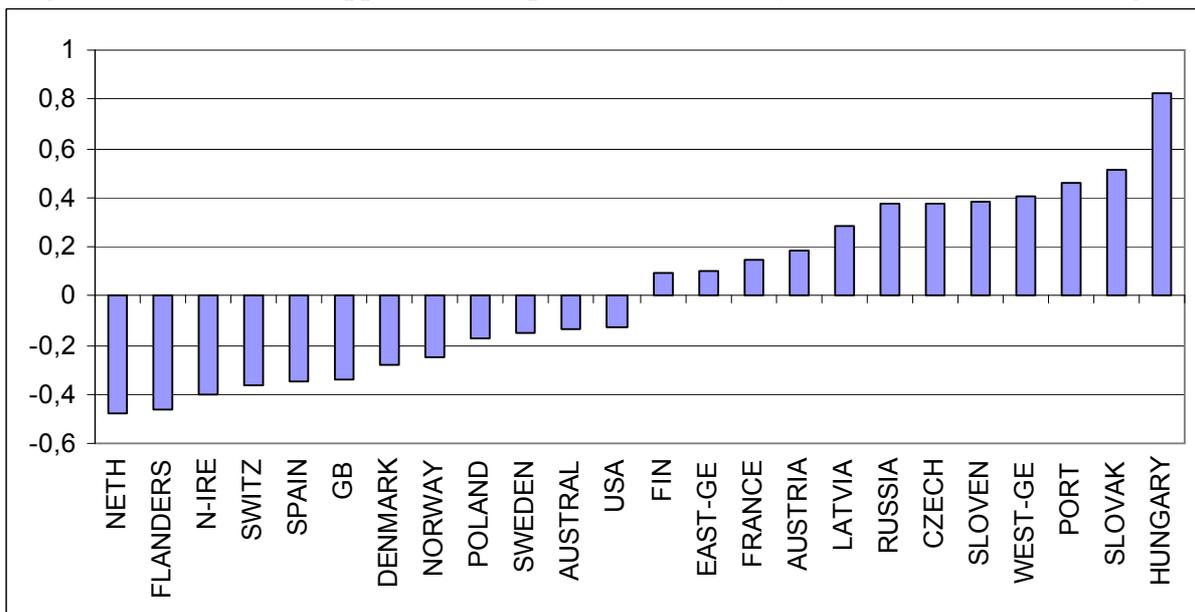
Figure 2: Mean score 'importance of marriage' (22-55 years old) in 24 countries/regions



Note that although this 'marriage factor' correlates with the previous factor (inter factor correlation of factor 1 and 2 equals .24641), the results in figure 1 and 2 show clearly that the factors measure distinct dimensions. Thus attaching relatively great importance to marriage does not necessary go hand in hand with a relatively low acceptance of alternative family types (e.g. Hungary). Conversely a relatively high approval of alternative family types does not necessarily implies attaching relatively less importance to marriage (e.g. Austria).

The third and final factor reported in table 3 is related to parenthood. In countries where parenthood is more appreciated, the mean score on this factor will be higher. If we look at figure 3 we can clearly see that in the most Eastern European countries parenthood is relatively highly appreciated. The Netherlands, Flanders and Northern Ireland score the lowest on this factor.

Figure 3: Mean score on appreciation of parenthood ((22-55 years old) in 24 countries/regions



6. Multivariate Models

In order to examine how family structure and role occupancy (marital status, presence of children, employment situation of both partners) influence the reported happiness and satisfaction with family life across the 24 countries, we conduct a multi-level analysis with robust standard errors. The latter procedure follows from the fact that neither dependent variable satisfies the normality assumption: robust standard errors are more reliable in this case. Multilevel regression analysis allows us to distinguish between the effects of characteristics of the individuals and of the countries as a whole (Haller & Hadler, 2006) and hence to control national differences for compositional effects. The analysis was done with the statistical program MLwin (Rasbash, Browne, Goldstein, Yang et al., 2000).

Theoretical accounts of gender role socialization, differential social change in gender relation attitudes and behaviours and prior empirical research on the gendered nature of subjective well-being taken together lead us to estimate models separately for men and women. After assessing the effects of these family characteristics, we estimate models with national-level indicators. Here we can see to what extent these macro-level factors are responsible for eventual differences between the countries in mean happiness and satisfaction with family life of the inhabitants. Finally, we test interaction models in order to assess whether the presence of children in the household and being married have a different influence on the well-being of individuals according to the country-specific attitudes towards marriage, parenthood and alternative family types.

7. Results

7.1 Do marriage and children make people happier?

Table 2 shows the results for the multi-level analysis with 24 countries, including all individual-level variables. The explained variance between individuals is nowhere greater than 5%, but given the nature of our dependent variables this is not unusually low. We can also see that 7% of the variance between the countries in the mean happiness of men was due to compositional effects.⁸ In all four models we find a substantively interesting amount of variance between the countries with regard to the reported happiness and the satisfaction with family life, a point to which we will return below. The intercept (or the general mean across all countries) for the 4 models is between 2.569 and 3.093, which is relatively high.

We first discuss briefly the results for the control variables. A first conclusion is that the reported happiness and satisfaction with family life declines with age. Only the two youngest age categories of women do not differ significantly with regard to their satisfaction with family life, but in general, between age 22 and 55, getting older has a negative effect on the happiness and satisfaction with family life of men and women. The fact that we do not find a U-shaped relationship as in some other research (for example Hayo and Seifert, 2003; Christoph and Noll, 2003) may be explained by the upper age restriction of our sample. Our results are however in line with the common finding that younger adults tend to be happier than adult people in the middle age categories (for example Haller & Hadler, 2006; Hayo and Seifert, 2003; Christoph and Noll, 2003)

We find a significant effect of education on the happiness of women but not men. Higher educated women report themselves as happier than less educated women. This finding is not

⁸ The explained variance within and between the countries is calculated by looking at the degree in which the variance components σ_u and σ_e have diminished in comparison with the unconditional means model (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992).

in line with the results of Haller & Hadler (2006) who found no effect of education on happiness and life satisfaction, but does parallel the results of Hayo and Seifert (2003). The latter found a positive effect of education on the economic well-being after controlling for wealth and income effects, which, according to the authors, possibly could be explained by psychological factors or problems resulting from lower income or wealth. The financial situation of the household seems to be important for the happiness of both men and women. Men and women in the lowest quartile report to be less happy than men and women in a higher income quartile. Women in the highest quartile are also significantly happier than the women in the second income quartile, as well as more satisfied with their family life. For men, we found no significant relationship between the financial situation of the household and the satisfaction with family life. In general however, the results correspond to findings of, for example, Christoph & Noll (2003) who found significant differences in life satisfaction between the highest and the lowest income quartile.

The main focus of the investigation concerns the relationships between family configurations and role occupancy and subjective well being. The results show clearly that married respondents (both men and women) score significantly higher on both well-being measures than their cohabiting counterparts. We would not expect otherwise given the extensive literature linking marital status to favourable outcomes. It is interesting to note however, that while the marital status coefficient for men and women is almost equal in the case of their happiness, the coefficient for the men is almost double the one of women for reported satisfaction with family life.

We also included interaction effects between marriage status and age of the respondents, but the addition of these terms did not result in a statistically significant improvement in the fit of the model.

The estimated effects of the presence of older and younger children in the household are clearly dissimilar. The presence of younger children in the household doesn't seem to have a significant effect on either the happiness or satisfaction with family life of men or women. However, the presence of older children (between age 6 and 17) seems to reduce the happiness of both men and women. A similar negative effect of older children on the satisfaction with family life is only found for women. We have tested for interaction effects between the age of the respondent and the presence of older and younger children respectively, but these terms did not lead to a significant improvement of the model. The same is true for the interaction effects between the marriage status and the two child variables. We also considered more detailed measures taking into account the number of younger and older children (no children, one child, two children, three children or more) in the household but this additional detail again offered no additional explanatory power.

Table 2: Results for the individual effects in the multilevel regression analysis for the happiness and satisfaction with family life of men and women in 24 countries/regions⁹

	Men		Women	
	Happiness (low-high)	Satisfaction with family life (low-high)	Happiness (low-high)	Satisfaction with family life (low-high)
Intercept	2.744 (.089)***	3.093 (.010)***	2.569 (.054)***	2.815 (.078)***
Age				
22-27 years (ref)				
28-33 years	-.176 (.037)***	-.117 (.080)	-.116(.036)***	-.114 (.044)**
34-39 years	-.222 (.047)***	-.225 (.084)**	-.257 (.040)***	-.235 (.067)***
40-45 years	-.346 (.046)***	-.335 (.085)***	-.356 (.040)***	-.325 (.069)***
46-51 years	-.385 (.055)***	-.349 (.078)***	-.370 (.037)***	-.350 (.067)***
52-55 years	-.402 (.062)***	-.389 (.092)***	-.399 (.047)***	-.349 (.078)***
Education				
low education (ref)				
moderate education	-.008 (.049)	-.049 (.049)	.098 (.042)*	.061 (.053)
high education	.028 (.053)	-.083 (.057)	.112 (.057)*	.063 (.060)
Cohabiting (ref:married)	-.113 (.036)***	-.226 (.041)***	-.125 (.027)***	-.113 (.035)***
Presence children < 6 years (ref:no)	.049 (.036)	.032 (.037)	.039 (.028)	.035 (.040)
Presence children 6-17 years (ref:no)	-.077 (.020)***	-.025 (.023)	-.069 (.026)**	-.067 (.032)*
Employment status				
Fulltime (ref)				
Part time	-.019 (.057)	-.002 (.049)	.063 (.023)**	.082 (.025)***
Housemen/wife	-.039 (.201)	.100 (.180)	.014 (.041)	.041 (.049)
Unemployed	-.443 (.089)***	-.220 (.070)**	.019 (.054)	.042 (.053)
Other	-.036 (.072)	-.065 (.082)	.018 (.044)	-.012 (.040)
Employment status partner				
Fulltime (ref)				
Part time	.027 (.033)	.005 (.038)	-.035 (.050)	.031 (.058)
Housemen/wife	.123 (.045)**	.077 (.057)	-.112 (.172)	.019 (.134)
Unemployed	-.153 (.105)	-.057 (.103)	-.272 (.066)***	-.242 (.081)**
Other	-.018 (.056)	-.017 (.064)	-.064 (.076)	-.071 (.047)
Income quartile household				
1st quartile	-.069 (.035)*	-.049 (.038)	-.088 (.026)***	-.052 (.030)
2nd quartile (ref)				
3th quartile	.023 (.027)	.034 (.036)	-.018 (.026)	-.031 (.034)
4th quartile	.034 (.035)	.020 (.046)	.143 (.027)***	.126 (.034)***
Number of observations	5522	5560	7388	7417
σ_u	.028 (.008)	.029 (.010)	.042 (.013)	.047 (.015)
σ_e	.705 (.022)	.757(.039)	.759 (.033)	.870 (.042)
R-squared within	.04	.05	.05	.03
R-squared between	.07	.00	.00	.00
-2LL	13808,750	14320,250	18857,96	19999,670
* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001				

Note: multi-level analysis with robust sandwich estimators.

Note: ()= Standard errors

⁹ Analysis were conducted on the weighted dataset. For more information on the construction of the national weighting coefficients we refer to the code book of the ISSP 2002 (Zentralarchiv fuer Empirische Sozialforschung, 2004).

Now we turn to the results for the employment situation of respondent and partner. Concerning the own employment situation, we can see that unemployed men are much less happy and less satisfied with their family life than full-time working men. For women on the other hand, personal unemployment doesn't seem to effect the outcome of either measures of wellbeing. On the other hand, part-time working women feel happier then full-time working women and also report a higher satisfaction with family life. If we look at the influence of the employment situation of the partner, we can see that men feel happier when their partner chooses to stay at home. Having an unemployed partner at home however has a negative effect on the happiness as well as on the satisfaction with family life of women,

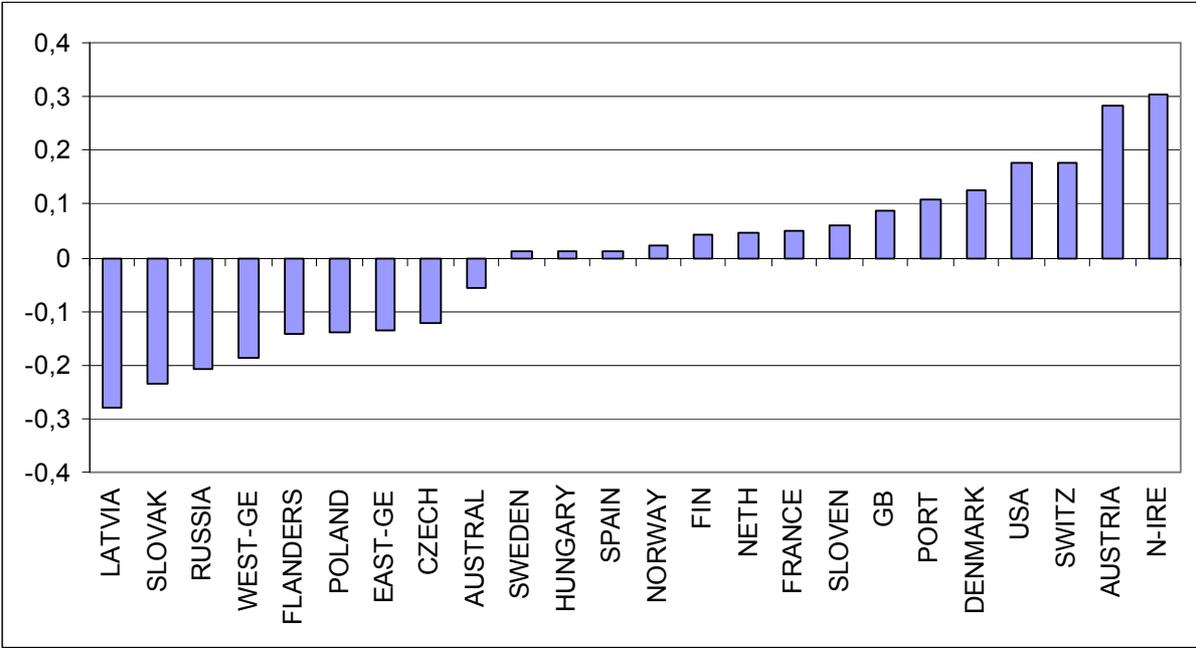
7.2 Contextual effects

7.2.1 International differences in happiness and satisfaction with family life

Above we saw that, after controlling for compositional effects, there still exists a significant amount of variance between countries for both measures of subjective well being. Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 visually depict these national differences in terms of the country-level residuals for the mean happiness and satisfaction with family life of men and women. We use a significance level of .05 ($SD > 1.96$) to designate scores that are significantly higher or lower than the general mean.

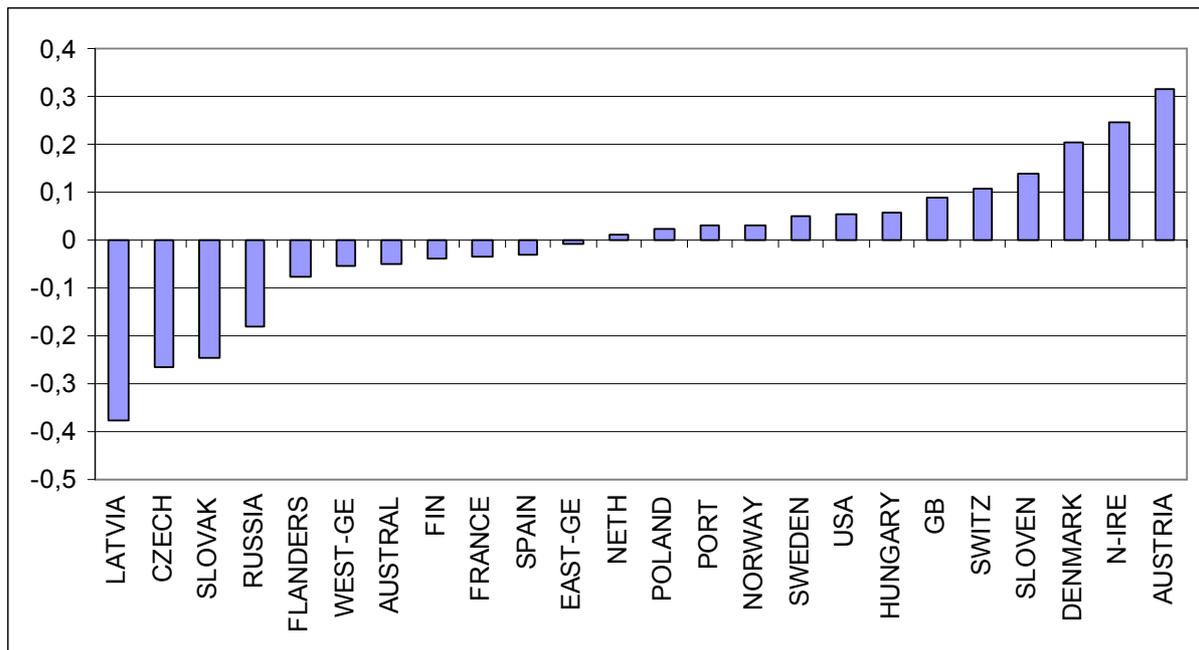
Seven countries/regions score significantly lower than the general mean with regard to the mean happiness of men and 5 countries score significant higher. The first group mainly consists of Eastern European countries, the second group is more eclectic with English-speaking countries well represented (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Country-level residuals mean happiness men (after controlling for the individual effects presented in table 2)



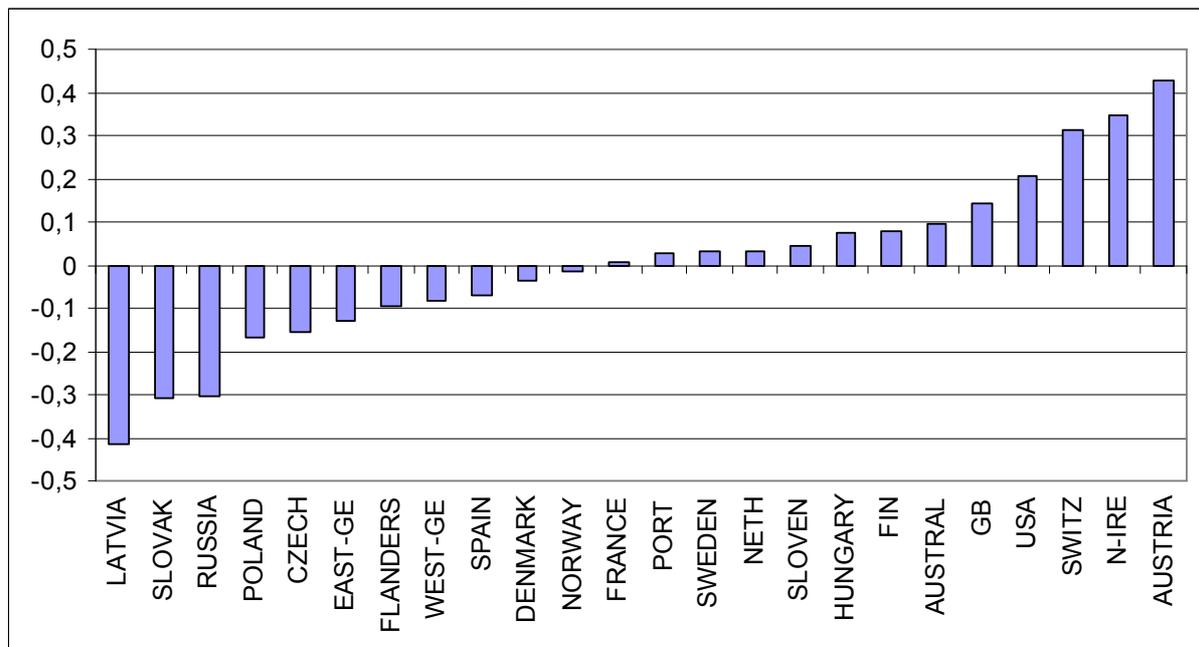
With regard to the mean satisfaction with family life of men there are 4 countries that score significantly lower, and 3 countries that score significantly higher then the general mean. The four lower scoring countries are all Eastern European countries, while Denmark, Northern Ireland and Austria score significantly higher then the general mean (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Country-level residuals mean satisfaction with family life men (after controlling for the individual effects presented in table 2)



With respect to the aggregate happiness of women, 5 Eastern European countries score significantly lower than the general mean, while three English-speaking countries, Austria and Switzerland score significantly higher (Figure 6).

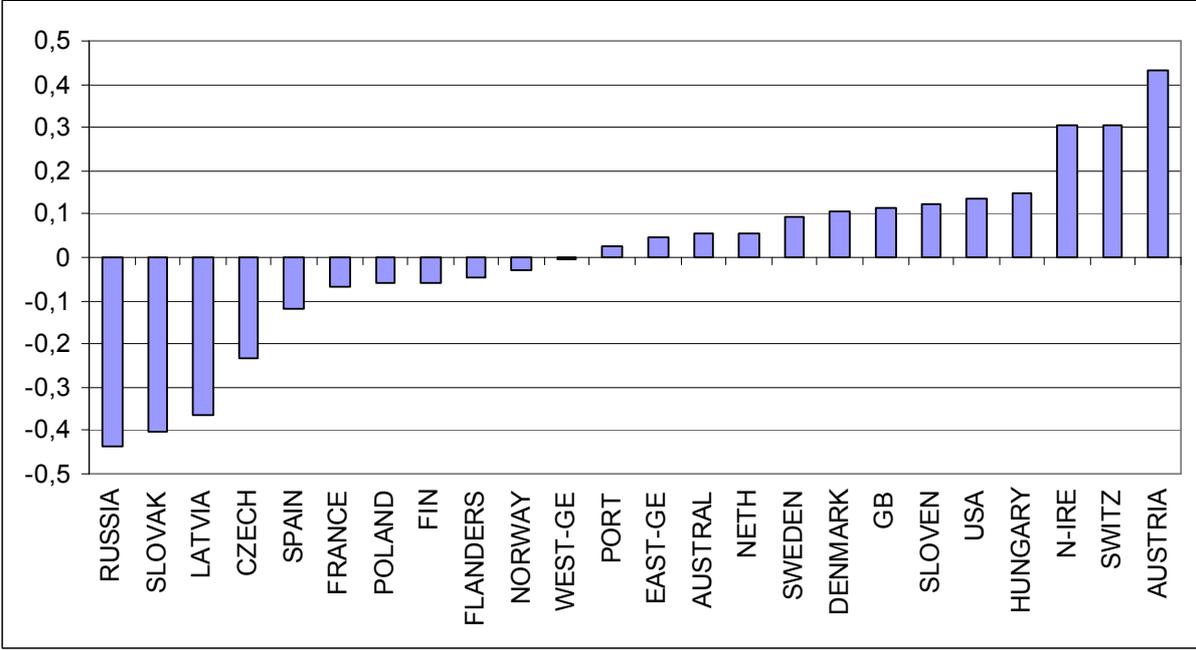
Figure 6: Country-level residuals mean happiness women (after controlling for the individual effects presented in table 2)



Finally, Figure 7 shows the country-level residuals for the mean satisfaction with family life of women. Russia, the Slovak Republic, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Spain score

significantly lower than the general mean, while the USA, Hungary, Northern Ireland, Switzerland and Austria score significantly higher.

Figure 7: Country-level residuals mean satisfaction with family life women (after controlling for the individual effects presented in table 2)



Our results generally parallel those reported by Haller & Hadler (2006): post-communistic countries are overrepresented at the bottom of the wellbeing scale and the Anglo-Saxon countries are overrepresented at the top. In contrast with the findings of Christoph and Noll (2003) we do not find the northern European countries at the very top of the classification with regard to mean subjective well-being.

7.2.2 Determinants of cross-national differences in happiness and satisfaction with family life

Tables 3 and 4 contains the results for the multi-level models in which 5 contextual variables were introduced: (1) the different welfare type regimes¹⁰ (2) the real gross domestic product per capita (3) the social approval of alternative family types (4) the appreciation of marriage (5) the appreciation of parenthood. As the number of countries is limited, we first consider the individual effect of each level-2 variable separately. Next, we estimate a model that includes all of the national level variables to see if the effects of each variable are modified after controlling for the others. In the last column, we see the results of the most parsimonious model which explains the largest amount of variance in the well-being measures between the countries. We focus the discussion of the results primarily on this reduced model.

¹⁰ In a first step 5 welfare state regimes were included in the model, with the conservative welfare regimes as reference category. In a next step, only the categories which showed to be significantly different from the reference category were included to save some degrees of freedom. The other categories were combined with the reference category. In the tables only these final results are represented.

Table 3: Results for the contextual effects in the multilevel regression analysis for the happiness and satisfaction with family life of men in 24 countries/regions

Happiness Men							
Model	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Best
Eastern-European	-.219 (.067)**					-.087 (.107)	
GDP per capita (*1000)		.011 (.002)***				.015 (.004)***	.017 (.004) ***
Disapproval alternative family types			-.131 (.133)			-.170 (.078)*	-.169 (.083)*
Importance of marriage				-.168 (.061)**		.193 (.092)*	.162 (.079)*
Appreciation of parenthood					-.131 (.092)	.153 (.076)*	.140 (.078) ^o
R-square between	.37	.48	.11	.19	.11	.67	.63
Satisfaction with family life Men							
Model	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Best
Eastern-European	-.248 (.093)**					-.093 (.166)	
Mediterranean	-.134 (.041)**					-.025 (.085)	
GDP per capita (*1000)		.011 (.003)***				.014 (.006)*	.015 (.003)***
Disapproval alternative family types			-.206 (.120) ^o			-.282 (.080)***	-.280 (.091)**
Importance of marriage				-.188 (.087)*		.250 (.100)*	.221 (.103)*
Appreciation of parenthood					-.183 (.103) ^o	.072 (.087)	
R-square between	.31	.34	.07	.10	.03	.62	.57

Note: multi-level analysis including all individual variables presented in table 2.

Note: ()= Standard errors

Although we can see from the results in column 1 some differences across categories of the welfare state classification, these differences largely disappear after taking into account national GDP and country level attitudes regarding family issues. Only in the case of women's happiness does the contrast between respondents in the Eastern European bloc remain significant. The parallel effect for men is neutralized when other contextual variables are included in the model. Consistent with prior research we find that national GDP is a useful predictor of both measures of well being for both men and women. Respondents report higher levels of happiness and greater levels of satisfaction with family life in countries with a higher economic affluence.

Perhaps the most interesting results in tables 3 and 4 pertain to the county-level attitude variables. After controlling for the economic prosperity of a country, the attitude variables explain a relatively sizable proportion of the variance between the countries. Overall there is a considerable amount of consistency in these set of results for both measures of well being and for both men and women. In general we find a more positive response for countries where there is a greater acceptance of alternative family forms. Moreover, positive responses are also found in countries where marriage and parenthood are relatively more valued. Four contextual variables explain 63% of the variance in happiness between countries for men and five contextual variables explain 71% of the inter-country variance for women. Concerning the satisfaction with family life, the effect of the appreciation of parenthood is no longer statistically significant after controlling for the other contextual variables. A higher economic affluence, a higher approval of alternative family types and a higher appreciation of marriage seem to be predictors of a higher satisfaction with family life. Three contextual variables explain 57% of the variance in satisfaction with family life for men and 62% of the variance for women.

We need to note at this point that with respect to the results discussed above the presented R²-square values are not the same as the traditional R-squared statistics and that they only refer to the proportion of 'explainable variance'. This means that we can obtain comparatively high values for this statistic without explaining a great deal of the overall variance (because there is not much to explain) (Singer, 1998). Our variance on country-level is in any case relatively

low (partially due to the small number of countries) and the proportion of contextual variables to the number of countries is relatively high, so it is hard to obtain robust estimates.

Table 4: Results for the contextual effects in the multilevel regression analysis for the happiness and satisfaction with family life of women in 24 countries/regions

Happiness Women							
Model	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Best
Eastern-European	-.297 (.083)***					-.265 (.109)*	-.265 (.109)*
GDP per capita (*1000)		.013 (.003)***				.016 (.004)***	.016 (.004)***
Disapproval alternative family types			-.107 (.167)			-.186 (.089)*	-.186 (.089)*
Importance of marriage				-.167 (.096)		.343 (.103)***	.343 (.103)***
Appreciation of parenthood					-.167 (.120)		.200 (.092)*
R-square between	.44	.49	.07	.15	.10	.71	.71
Satisfaction with family life Women							
Model	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Best
Eastern-European	-.275 (.101)**					-.227 (.181)	
Mediterranean	-.155 (.061)**					-.077 (.107)	
GDP per capita (*1000)		.012 (.004)**				.014 (.007)*	.018 (.004)***
Disapproval alternative family types			-.198 (.154)			-.342 (.084)***	-.336 (.103)**
Importance of marriage				-.162 (.096) ^o		.399 (.076)***	.332 (.097)***
Appreciation of parenthood					-.178 (.132)		.120 (.093)
R-square between	.40	.43	.17	.17	.14	.69	.62

Note: multi-level analysis including all individual variables presented in table 2.

Note: ()= Standard errors

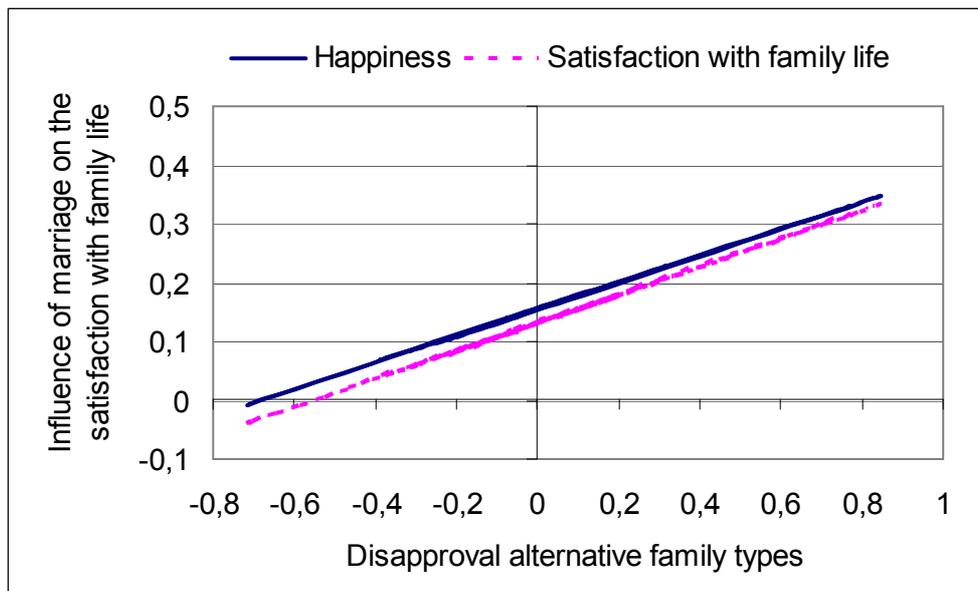
7.3 Cross-level interaction effects: testing our research hypothesis

We now consider our two central research hypotheses: (1) the influence of marital status (married versus cohabiting) on the happiness and satisfaction with the family life of men and women will differ according to the social recognition of marriage within a society, and (2) the influence of the presence of children in the household on the happiness and satisfaction with family life will vary according to the social recognition of parenthood in a society. In order to test these hypotheses cross-level interaction terms were introduced with the relevant variables on individual variables on the one hand, and the relevant variables on national/regional level on the other hand. The interaction terms were introduced in the model including the individual variables from table 2 and the contextual variables from the best model in table 3 and 4.

For the effect of marriage, we find a significant interaction effect with the approval of alternative family types within a society, and this interaction pertains to both measures of well-being. As countries score on average one unit higher on this attitude scale, the effect of marriage on the happiness and satisfaction with family life of women is respectively increasing with 0.223 (SE¹¹=0.074; p<0.01) and 0.235 (SE= 0.103; p<0.05). As can be seen in figure 8, in countries with a relatively high approval of alternative family types the effect of marriage on both measures of well-being is negligible. For men, we didn't find a similar interaction effect, nor did we find statistically significant interaction effects between the appreciation of marriage and the effect of marriage on the well-being of men or women. Hence, our first research hypothesis is only confirmed for women with regard to the approval of alternative family types within a society.

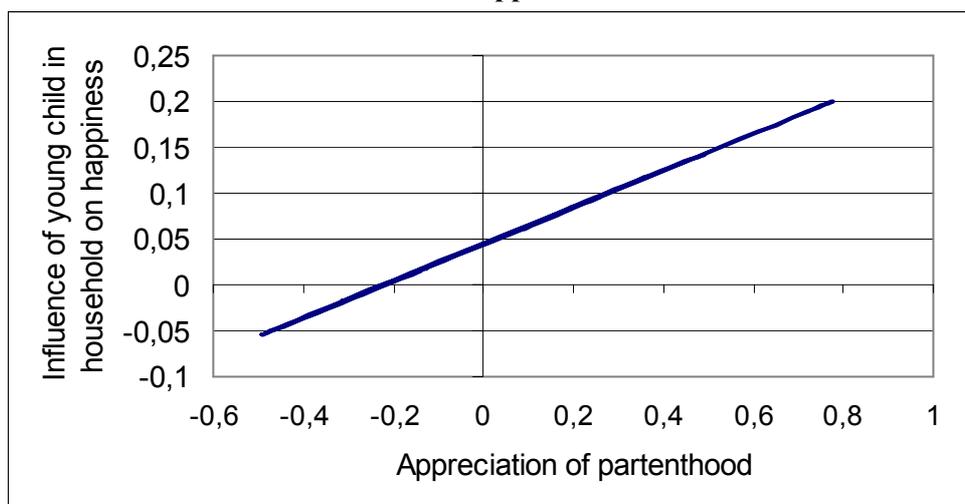
¹¹ SE=standard error

Figure 8: Cross-level interaction between social disapproval of alternative family types and the influence of marriage on the happiness and satisfaction with family life of women.



Next we looked how the effect of the presence of children in the household on the well-being of men and women might be conditioned by the appreciation of parenthood within a society. With regard to the effect of older children on the well-being we didn't find any significant interaction with the appreciation of parenthood within a society, neither for men nor for women. Concerning the younger children, only the effect of the presence of young children in the household on the happiness of men seem to be depending on the appreciation of parenthood within a society: as countries score on average one unit higher with regard to the appreciation of parenthood, the effect of the presence of young children in the household on the happiness of men increases with 0,198 (SE=0.075; $p < 0.01$). This interaction effect is visually depicted in figure 9. Our second general research hypothesis finds support in the case of the effect of young children on the happiness of men.

Figure 9: Cross-level interaction between appreciation of parenthood and influence of a young child on the happiness of men



8. Discussion

The post WWII era has witnessed many changes in family life: both in terms of the way it is lived and the meanings and values attached to it. The popularity of marriage has declined and in many western societies the married couple with children occupies a less dominant position amongst the widening array of alternative family forms. Within this changing context, researchers have been concerned with how specific family types and characteristics influence the subjective well being of men and women. In this study we have extended that research tradition by investigating how cultural differences influence well-being and how they might shape the relationship between the family situation and the subjective well-being. First, the 24 countries in this study were compared with regard to the general attitudes towards marriage, alternative family types and parenthood. Next, we looked how the presence of children in the household and the marriage status had an influence on the reported happiness and satisfaction with family life of 22 to 55 year old men and women living together with a partner.

Consistent with previous research results, we find that marriage seems to be an important source of happiness. Married people in general seem to be happier than cohabiting people, which is a confirmation of the commitment hypothesis that states that the positive effects of a partner relationship are reinforced by the long term commitment which marriage represents. It is also possible that we are observing in part the operation of a selection process. Married people may have a more positive belief in long-lasting relationships and perhaps to life in general. In short these more 'committable' people may be more inclined to get married or marry earlier than their cohabitating counterparts. However, for women we found that the effect of marriage depends to some extent on the social approval of alternative family types. More specifically, we found that in countries where alternative family types are more accepted, the difference in happiness and satisfaction with family between married and cohabiting people is smaller than in countries with a more disapproving attitude towards family types deviating from the traditional married couple. The fact that these results are found for both measures of well-being suggests that they are robust enough to warrant further attention. Our first research hypothesis is hence partially confirmed for women. Corresponding to the argumentation of Evans & Kelley (2004) we can say that a part of the positive effects of marriage for the happiness and satisfaction with family life for women is due to the fact other partner and family formations are less socially supported. For men, on the other hand, marriage seems to be important for their well-being, independent of the social support for alternative family types or appreciation. Bringing both results together, we could argue that the long-term commitment characterizing marriage is beneficial for men, while for women, satisfying the social norms with regard to family life may be more important. Another possible explanation for the gender difference follows from considering the extent to which the social meanings of marriage are still linked to the idea of the male breadwinner model. Davis, Greenstein & Gerteisen Marks (2007, p. 1246) for example found that "*cohabiting men report performing more household labour than do married men, and cohabiting women report performing less household labour than do married women*". Hence, cohabiting couples expect and behave in a more egalitarian way than married couples do. Since especially the role of men has been subject to considerable pressure and real changes in recent times, it is possible that significant numbers of men continue to feel 'safer' within the traditional institution of marriage which guarantees them certain privileges. Finally, it is also important to note that the ISSP data did not include detailed information on the partnership and marriage history of the respondents. Important details of the relationship are thus beyond our view. For example, the meaning of a second marriage can be totally different than for a first marriage, and cohabiting after a divorce can have a totally different meaning than a cohabitation of a never married. Therefore, more detailed distinctions with regard to the

partnership history and with regard to characteristics of the current partner relationship would surely provide greater insights into the dynamics we are studying here.

Our second important set of findings is related to the effect of children in the household on the well-being of men and women. First, the results of the individual analysis show that the presence of young children (under age 6) in the household does not seem to have an influence on the happiness and satisfaction with family of 22 to 55 year old men and women in a partner relationship. Hence, it seems like the positive and negative effects related to early parenthood balance neutralize or counterbalance each other. For men however, we did find the effect of young children on their happiness to be dependent on the appreciation of parenthood within a society, which is a partial confirmation of our second research hypothesis. A possible explanation could be the more vulnerable position of men with regard to parenthood than women and the fact that ‘fathering’ is perceived as less obvious than ‘mothering’. As a consequence, in cultures where parenthood is more appreciated, men take more pleasure in ‘playing father’. Possibly, the fact that we do not find a similar effect for women could also be explained by the fact that the positive sides of parenthood can never overshadow the negative costs of parenthood for women, no matter how high the appreciation of parenthood is within a society. Secondly, we also find noteworthy results concerning the effect of the presence of older children in the household (age 6 to 17) on the well-being of men and women. For both men as women, the presence of older children goes hand in hand with a lower level of reported happiness. For women, also the satisfaction with family life is negatively associated with the presence of older children. The balance between costs and benefits hence seem to tilt to the negative side with regard to the effect of older children. As one could argue that the time and opportunity costs related to smaller children are bigger than for older children mainly the old saying ‘small children, small worries, big children, big worries’ seems suitable here. The fact that we only find a negative effect of older children on the satisfaction with family life of women could also be an indication of the fact that women still feel that they have the ultimate responsibility with regard to the successful functioning of the household. If we relate our findings to the results of Haller and Hadler (2006) concerning the differences between the ‘happiness measure’ and the ‘satisfaction measure’, the influence of older children on the happiness of men and women could more be related to the emotional side of the parent-child relationship, while the satisfaction with family life is more related to a more or less objective well-functioning household. Another consideration would point to the fact that the contemporary national policies are only directed primarily towards the support of early parenthood and fail with regard to the support of families with older children. We also note that the age categories used in this study are necessarily constrained by the information available in the ISSP dataset. More detailed distinctions with regard to the age of the children living in the household, in combination with information on children outside the household, could be valuable.

In terms of the effects of family structure on subjective well-being we need to highlight the role of employment status and how this varies for men and women. These gender differences suggest that the men and women in this study have to some degree been socialized in the traditional male breadwinner model, and they appear to feel more comfortable when their family circumstances are congruent with that model. Unemployed men are less happy and less satisfied with their family life than full time working men, while for women unemployment is only a negative factor in so far as it involves their husbands, working half time is only beneficial for the happiness and satisfaction with family life of women, and men are happier with a housewife than with a full-time working partner. These results are in line with the findings of Bouazzaoui & Mullet (2002) who found that the effect of the personal

employment status is stronger for men, while for women the spousal employment factor is more important. A possible explanation for the fact that half-time working is only beneficial for women, could be that only women have sources of satisfaction within their family (Haller & Hadler, 2006). As housewives do not significantly differ in their happiness and satisfaction with family life from full-time working women, it seems that gainful work and family are equivalent sources of happiness/satisfaction for women, and that a balanced combination of both is the most beneficial situation for women. On the other hand, we can also see evidence full-time work is still putting more pressure on women than on men, as full-time working women are more unhappy than half-time working women. This latter effect clearly implies that, despite policy efforts to reduce work-family incompatibilities by governments (many of which are represented in our sample), women still don't experience their greatest subjective well-being in a *full-time two-earner family configuration*. In future research, we expect to explore how the patterns of effects we have reported from this project may themselves be contingent on other aspects of the macro-level context. In particular we might expect that the gender role attitudes within a country and the national institutional arrangements directed towards work-family compatibility could be quite consequential in this regard.

Concerning the national differences with regard to the mean happiness and satisfaction with family life we could argue that, since we find a positive association between the appreciation of marriage and parenthood within a country and happiness and satisfaction with family life that a belief in long-lasting relationships is important for the well-being of individuals. If we see the social appreciation of marriage and parenthood as an indicator of the importance and strength of family relationships within a society, the supporting role of a family seems to be important for men and women. This raises the question as to whether the contemporary family policy shouldn't be more directed towards supporting these primary family relationships themselves, rather than focusing mainly on alternatives. Family policy in many western countries is directed towards financial rewards, tax deductions, social benefits, ... while a more explicit policy directed towards the reinforcement of family relationships may be more beneficial (Matthijs, 2007).

Finally, we need to reiterate that our results are referring to 22 to 55 year old men and women in coresident partner relationships. Comparative research on the well-being of youngsters, elderly people, singles, single parents, not only offers interesting future research possibilities, but can also reveal different international well-being patterns that are also likely to be shaped by the cultural and institutional context in which the research subjects are imbedded.

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Appendix 1: Country Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Country
AUSTRAL	Australia
AUSTRIA	Austria
CZECH	Czech Republic
DENMARK	Denmark
EAST-GE	East-Germany
FIN	Finland
FLANDERS	Flanders
FRANCE	France
GB	Great Brittain
HUNGARY	Hungary
LATVIA	Latvia
NETH	The Netherlands
N-IRE	Northern Ireland
NORWAY	Norway
POLAND	Poland
PORT	Portugal
RUSSIA	Russia
SLOVAK	Slovak Republic
SLOVEN	Slovenia
SPAIN	Spain
SWEDEN	Sweden
SWITZ	Switzerland
USA	United States of America
WEST-GE	West-Germany
AUSTRAL	Australia

Appendix 2: 22-55 years old men and women in the national samples

Country	Men	Women	Total
AUSTRAL	289	376	665
AUSTRIA	337	569	906
CZECH	226	436	662
DENMARK	288	359	647
EAST-GE	218	247	465
FIN	274	356	630
FLANDERS	287	345	632
FRANCE	296	778	1074
GB	301	412	713
HUNGARY	192	213	405
LATVIA	217	248	465
NETH	279	302	581
N-IRE	145	197	342
NORWAY	369	421	790
POLAND	240	320	560
PORT	164	264	428
RUSSIA	320	406	726
SLOVAK	235	295	530
SLOVEN	238	259	497
SPAIN	447	539	986
SWEDEN	231	281	512
SWITZ	189	204	393
USA	193	279	472
WEST-GE	93	102	195
TOTAL	6068	8208	14276

Appendix 3: Absolute and relative frequencies for individual variables

	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
Age:				
22-27 years	453	7.47	929	11.32
28-33 years	971	16	1481	18.04
34-39 years	1254	20.67	1739	21.19
40-45 years	1297	21.37	1691	20.60
46-51 years	1282	21.13	1448	17.64
52-55 years	811	13.37	920	11.21
Education				
Low	748	12,40	1052	12.91
Middle	3282	54,39	4253	52.18
High	2004	33.21	2845	34.91
<i>Missing</i>	34		58	
Partner situation				
Married	4881	81,92	6666	83,36
Cohabiting	1077	18,08	1331	16,64
<i>Missing</i>	110		211	
Presence of children younger than 6 years old				
No	4436	74,97	5881	73,59
Yes	1481	25,03	2111	26,41
<i>Missing</i>	151		216	
Presence of children between 6 and 17 years old				
Ne	3189	53,91	4315	54,02
Ja	2726	46,09	3673	45,98
<i>Missing</i>	153		220	
Employment situation:				
Full-time working	5199	86,18	4040	49,44
Part-time working(<35 uren)	302	5,01	1986	24,31
Home	24	0,40	1270	15,54
Unemployed	238	3,94	432	5,29
Other	270	4,48	443	5,42
<i>Missing</i>	35		37	
Employment situation partner:				
Full-time working	3130	53,56	6763	85,54
Part-time working(<35 uren)	1108	18,96	253	3,20
Home	862	14,75	33	0,42
Unemployed	273	4,67	286	3,62
Other	471	8,06	571	7,22
<i>Missing</i>	224		302	
Income quartile household (per capita)				
1st quartile	1544	25.51	2295	28.24
2nd quartile	1602	26.57	2264	27.86
3rd quartile	1508	25.01	1939	23.86
4th quartile	1375	22.81	1628	20.03
<i>Missing</i>	39		82	

Appendix 4 : Real Gross Domestic Product per capita for the 24 countries/regions (2002)

Country	Real Gross Domestic Product per Capita (*1000)
AUSTRAL	28,57
AUSTRIA	28,78
CZECH	15,48
DENMARK	29,02
EAST-GE	26,49
FIN	24,08
FLANDERS	26,34
FRANCE	26,93
GB	26,83
HUNGARY	13,32
LATVIA	10,71
NETH	27,73
N-IRE	26,83
NORWAY	33,53
POLAND	9,23
PORT	18,73
RUSSIA	10,81
SLOVAK	10,83
SLOVEN	20,61
SPAIN	21,57
SWEDEN	26,50
SWITZ	30,57
USA	34,50
WEST-GE	26,49

Source: Alan Heston, Robert Summers and Bettina Aten, Penn World Table Version 6.2, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania, September 2006.