

**Cultural vs. Policy Influences on Cohort Fertility Trends: A Natural Experiment Study
on the German Minority in Eastern Belgium**

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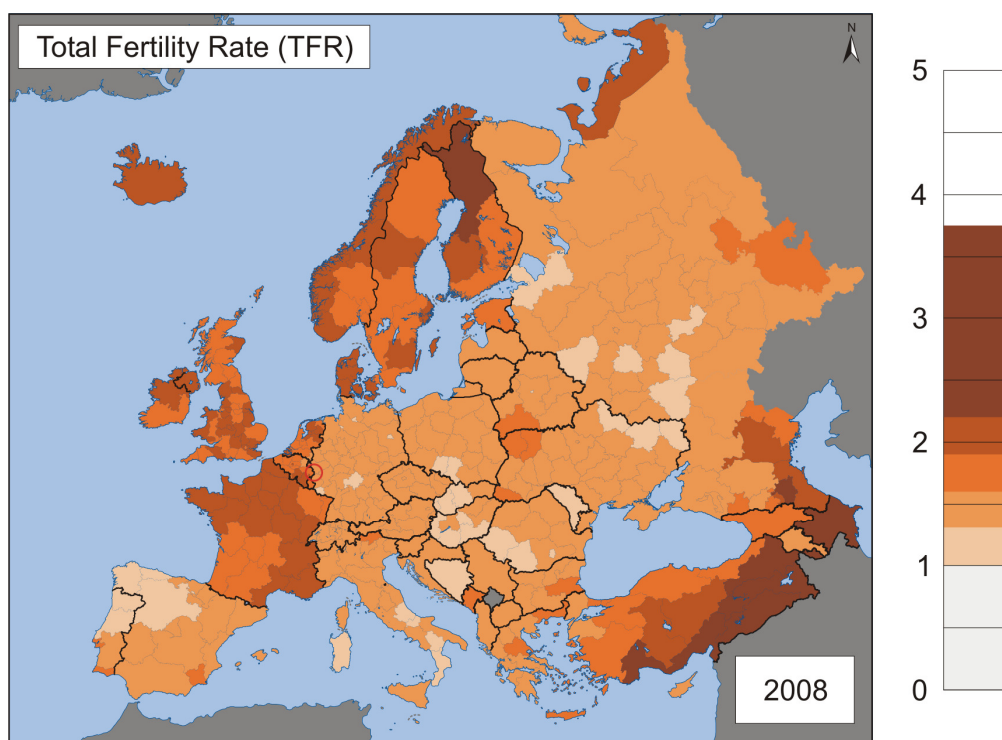
Abstract

A few countries in Europe - such as France, Sweden or Belgium - still report cohort fertility rates close to two children per women. On the contrary, fertility is currently only around 1.5-1.6 children in German-speaking countries. These country variations in fertility levels are usually explained by referring to differences in attitudes and social policy contexts. However, due to the mutual interdependence of the two, it is cumbersome to isolate the impact of cultural and institutional factors on behavior. In our study we attempt to disentangle the two by drawing on a natural experiment. After WW I two German districts were ceded to Belgium. The population in this area retained its German identity, but is subject to Belgium family policies. Our study uses (micro)-census data to contrast completed cohort fertility of the German minority in Belgium with western Germany as well as the Flemish and French communities in Belgium, controlling for individual-level characteristics. First results indicate that the fertility pattern of the German minority in Belgium resembles more the German pattern than the Belgium one, suggesting that cultural factors may be more powerful in explaining fertility levels than family policy contexts.

Fertility Differences in Western Europe

Over the last decades a distinct fertility divide has emerged between western Germany and its western and northern neighbour countries. Cohort fertility rates for women born in 1960 are in western Germany at a level of around 1.6, which is well below the figures reported for Belgium (1.9), France (2.1) or Denmark (1.9) (GGP, 2011). With regard to the percentage of women remaining childless, western Germany reports levels above 20%, which are among the highest in Europe (GGP, 2011). The country divide in fertility is also visible in recent TFR-statistics (see Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Total Fertility Rate in Europe 2008



Source: Statistical Offices; Base Map: Eurostat (2003), extended by MPIDR/ CGG (2009)

It is disputed, which factors have contributed to the emergence of this fertility divide. Some argue that it is predominantly cultural/ societal norms and resulting deviations in family images, which are responsible for these differences (Goldstein et al., 2003). Many (western) Germans still believe that prior to founding a family they should first finalize education, establish themselves on the labour market and marry (see Hank, 2003). Persons not complying with these ideals might decide to delay their transition to parenthood or ultimately remain childless. With regard to reconciliation of career and family plans another peculiarity

of the (western) German debate on family images is that until very recently there were strong societal reservations against working mothers. This was especially true for mothers of young children, as it was widely believed, that such behaviour is harmful for the development of the child (see Kolbe, 2002: 153 ff.). There was even a special colloquial term for mothers pursuing such behaviour: *Rabenmutter* (raven mother). The existence of such norms, which are much less prevalent in France (Ruckdeschel, 2009) and Belgium, increases difficulties for women to combine career ambitions with child-bearing plans, which is likely to have an effect on fertility decisions.

In contrast to this social norms argumentation others have argued that differences in family policies might be responsible for the fertility divide (e.g. Chesnais, 1998). (West) German politics were for a long time oriented towards the male-breadwinner model. Only recently reforms were implemented, aiming at fostering gender equality and supporting reconciliation of dual employment and child rearing (Ostner, 2006; Henninger et al. 2008). In contrast to other Western European countries, Germany did not put a high emphasis on the development of child care institutions to support employed mothers. Despite recent improvements, the supply of institutional child care for children under 3 years as well as full-time child care for the 3-6 year old is still relatively low compared to other European countries (see also Morel, 2007: 630).

Belgium and France on the other hand, established already very early a well-functioning child care system, which is in Belgium for the 3-6 year old almost universal and free of charge. Also institutional child care for the 0-3 year old is much more developed in Belgium and France than in western Germany. According to the EU-SILC-survey, in 2005 42% of all 0-3 year old in Belgium (32% in France) were in formal childcare, while in Germany this was only the case for 16% of this age group (GGP, 2011). Access to child care might be particularly relevant for fertility decisions of highly educated women and men, as they face high opportunity costs, if they cannot fully participate in the labour market due to child rearing obligations (see e.g. Kravdal, 1996, on Norway).

The German Minority in Eastern Belgium – a potential Natural Experiment Setting

It is difficult to determine the role of societal norms and policies in influencing fertility trends, as they are usually interrelated (Neyer and Andersson, 2008). In societies with conservative

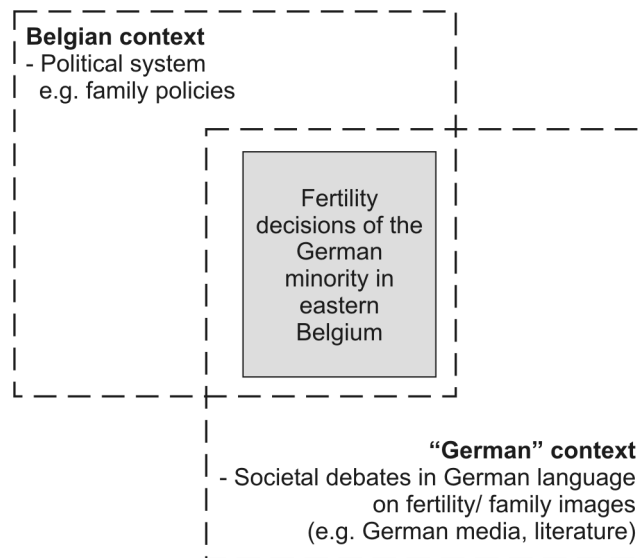
family images it is likely that conservative family policies are implemented, which might again reinforce conservative family images. In order to overcome such “causality problems”, this study draws on a natural experiment setting, which potentially allows us to distinguish between the effects of societal norms and family policies.

After World War I Germany had to cede two districts to Belgium as a compensation for the attack on the neutral Belgian state (George, 1927; Scharte, 2010). In 1920 the Belgium state took over the administration over the districts of Eupen and Malmedy, which were officially annexed in 1925 (location is highlighted with red circle in Fig. 1). The German population in this area was not resettled, but remained as a German-speaking minority in the Belgium state and was granted Belgium citizenship. Today, the German-speaking community consists of around 74,000 inhabitants. Most of this population is living spatially concentrated in 2 towns and 7 rural communities, in which they constitute the vast majority. These settlements are situated at the border to Germany. The German language is still the language of communication and will probably also remain so in the future, as German is one of the three official languages of the Belgium state.

The German minority has been living for almost 90 years in the context of the Belgium welfare state, with the exception of a short period during World War II, when Belgium was occupied by Germany (1940-1944). While prior to 1918 neither Belgium nor Germany had implemented substantial policies to support families, this has drastically changed since then. But the countries took very different pathways with regard to the family policies in place, as has been discussed above. This implies that the German minority in Belgium received quite different family policy treatments in contrast to the western German population. But in terms of societal discussions on family images it is likely that the German minority was still heavily influenced by discourses in western Germany, as its members were able to watch German national TV channels, read German-language newspapers and books (see Fig 2)¹.

¹ The TV-Program in German language provided by the public Belgian broadcasting service only exists since 1991. Apart from this there a small number of German-language radio stations operating in that area.

Fig. 2: Belgian Political Context vs. "German" Cultural Context



If national family policies are the driving factor behind fertility differences in Western Europe, we would expect the fertility of the German minority in Belgium to be very similar to the one observed in other parts of Belgium. If discourses on social and cultural norms are dominating the fertility behaviour, the fertility levels of the German minority should rather follow the pattern observed in western Germany. In our study we will look into this by contrasting completed cohort fertilities of the German minority in Belgium with both the patterns in western Germany as well as the ones prevalent in the Flemish- and French-speaking parts of Belgium.

Data and Methods

For Belgium we use data from the census of 2001, providing us with a 100% sample of the population living in Belgium at that time. For Germany we are using the scientific use file of the micro-census of 2008². Based on this cross-sectional information we reconstruct completed cohort fertilities for the cohorts born between 1935 and 1959. These cohorts are

² The German micro-census of 2008 provides data on the number of children ever born to a woman. Before this date, only data on the number of children with the current married partner had been collected by the German statistical office.

most relevant for our analysis, as the second half of the 20th century was the period, where we could see the strongest divergence in family policies between Belgium and Germany.

In identifying the German minority in Eastern Belgium we are faced with the challenge, that the census does not provide information on mother tongue or membership to the German community. There is information on citizenship, but this is not informative as the majority of the German-speaking population in this area holds the Belgium citizenship. We also do not have access to the names, which might help us in identifying members of the German minority. Therefore, we decided to use information on the place of residence as a proxy. This implies that all persons living in the nine municipalities belonging to the German Community in Belgium are considered to be part of the German minority³. The same way we define membership to the Flemish- and French-Speaking Communities in Belgium.

With regard to Germany we decided to only look at respondents living in western Germany, as we are mostly interested in the interplay of fertility with western German family policies, which were strongly oriented towards the male-breadwinner model. The family policies in place in eastern Germany until 1989 strongly diverged from this model.

One challenge of our analysis is that there might be strong differences in the socioeconomic structure of the regions we are comparing. The German community in Belgium consists of two medium-sized towns with a population of 18,000 and 10,000 inhabitants and seven rural communities with 3,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. Such a rather rural setting might provide a more favourable environment for fertility decisions compared to the large metropolitan areas in which substantial parts of the Belgian and western German population are living. However, we can also find contrasts within the German community. The town of Kelmis is situated in the direct vicinity of the German city of Aachen, into which many of its inhabitants commute. Also Eupen and Raeren belong to the densely populated area along the transport and communication corridor connecting Cologne and Brussels in the Northern part of the German Community. The other six municipalities are on the other hand

³ This also includes women which are born in Germany (app. 18.6% of the population in this area) and/or hold the German citizenship (15.8%). In the analysis we test the sensitivity of our findings by using alternative definitions of the German minority, in which one or both of these groups are excluded.

situated in the Southern part, which can be characterized as peripheral and predominantly rural. It is spatially separated from the Northern part by the Hautes Fagnes/ Hohe Venn, an almost unpopulated moorland.

Nevertheless, we felt that we should contrast the fertility pattern of the German community in Belgium also to a reference group in Belgium which lives in a comparable socio-economic context. For this we make use of the fact, that the German community is part of the Belgium district Verviers, which comprises in addition to the nine predominantly German-speaking municipalities also 20 predominantly French-speaking municipalities. We use the population of these 20 municipalities as an additional reference group.

In this extended abstract we present descriptive statistics, decomposing cohort fertility rates by parity and educational attainment. The latter is defined as follows: low (ISCED 0-2), middle (ISCED 3-4) and high (ISCED 5-6). Our main interest is on the prevalence of childlessness and progression to third and higher order births. This analysis will be complemented by logit models for these two variables, controlling for a number of individual level and contextual level characteristics. As individual-level characteristics we are able to include place of residence, age, educational attainment, country of birth and nationality. As contextual characteristics we include municipality size. The data as such does not allow us to control for socio-economic status beyond educational attainment. For the Belgian census information on socio-economic status is only available for the cross-section in 2001. Similarly, the German micro-census only has this information available for the cross-section of 2008. Therefore, we limit ourselves to controlling for educational attainment, which allows us to at least partly also capture the confounding role of socio-economic status in fertility.

Preliminary Findings

In presenting the results we will first turn to the birth parity distributions for the cohorts born between 1935 and 1959. Tab. 1 in the appendix shows the data for the German minority in Belgium, Tab. 2 the values for western Germany, and Tab. 3 and Tab. 4 the results for the Flemish and French Communities in Belgium. We will first look at changes in the share of childless women over cohorts. In western Germany, where high shares of childless women are a prominent characteristic of the fertility pattern, this share has almost doubled from 11% in the cohort born 1935-1939 to 19% in the cohort born 1955-1959. In the French- and Flemish-

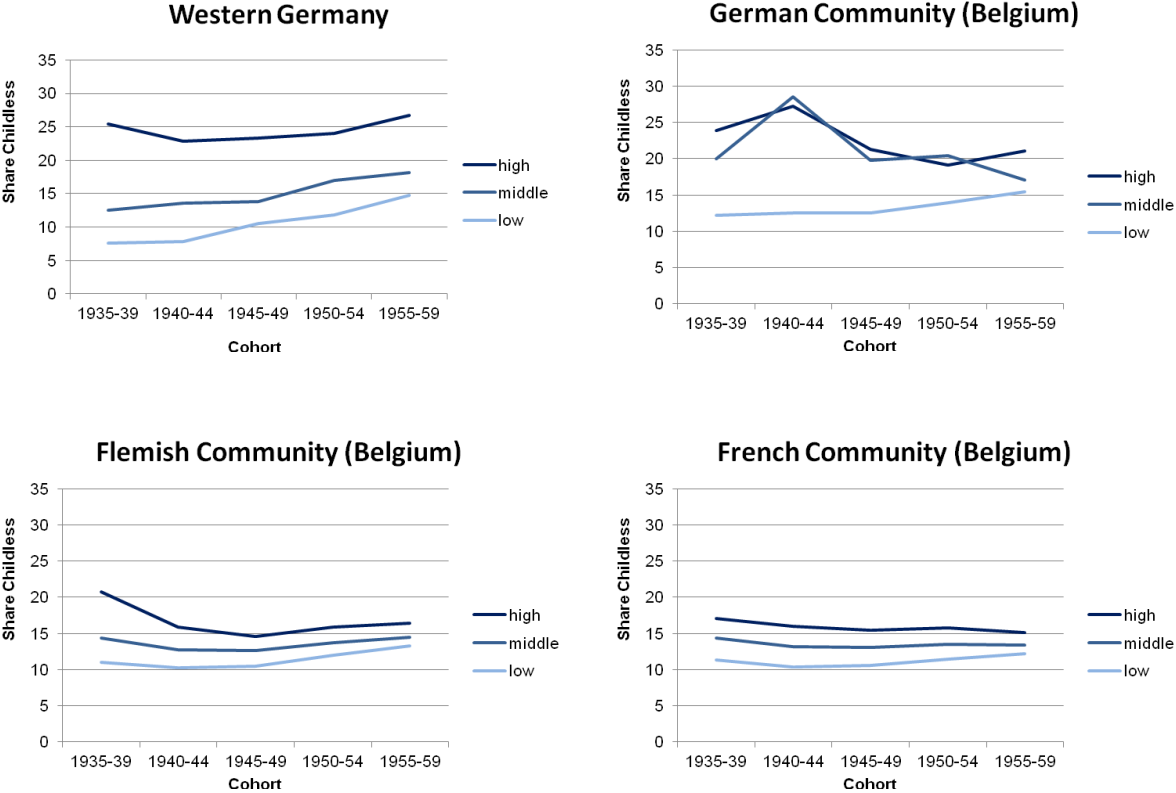
speaking part of Belgium, on the other hand, the older cohorts had higher shares of childlessness compared to Germany, with a level of app. 13%. But over the cohorts, only marginal increases are visible, with the French-speaking part reporting 14% and the Flemish-speaking part 15% of childless women in the cohort born between 1955 and 1959. The population living in the nine municipalities of the German community in Belgium, on the other hand, experienced an increase of the share of childless women from 14.7% in the cohort 1935-1939 to 18.7% in the cohort 1955-1959. The latter number is very close to the one reported for western Germany.

However, one should be careful to rush to easy conclusions. If we exclude in the cohort 1955-59 of the German minority in Belgium those women who were born in Germany or which hold the German citizenship, the share of childless women is with 16.6% or respectively 16.1% getting closer to the number reported for the other parts of Belgium. But also those numbers are substantially higher than the one reported by the population of the French-speaking municipalities of the district of Verviers, which are neighbouring the German Community, where only 13.8% of the women born between 1955 and 1955 are childless.

We will now turn to the share of women with third or higher order births. With regard to this aspect, we do not only see substantial differences between western Germany and Belgium, but also between the different language communities within Belgium. In western Germany, the share of women with three or more children decreased from 32% in the cohort 1935-1939 to 19% in the cohort 1955-1959. Also the Flemish-speaking community in Belgium experienced a substantial decrease from 36.7 % to 22.9%, while the changes are less drastic in the French-speaking part (38% to 27.1%). With regard to the share of women with three and higher order births, the population of the German community in Belgium is exhibiting levels above the Flemish-speaking community. In the cohort 1955-1959 the share of women with three and more children is 24.6%. If we exclude German citizens or those born in Germany, the shares are even increasing to 26.8% or 26.5% respectively. This is close to the numbers of the French-speaking part of Belgium. Nevertheless, it is still substantially lower than the values observed in the neighbouring French-speaking municipalities of the district Verviers, where 32.6% of all women gave birth to three or more children. This

suggests that with regard to higher order births, the rather rural context of Eastern Belgium seems to have a positive influence on the pattern.

Fig. 3 : Childlessness by Educational Attainment



Sources: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census & German Microcensus, 2008; own calculations

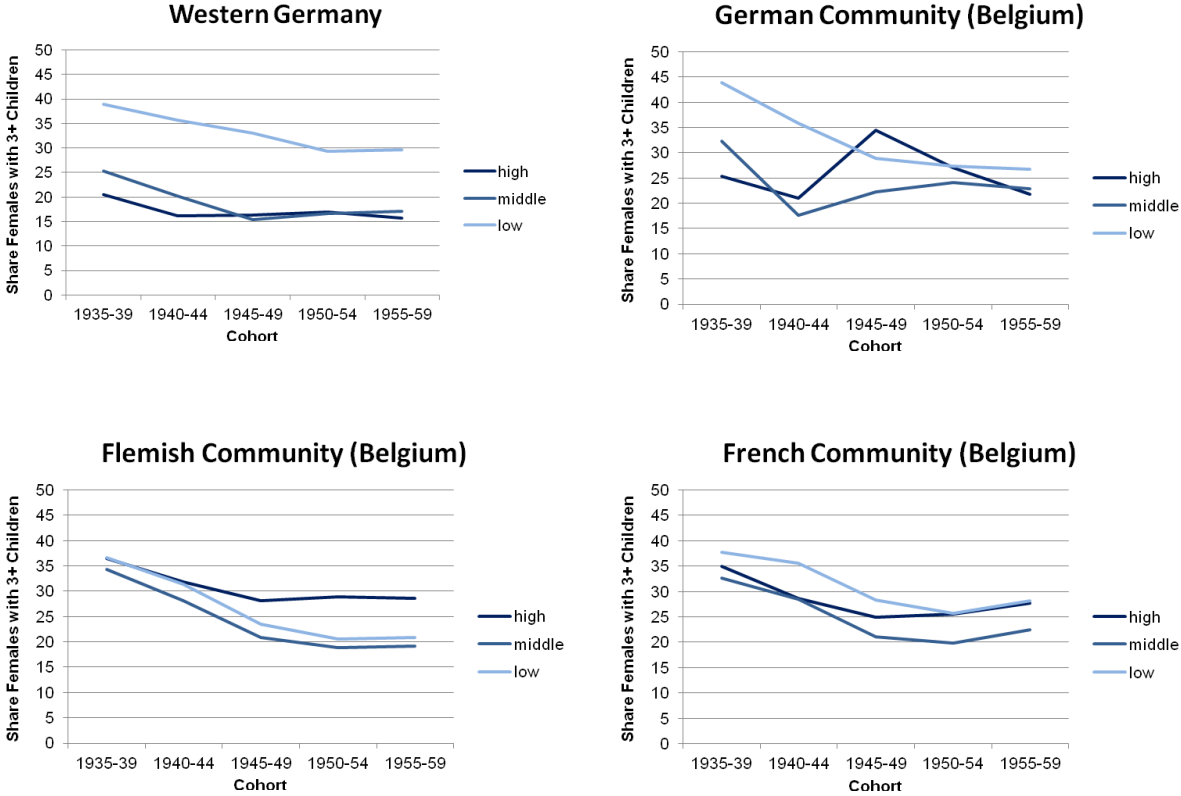
Another important aspect of the low fertility levels in western Germany is the high share of women with higher educational attainment, which remain childless (Kreyenfeld and Konietzka, 2007). This can also be seen in Figure 3. Already in the cohort born 1935-1939 around 25 percent of the highly educated remained childless and this pattern has not changed in the younger cohorts. There has been a process of convergence, as the share of childless among the middle and lower educated has increased from the older to the younger cohorts. But there are still stark differences existing between the higher educated and the other two categories. In the Flemish and the French Community of Belgium the share of childless women is also increasing by level of educational attainment, but the differences between the categories are much lower and converging over the cohorts. All educational groups display

lower levels of childlessness compared to their western German counterparts. But the differences are most pronounced for the higher educated, where the numbers in western Germany are close to 30%, which is almost twice as high as in the Flemish and French Communities of Belgium.

Looking at the German Community, we face the problem that disaggregating by cohort, parity and education we run for the higher and middle educated women into the problem of small sample sizes. This is especially true for the older cohorts, in which for a substantial part information on the educational attainment is missing (see Tab. 5). Therefore, the values for the cohorts 1935-39 and 1940-1944 should be treated with caution. Among the younger cohorts, the share of childless among the low and middle educated resemble the levels observed in western Germany. But among the higher educated the share of childless is close to the levels reported by the middle educational category. The small differences between the educational categories might be an effect of the excellent access to low-cost institutional child care in Belgium. An alternative explanation might relate to the non-metropolitan context, in which the German community is embedded. In such a setting, educational differences might not play out that strong compared to large metropolitan areas, in which a substantial share of the western German population is living. In additional multivariate analyses we will in the future be able to look into this in more detail.

With regard to the women with three or more children (see Fig. 4), in western Germany we can observe a strong gradient by educational level. The lowest educated are more likely to get three or more children compared to those with medium or higher educational attainment. In Belgium the differences are not so clear-cut. In the Flemish part the share of women with three or more children is the highest among highly educated women. In the French-speaking part next to the highly educated the levels are also quite high for the low-educated. Among the German minority in Belgium the values for the middle and high educated are fluctuating due to rather small sample sizes. The pattern hints in the direction, that also with regard to progression to higher order parities the differences by educational attainment are smaller among the German minority compared to western Germany.

Fig. 4 : Share Females with three or higher Parity Births by Educational Attainment



Sources: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census & German Microcensus, 2008; own calculations

Discussion and Outlook

Our preliminary findings confront us with a mixed picture. The fertility pattern of the German minority in Belgium has not completely converged on the pattern prevalent in the Flemish- and French-speaking part of the country. This is especially true for the share of childless women, where the values of the German minority are very close to the levels observed in western Germany. This gives support to the view, that the existing fertility differences between Germany and Belgium are not solely a result of the different paths in family policy development.

However, the fertility pattern of the German minority in Belgium seems to deviate in some aspects from the western German one. In respect to the prevalence of women with three and more children, the values for the German minority in Belgium seem to resemble more the ones of the other Belgium Communities, than the levels observed in western Germans. There

are also indications that the relationship between educational attainment and fertility outcomes seems to differ between the German minority and western Germans. In western Germany strong differences are visible along this gradient in terms of childlessness and higher order births. Among the German minority in Belgium, these differences seem to be smaller. The observed pattern might after all show that Belgium family context may positively influence fertility outcomes. However, this pattern might also relate to the fact, that there are no big cities existing in the area, where the German minority is located. In such a rather rural context socio-economic constraints to higher order births might be smaller compared to metropolitan areas. We hope to shed more light on this aspect in our future modelling attempts.

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Appendix

Tab. 1: Parity distribution of women born 1935-1959, Belgium, Eastcantons

			Parity					Total
			0	1	2	3	4+	
COHORT	1935-1939	Count	285	322	536	422	376	1941
		% within COHORT	14.7%	16.6%	27.6%	21.7%	19.4%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	344	332	685	404	262	2027
		% within Cohort	17.0%	16.4%	33.8%	19.9%	12.9%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	314	408	667	358	179	1926
		% within Cohort	16.3%	21.2%	34.6%	18.6%	9.3%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	413	433	843	432	149	2270
		% within Cohort	18.2%	19.1%	37.1%	19.0%	6.6%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	485	446	1027	471	170	2599
		% within Cohort	18.7%	17.2%	39.5%	18.1%	6.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	1841	1941	3758	2087	1136	10763
		% within Cohort	17.1%	18.0%	34.9%	19.4%	10.6%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census, 2001; own calculations

Tab. 2: Parity distribution of women born 1935-1959, Western Germany

			Parity					Total
			0	1	2	3	4+	
COHORT	1935-1939	Count	1272	2483	4181	2179	1486	11601
		% within Cohort	11.0%	21.4%	36.0%	18.8%	12.8%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	1429	2702	4436	1873	974	11414
		% within Cohort	12.5%	23.7%	38.9%	16.4%	8.5%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	1383	2558	3878	1362	640	9821
		% within Cohort	14.1%	26.1%	39.5%	13.9%	6.5%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	1935	2901	4332	1570	642	11380
		% within Cohort	17.0%	25.5%	38.1%	13.8%	5.6%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	2365	2887	4732	1712	644	12340
		% within Cohort	19.2%	23.4%	38.4%	13.9%	5.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	8384	13531	21559	8696	4386	56556
		% within Cohort	14.8%	23.9%	38.1%	15.4%	7.8%	100.0%

Source: German Microcensus 2008; own calculations

Tab. 3: Parity distribution of women born 1935-1959, Belgium, Flemish Region

			Parity					Total
			0	1	2	3	4+	
COHORT	1935-1939	Count	21118	33924	47612	30848	28697	162199
		% within Cohort	13.0%	20.9%	29.4%	19.0%	17.7%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	18403	34735	52670	29110	19493	154411
		% within Cohort	11.9%	22.5%	34.1%	18.9%	12.6%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	23112	47721	72686	31291	15222	190032
		% within Cohort	12.2%	25.1%	38.2%	16.5%	8.0%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	27614	49228	78417	31481	13720	200460
		% within Cohort	13.8%	24.6%	39.1%	15.7%	6.8%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	33098	51592	86844	35619	15327	222480
		% within Cohort	14.9%	23.2%	39.0%	16.0%	6.9%	100.0%
	Total	Count	123345	217200	338229	158349	92459	929582
		% within Cohort	13.3%	23.4%	36.4%	17.0%	9.9%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census; own calculations

Tab. 4: Parity distribution of women born 1935-1959, Belgium, Walloon Region

			Parity					Total
			0	1	2	3	4+	
COHORT	1935-1939	Count	10834	17445	22594	14845	16351	82069
		% within Cohort	13.2%	21.3%	27.5%	18.1%	19.9%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	9569	16957	24184	14322	12413	77445
		% within Cohort	12.4%	21.9%	31.2%	18.5%	16.0%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	14072	27569	38495	18608	11415	110159
		% within Cohort	12.8%	25.0%	34.9%	16.9%	10.4%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	15741	29219	41569	18875	10274	115678
		% within Cohort	13.6%	25.3%	35.9%	16.3%	8.9%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	17061	28412	43624	21842	11260	122199
		% within Cohort	14.0%	23.3%	35.7%	17.9%	9.2%	100.0%
	Total	Count	67277	119602	170466	88492	61713	507550
		% within Cohort	13.3%	23.6%	33.6%	17.4%	12.2%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census; own calculations

Tab. 5 Parity distribution of women born 1935-1959 by educational attainment, Belgium, Eastcantons

Education Categories			Parity					Total
			0	1	2	3	4+	
None, Primary & Lower Secondary	1935-1939	Count	131	165	308	258	216	1078
		% within Cohort	12.2%	15.3%	28.6%	23.9%	20.0%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	144	184	409	245	166	1148
		% within Cohort	12.5%	16.0%	35.6%	21.3%	14.5%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	133	234	392	210	98	1067
		% within Cohort	12.5%	21.9%	36.7%	19.7%	9.2%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	162	219	465	244	73	1163
		% within Cohort	13.9%	18.8%	40.0%	21.0%	6.3%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	182	206	473	236	78	1175
		% within Cohort	15.5%	17.5%	40.3%	20.1%	6.6%	100.0%
	Total	Count	752	1008	2047	1193	631	5631
		% within Cohort	13.4%	17.9%	36.4%	21.2%	11.2%	100.0%
Higher Secondary	1935-1939	Count	26	30	32	24	18	130
		% within Cohort	20.0%	23.1%	24.6%	18.5%	13.8%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	52	35	63	18	14	182
		% within Cohort	28.6%	19.2%	34.6%	9.9%	7.7%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	41	44	76	34	12	207
		% within Cohort	19.8%	21.3%	36.7%	16.4%	5.8%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	72	82	114	60	25	353
		% within Cohort	20.4%	23.2%	32.3%	17.0%	7.1%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	88	86	224	93	25	516
		% within Cohort	17.1%	16.7%	43.4%	18.0%	4.8%	100.0%
	Total	Count	279	277	509	229	94	1388
		% within Cohort	20.1%	20.0%	36.7%	16.5%	6.8%	100.0%
Tertiary Education	1935-1939	Count	17	15	21	15	3	71
		% within Cohort	23.9%	21.1%	29.6%	21.1%	4.2%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	40	29	47	18	13	147
		% within Cohort	27.2%	19.7%	32.0%	12.2%	8.8%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	48	50	72	33	22	225
		% within Cohort	21.3%	22.2%	32.0%	14.7%	9.8%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	75	69	142	78	28	392
		% within Cohort	19.1%	17.6%	36.2%	19.9%	7.1%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	116	88	227	83	37	551
		% within Cohort	21.1%	16.0%	41.2%	15.1%	6.7%	100.0%
	Total	Count	296	251	509	227	103	1386
		% within Cohort	21.4%	18.1%	36.7%	16.4%	7.4%	100.0%

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Missing	1935-1939	Count	78	89	136	101	104	508
		% within Cohort	15.4%	17.5%	26.8%	19.9%	20.5%	100.0%
	1940-1944	Count	84	54	117	87	51	393
		% within Cohort	21.4%	13.7%	29.8%	22.1%	13.0%	100.0%
	1945-1949	Count	70	53	79	60	31	293
		% within Cohort	23.9%	18.1%	27.0%	20.5%	10.6%	100.0%
	1950-1954	Count	71	40	77	37	13	238
		% within Cohort	29.8%	16.8%	32.4%	15.5%	5.5%	100.0%
	1955-1959	Count	62	41	54	32	16	205
		% within Cohort	30.2%	20.0%	26.3%	15.6%	7.8%	100.0%
	Total	Count	365	277	463	317	215	1637
		% within Cohort	22.3%	16.9%	28.3%	19.4%	13.1%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Belgium, 2001 Census; own calculations