

SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

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The first or “classic” demographic transition refers to the historical declines in mortality and fertility, as witnessed from the 18th Century onward in several European populations, and continuing at present in most developing countries. The end point of the first demographic transition (FDT) was supposed to be an older stationary and stable population corresponding with replacement fertility (i.e. just over 2 children on average), zero population growth, and life expectancies higher than 70 years. As there would be an ultimate balance between deaths and births, there would be no “demographic” need for sustained immigration. Moreover, households in all parts of the world would converge toward the nuclear and conjugal types, composed of married couples and their offspring.

The second demographic transition (SDT), on the other hand, sees no such equilibrium as the end-point. Rather, new developments bring sustained sub-replacement fertility, a multitude of living arrangements other than marriage, the disconnection between marriage and procreation, and no stationary population. Instead, populations would face declining sizes if not complemented by new migrants (i.e. “replacement migration”), and they will also be much older than envisaged by the FDT as a result of lower fertility and additional gains in longevity. Migration streams will not be capable of stemming aging, but only stabilize population sizes. Nonetheless, the outcome is still the further growth of “multicultural societies.” On the whole, the SDT brings new social challenges, including those associated with further aging, integration of immigrants and other cultures, less stability of households, and high levels of poverty or exclusion among certain household types (e.g. single persons of all ages, lone mothers).

History of the Concept

The idea of a distinct phase stems directly from Philippe Ariès’s analysis of the history of childhood (1962) and his subsequent 1980 paper on “Two successive motivations for low fertility.” In his view, during the FDT, the decline in fertility was “unleashed by an enormous sentimental and financial investment in the child.” Ariès refers to this as the “Child-king era,” and the fertility transition was carried by an altruistic investment in child quality (see also Arsène Dumont’s “Social capillarity”). This motivation is no longer the dominant one. Within the SDT, the motivation for parenthood is adult self-realization, and the choice for just one particular life style in competition with several others. The altruistic element focussing on offspring has weakened and the adult dyadic relationship has gained prominence instead.

The second element that sparked the SDT-theory was the conviction that the cyclical fertility theory as formulated by Richard Easterlin (1973) would no longer hold and that sub-replacement fertility was to become a structural, long term feature in western populations. In Easterlin’s theory, small cohorts would have better employment opportunities and hence earlier marriage and higher fertility, whereas

large cohorts would have worse economic life chances and display the opposite demographic responses. The cyclical reinforcement then stems from large cohorts of parents giving birth to small cohorts of children and vice versa. The SDT does not expect cyclical effects that would be strong enough to determine the fertility trend. Rather, it advances that other effects, both economic AND cultural, have an overriding capacity in conditioning these trends.

The third element that conditioned the SDT-theory is the major role given to the ideational factor and to the dynamics of cultural shift. The SDT-theory fully recognizes the effects of macro-level structural changes and of micro-level economic calculus. As such it is not at odds with the core arguments of neo-classic economic reasoning. Only, the SDT view does not consider these explanations as “sufficient” but merely as “non-redundant.” By the same token, the cultural factors involved are “non redundant” elements and not “sufficient ones.” The SDT is therefore an “overarching” theory that spans both economic and sociological reasoning. And it does not do so by taking value orientations as endogenous or by considering culture as a form of addiction (cf. G.S. Becker, 1996), but by treating ideational changes as exogenous influences that add stability to trends over and beyond economic fluctuations. The SDT furthermore links cultural shifts to dynamic processes of cohort succession, and to a recursive model of values-based selection and individual values reorientation as a function of paths followed during the life course.

Finally, a major stepping stone of the SDT-theory has also been Abraham Maslow’s theory of changing needs (1954). As populations become more wealthy and more educated, the attention shifts away from needs associated with survival, security and solidarity. Instead greater weight is attached to individual self-realization, recognition, grassroots democracy and expressive work and education values. The SDT-theory is therefore closely related to Ron Inglehart’s concept of “post-materialism” and its growing importance in political development. The direct consequence of this is also that the SDT predicts that the typical demographic outcomes (sustained sub-replacement fertility, growth of alternative living arrangements) are likely to emerge in non-western societies that equally develop in the direction of capitalist economies, with multi-level democratic institutions, and greater accentuation of Maslowian “higher order needs.”

First Demographic Transition – Second Demographic Transition Contrasts

Having pointed out the intellectual origins of the SDT, more attention can be given to the FDT-SDT contrast. Originally, the SDT was viewed as the mere continuation of the FDT, but such a “single transition” view obscures major differences of both a demographic and social nature. The major contrasts have therefore been listed in Table 1.

Opposite Nuptiality Trends

The FDT transition in the West is characterized by the gradual weakening of the old Malthusian “preventive check” located in late and non-universal marriage. Ages at first marriage are lowered and proportions marrying increased during the FDT. Furthermore, the areas where cohabitation and out of wedlock fertility had survived until the 20th Century, join the mainstream characterized by low illegitimacy and low incidence of unmarried partnerships. The earliest age at marriage is reached in the 1960s. Thereafter, all trends are reversed and rapidly so : ages at first marriage

increase, more single persons start living alone or start to cohabit prior to marriage, long term cohabitation replaces marriage, and ultimately fertility outside marriage becomes much more frequent. A similar turnaround also takes place with respect to remarriage. During the FDT, divorce (or widowhood) is often followed by remarriage, and even by continued childbearing. During the SDT post-marital relationships are channelled into cohabitation or living apart together (LAT)-relationships rather than remarriage. In parts of Central and in Eastern Europe, where the historical Malthusian late marriage pattern did not exist, the SDT is equally characterized by a new trend toward later marriage and more cohabitation after 1990. Also out of wedlock fertility now follows the western trend. Moreover, such features are now also emerging in the western part of Southern Europe (Italy, Malta, Spain and especially Portugal).

Opposite Timing of Fertility

During the FDT fertility became increasingly confined to marriage, contraception mostly affected fertility at the older ages (stopping) and higher marriage durations, mean ages at parenthood declined, but childlessness among married couples remained low. There are examples of below replacement fertility during the FDT, but these correspond to exceptional periods of deep economic crisis or war.

The SDT starts in the 1960s with a multifaceted revolution. First, there was the contraceptive revolution with the introduction of hormonal contraception and far more efficient IUDs, second, there was the sexual revolution with declining ages at first sexual intercourse, and third, there was the gender revolution questioning the sole breadwinner household model and the gender division of labor that accompanied it. These three “revolutions” fit within the framework of an overall rejection of authority, the assertion of individual freedom of choice (autonomy) and an overhaul of the normative structure. The overall outcome of this with respect to fertility is postponement: mean ages at first parenthood rise again, opportunities for childbearing are lost due to higher divorce, the share of childless women increases, and higher parity births (4+) become rare. The net result is structural and long term below replacement fertility.

Social Contrasts

With the exception of the very early fertility decline in France and a few other small European regions, much of the FDT was an integral part of a development phase during which economic growth fostered material aspirations and improvements in material living conditions. The preoccupations of the 1860-1960 era were mainly concerned with increasing household real incomes, improving working and housing conditions, raising standards of health, improving human capital through mass education, and providing a safety net for all via the gradual construction of a social security system. In Europe, these goals were shared and promoted by all major democratic political parties, their organizations, and by churches as well. In this endeavor solidarity was a central concept. All such political or religious “pillars” had their views on the desirable evolution of the family. For the religious organizations, these views were based on the holiness of matrimony in the first place, but their defense of the closely knit conjugal family also stemmed from fears that urbanization and industrialization would lead to immorality and atheism. The secular pillars, such as Socialist or Liberal parties, equally saw the family as the cornerstone of society. Both moral and material uplifting would be served best by a sharp gender-based

division within the family: husbands assume their roles as devoted breadwinners and women as guardians of all quality related issues (order and neatness, health, education, etc.). In other words, all religious and political factions – including the Communist one – contributed to the “embourgeoisement” of the family.

The SDT, on the other hand, is founded on the rise of the higher order needs. Once the basic material preoccupations are satisfied, further income growth and educational expansion jointly lead to the articulation of more existential and expressive needs. These are centered on a triad: *self-actualization* in formulating goals, *individual autonomy* in choosing means, and claiming *recognition* for their realization. These issues emerge in a variety of domains, and this is why the SDT is related to such a broad array of indicators of ideational or cultural shift (e.g. Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1996, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2004). The SDT occurs in tandem with the growth of “postmaterialism” (e.g. Inglehart, 1990) and political or religious “depillarization” (e.g. Lesthaeghe and Moors, 1995), the disengagement from civic, professional or community-oriented associations, a critical stand *vis à vis* all forms of authority, the stress on expressive values in socialization and in work, and, of course, a quest for far more egalitarian gender relations. Also at the individual level, the choice for new types of households (premarital single living, cohabitation and parenthood within cohabitation) are all linked to such individualistic and non-conformist value orientations in a great variety of spheres. Furthermore, these associations between household types and value orientations not only hold for northern and western Europe but, by now, equally for southern, central and eastern Europe.

Criticisms

Several criticisms have been launched against the Second Demographic Transition view. First, some argue there is no “second” demographic transition, but just the continuation of a single one. Second, some suggest that SDT is typical only of northwestern Europe. Third, SDT does not envisage a “new equilibrium” at the end, unlike the original FDT. In addition to these objections, others dislike the strong “cultural” interpretation. A reply to these criticisms is forthcoming in Thornton, Axinn and Jayakody (2005), arguing that the SDT correctly predicted the trends in central, eastern, and southern Europe, and that all correlations at the micro-level between household type and value-orientations emerge there as well.

SEE ALSO:

Demographic Transition; Fertility, Households; Values; Cohabitation; Individualism; Post-Materialism; Secularisation; Replacement Migration; Life Cycle; Cultural Change; Living Arrangements

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Table 1: Overview of demographic and societal characteristics respectively related to the FDT and SDT (Western Europe).

FDT	SDT
A. Marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise in proportions marrying, declining age at first marriage • Low or reduced cohabitation • Low divorce • High remarriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall in proportions married, rise in age at first marriage • Rise in cohabitation (pre- & postmarital) • Rise in divorce, earlier divorce • Decline of remarriage following both divorce and widowhood
B. Fertility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline in marital fertility via reductions at older ages, lowering mean ages at first parenthood • Deficient contraception, parity failures • Declining illegitimate fertility • Low definitive childlessness among married couples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further decline in fertility via postponement, increasing mean age at first parenthood, structural subreplacement fertility • Efficient contraception (exceptions in specific social groups) • Rising extra-marital fertility, parenthood within cohabitation • Rising definitive childlessness in unions
C. Societal background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preoccupations with basic material needs: income, work conditions, housing, health, schooling, social security. Solidarity prime value • Rising memberships of political, civic and community oriented networks. Strengthening of social cohesion • Strong normative regulation by State and Churches. First secularisation wave, political and social “pillarisation” • Segregated gender roles, familistic policies, embourgeoisement. • Ordered life course transitions, prudent marriage and dominance of one single family model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of "higher order" needs: individual autonomy, self-actualisation, expressive work and socialisation values, grass-roots democracy, recognition. Tolerance prime value. • Disengagement from civic and community oriented networks, social capital shifts to expressive and affective types. Weakening of social cohesion. • Retreat of the State, second secularisation wave, sexual revolution, refusal of authority, political "depillarisation". • Rising symmetry in gender roles, female economic autonomy. • Flexible life course organisation, multiple lifestyles, open future.