

VID Colloquium

Childlessness Trends, Religious Trends: Are They Associated?

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Is the destiny of Europe one of a secular society with an ever-growing number of childless senior citizens? First, I look at childlessness. In the communist era, less than 10 percent of women in Eastern Europe remained childless, but in recent years there has been an almost universal tendency for those countries to approach and even exceed the levels seen in Western Europe. Secondly, I look at religious trends. Decline in religious attendance has been most marked in the Catholic countries, but in many secular countries of both Eastern and Western Europe there has been stabilisation in religious attendance. Thirdly, I examine the association of childlessness with religiosity. In the Western European countries childlessness is much less common amongst those who are religiously active: Switzerland is an extreme example of this differential, where 38 percent of non-affiliated women are childless. In contrast, in most ex-communist countries there is no significant difference in childlessness by religiosity. A country which shows the opposite association to Switzerland is Georgia, where (unusually) young people are more religiously active than older people, and where young people adopting the 'new behaviour' of church attendance are also more likely to remain childless. Finally, can we draw any conclusions about trends in childlessness and religiosity - and the links between them - in Europe? This talk aims to generate discussion on what is known and, even more importantly, what is not known and should be investigated further.

About the presenter

The original doctoral research of Marion Burkimsher was in Geography at Manchester University, and she still retains a high level of interest in spatial and temporal variations - in particular inter-country comparisons - and the processes involved that lead to these variations. After a career break to bring up two sons, she started to become more involved in academic matters by editing papers on the subject of demography, primarily for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In doing so, she discovered that the field of demography was fascinating, considerably more so than the process of linguistic editing. Therefore in 2005 she enrolled on the new Masters course in Demography at the University of Geneva. At the end of two years of study, she carried out a three-month internship at the UNECE and completed her dissertation based on statistical analyses of fertility data from Bulgaria, Hungary and Georgia. Since completing the Masters' programme in 2008, she has been following two strands of interest - fertility trends and religious trends - as an independent researcher affiliated with the University of Lausanne. Her current research interests cover various topics: the inter-country comparisons; the influence of period, age and cohort effects; the statistical analyses of large data sets; secularisation and revival; the measures of dispersion, convergence and divergence; the three-way correlations of fertility, religiosity and 'happiness'.

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