Interview with Pearl Dykstra – FamiliesAndSocieties:

"We need to think of four generation families"

Pearl Dykstra is Professor of the Erasmus University Rotterdam and co-leader of the work package on intergenerational linkages within Families And Societies, a European project investigating the diversity of life courses and demographic change in Europe. AGE Platform Europe, dissemination partner of the project, had a chat with her. In the interview, she underlines the importance of adding a fourth generation when analysing the intergenerational linkages within the families. She explains how important the availability of long-term care services is regarding the structure of these linkages, and she discusses the cultural and political explanations of the diversity of long-term care arrangements across Europe. She thinks that political factors explain specific care arrangements more satisfactorily than cultural ones. Her work package will be producing very interesting research on these topics in the coming year.

Borja Arrue (AGE Platform Europe): How would you define your role within Families and Societies?

I am the work package leader of WP7 and what we want to do is to get insights into the determinants of intergenerational exchanges in families, and we are very interested in cross-national differences within Europe. When we talk about intergenerational exchanges we mean the help that parents and grandparents give to their children and grandchildren, but we are also thinking about the help that younger adults provide to their parents and grandparents, and sometimes maybe even great-grandparents.

BA: Are you also looking at the concrete context of the crisis? For instance, we see that grandparents are helping their children very much in many countries. Are you also exploring the links between child poverty and the level of support of grandparents and their pensions?

Yes, and that is primarily the specialisation of Pau Marí-Klose, in Spain. We want to examine the effects of the crisis. However, sometimes we have data problems, because a lot of our data is from before the crisis or from the onset of the crisis, but we have not yet sufficient data from 2012 onwards. So what we have is anecdotal. We know for example that in Greece, many young adults who have obtained university education and who would have been in Athens are leaving the city and go back to the areas where their families came from. Then it is often their grandparents who own land, for instance a rural property. These adult grandchildren are able to live on the land, but interestingly they also start tiny businesses. For example, with grapes they make jam or wine, or with olives they make olive oil. But that is anecdotal – we know this is happening, it has been written up in the newspapers, but we do not have the survey data yet. But Pau Mari-Klose my colleague from Spain has just finished a survey exactly on this topic, and he is hoping to present preliminary results

at our next meeting in Madrid. But I am afraid; this is only data from Spain. What I find fascinating is that for those who have a family with property, they have an advantage over those who do not have such families.

BA: So you look at intergenerational solidarity from older people to younger people. But how do you look on the opposite direction, on transfers from younger people towards older people, for example when it comes to long-term care needs?

Yes, that is work that has now been completed. There is a working paper we have written about co-residence. We know that in the past, rates of co-residence have been rising, but this is not because young people are taking old people into their homes so that they can provide care – which is often thought. It is actually the older people who have homes, and the younger people move back home because they are in need of assistance. We also look at the care provided by adult children, usually between 50 and 70, because they are the ones who are most heavily involved in caring for ageing parents. There we see very clear cross-national differences. It is important here to make a distinction between *help* and *care*.

Help is help with daily tasks, such as transportation - helping to bring their mother to the hospital, or help with housekeeping or cooking meals. These are tasks which can be easily organised by family members.

That has to be distinguished from what we call **care**. Care is helping those who have been ridden or those who are very frail. It means dressing, helping people to get to bed and to get out of it, feeding, sometimes, and bathing and washing.

What we see across countries is that in countries with the poorest welfare state provisions – in this we are looking at Eastern and Southern Europe – the proportions of adult children providing *care* to parents is highest. But the pattern for *help* is exactly the opposite. In countries with the most generous welfare state provisions, adult children are more likely to be *helping* their parents.

Philippe Seidel (AGE Platform Europe): The first paper that has been written is about the quality of relations between generations, when people live together. Does this have an implication for the quality of the inter-family links?

The literature says that, if frail parents are dependent on their adult children, relationships tend to be of a poorer quality than when they are not necessarily dependent. This dependency is much higher in countries which have been characterised by Chiara Saraceno by what she calls '**familiarism by default'.** This means that their family does virtually everything, but this is because there is no other option. This is either because there are few public services or because services that are provided by the market are too expensive to purchase. And in these countries, both the adult children and the older adults run the greatest risk of having poor mental well-being, and their relationships tend to be poorest, because of this forced dependence. And again: many older adults do not want to be dependent on their adult children. We see that what they attempt to do, until very high ages, is to be the ones giving and not to be the ones on the receiving edge.

PS: That means that there is also a factor in how far the linkage between generations is voluntary or not? So when you choose to help your parents, when you are not doing the more specialised

tasks, where you would need some training, but only provide some day-to-day help, then there is a higher quality of life?

Yes, and this is also what families are also equipped to do – doing the shopping etc. This is also what we grow up expecting to do. If there is physical care – it does not happen very often, fortunately, the percentage is between three and nine percent – there is awkwardness involved, and it is also a reversal of the parent-child relationship. In countries where it is necessary, families do step in but the risk of being in a poor relationship is highest in those countries where adult children are the ones providing the care out of necessity.

BA: When you speak about the quality of the relationship, what are the indicators you are looking to?

This is very simple. You ask about how close you are, or even a very direct question about how you rate the quality of this relationship.

BA: In countries where this 'familiarism by default' happens, to what extent do you think is it the lack of availability of good social services that explains this tendency or do you think this is a cultural tendency?

This is an argument that is always made, which we call a chicken-or-the-egg problem. I find it very important to distinguish the cultural and the economic. And we also have to look at why did a country not choose public welfare institutions? We must not forget that countries decide differently about how they feel solidarity should be expressed. In a country like Sweden, the people have expressed desire through elections to organise solidarity for older people through public services. In countries such as Italy, this has not been done.

But Italy is very interesting, as there are very generous pensions. The American political scientist Julia Lynch argues that, if Italy did not develop generous care services for the elderly, that is because the representatives of adult children or the elderly themselves were not of interest in politics, and so politicians did not have to make promises to these groups. They did not need to promise them, for example, good health care services, whereas the representatives of employers or the employees were always present in political discussions. She would therefore argue that it's political, it's a matter of power, and it is not a question of culture. I would tend to think that this explanation is more satisfactory than the one based on cultural factors.

PS: You also have done some research on childcare, comparing its quality depending on whether it is provided by grandparents, or by parents or in institutions, do you have some insights on this?

I have not looked at the quality of the care provided, but at the likelihood of grandparents to step in, on a daily basis, and again we see very clearly that grandparents are most likely to provide daily care to the children of a working daughter in countries where either leaves are not generous and are not paid at a high level, or where childcare services are relatively poor, in a measure that childcare services do not offer enough places for 0-3 year-olds in day-care facilities. There again, I could only say when are grandparents likely to provide daily care, but I could not say anything from my own research on the quality of care provided by parents or grandparents compared to that provided by a public service.

PS: In one of your working papers you talk about the "sandwich generation". What exactly do you mean by this concept?

The term 'sandwich generation' is incredibly popular in women's magazines. The idea, which I developed in my research some time ago, is that there are many women (and men) who are 'sandwiched' between responsibilities for both children growing up and ageing parents. Actually, by looking at the demographic reality, it becomes apparent that we need to add another generation, that of the people who have young children while their parents are not yet frail: they do not have responsibilities towards their parents, who can help them in their role as grandparents. However, adults with young children tend to have ageing grandparents, the fourth generation. Those adults are therefore like a "skipped" generation, they are not sandwiched immediately between two generations, but in the middle of four generations rather than just three. There are not that many people sandwiched between their own children and their own parents, if they are sandwiched they are sandwiched between their children and their grandparents. It might be the grandparents who are sandwiched between providing childcare and providing care to their own parents. If we take 65 year-olds, they are likely to have young grandchildren, but also likely to have an 85 year-old mother. That is the real sandwich.

BA: When it comes to the provision of care, the social investment approach establishes that all formal care is actually an investment that alleviates people from this task. What is your view on informal care and its relationship with the role of the state?

We need to be very careful with the use of the word 'formal', as it can mean two things. It can be market care, provided by market services, and if we look at what's happening in Europe we see that the provision of care is increasingly in private hands. And it can also be public, funded by the state.

It is interesting to see what is happening in a number of governments, including the Dutch, but also other governments. These are actually providing money for care but the provision of care is done by market services. It is also very important to look at what kind of care we are providing, either home help, such as 'meals on wheels', or institutional care in residential facilities. What we are seeing in Western and Northern Europe is that more and more home help is being introduced, enabling older adults to remain in their own home, which they want; and that residential facilities are being used as a very last resort for those who cannot possibly stay at home, and that is because they are in late stages of dementia or very frail.

We therefore have to be nuanced when we talk about care services provided for older adults. If care services are provided by the government, this releases the middle generation from care obligations; not that they don't want to care, but they can continue to participate in the labour market and contribute to taxes – and that is what we need to pay for these care services – and, of course, they can also continue to contribute to their own pension, which is good for their own well-being in later life and also for their ability to possibly buy market services.

BA: With regard to the role of informal carers, we can think about concrete examples, such as Spain, which in 2006 passed a Law on Dependency creating a universal entitlement to benefits for long-term care needs – of older people, but not only. At the end, the provisions of the law that were most used were actually those supporting informal carers – through public payment for their contributions to social security for the time spent caring for their relatives, for instance. This was

much more used than the benefits created to pay for a 'formal' carer – which reproduces this cultural pattern of relying very much on informal care. Does this not show a clear cultural path dependency, the existence of a 'familiarism by default'?

It is important to make a distinction between whether you are offering services, such as home help or institutional care, or payments for care. If you offer the latter, you introduce gender and socio-economic biases, as these payments are attractive mainly to those who do not have incomes on their own. This money will then mainly go to women. Again, the cultural bias possibly plays a role, but we also need to look at other aspects related to care provision and care professionals.

PS: What are the 'top three' topics you see coming up from your work package within Families and Societies in the coming months?

First of all, the unravelling of the political, the economic and the cultural; secondly, to analyse what is happening under the economic crisis; lastly, the need to think of multiple generations, not just parents and children, but parents, children, grandchildren and grandparents or great-grandparents, which is demographic reality: we are living longer together and we are more likely to be members of four generation families. */