

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20093]

Proposed title of the session

Multigenerational approaches to social and economic mobility

Abstract

Most research on social and economic mobility follows a two-generation approach, studying the correlations between the socioeconomic status of, typically, fathers and sons. More recently, it has become increasingly common to examine to what extent the transmission of status carries over from grandparents to grandchildren, which would imply that a three-generation (or even deeper) perspective is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive understanding regarding the mechanisms of status attainment and mobility (e.g. Warren and Hauser 1997; Mare 2011 and Björklund and Jäntti 2012). Much of the economic research into social mobility derives its theoretical foundation from the highly influential model developed by Becker and Tomes (1986). Socioeconomic attainment of children (e.g. earnings or occupational status) is partly the result of parental investments in the human capital of their offspring. This leads to a positive correlation of socioeconomic status in a two-generational setting. This theoretical postulate has also repeatedly been confirmed in empirical studies showing fairly high correlations in earnings between two consecutive generations (usually father and son) (e.g. Solon 1992; Zimmermann 1992; Björklund and Jäntti 2000, 2009, Jäntti and Jenkins 2013). Country differences in the strength of the correlation are, however, not trivial, indicating considerable heterogeneity in intergenerational earnings persistence across different contexts (see for example Blanden 2013).

The process of regression to the mean, however, causes the influence of earlier generations on socioeconomic outcomes to gradually diminish. If the correlation between grandfather-father and father-son both amount to 0.3, the correlation between grandfather and grandson is 0.09 ($0.3 \cdot 0.3$). In fact, according to Becker and Tomes (1986) most ancestral influences in developed countries are eliminated already after three generations, giving little room for an important role played by grandparents on grandchildren's outcomes. This view is consistent with a first-order Markov process, where the outcome in one generation is only determined by characteristics of the parental generation (e.g., Hodge 1966). Several studies on class attainment based on occupation also give empirical support for this view, showing no, or only a very limited, impact of grandparents' status on the status attainment of their grandchildren once the status of the parents are controlled for (e.g. Hodge 1966; Warren and Hauser 1997; Erola and Moision 2007). Other recent studies, however, provide evidence suggesting that there indeed are important effects of the grandparental generation on socioeconomic outcomes of the grandchildren, over and above the influence working through the parental generation (e.g. Lindahl et al 2012, Modin, Eriksson and Vågerö 2013, Hällsten 2014, Long and Ferrie 2012, Clark 2014, Campbell and Lee 2011, Hertel and Groh-Samberg 2014). Thus, despite the emergence of several stratification and mobility studies going beyond a two-generation approach, there is still need for more knowledge about long-term aspects of socioeconomic attainment and mobility (Mare 2011). The proposed session invites papers that contribute to this field, irrespective of time period or region.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Jonas Helgertz (Centre for Economic Demography/Department of Economic History, Lund University [Sweden])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Prof. Martin Dribe (Centre for Economic Demography/Department of Economic History, Lund University [Sweden])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Richard Zijdeman (International Institute of Social History [Netherlands])
3. Jan Stühler (University College London [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
4. Ineke Maas (Utrecht University [Netherlands])
5. Joseph Ferrie (Northwestern University [United States of America])