



# Comparing Families:

Does international perspective help?

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## Comparative Perspective in Family Demography

comparison in family demography well established, e.g.:

→ **comparisons across individuals/groups & across countries**  
age, sex, race, marital status, parenthood/parity, education  
case studies of different countries

-- based on the assumption of **differences**

→ **comparison of patterns across time and across space**  
Hajnal: European marriage pattern  
pooled data of different countries

-- in search of **similarities**

# Comparative Perspective in Family Demography



**“essence” of comparative research:**

“identify, analyze, explain differences and similarities” (Hantrais)

across individuals  
across time  
across space

## Advancements in Comparative Research

- ➔ (1) **from “universality claim” to context matters:**  
individuals embedded in a social environment shaped by cultural norms, economic conditions, and political structures
- ➔ (2) **from countries to regimes:**  
Przeworski & Teune (1970): replace “countries” by “variables”  
dimensions to classify systems based on similarities and differences  
most-similar systems/ most-different systems research design
- ➔ (3) **Methodological advancement:**  
event-history, multilevel, multiprocess modelling
- ➔ (4) **Data:** comparative longitudinal data; contextual data



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# Comparative Family Research

**across Time**

## Comparison across Time



**“critical juncture” (Thelen 1999; Neyer and Andersson 2008)**

point in calendar time at which a significant change occurs that is likely to have an impact on subsequent behavior

“before / after” research design

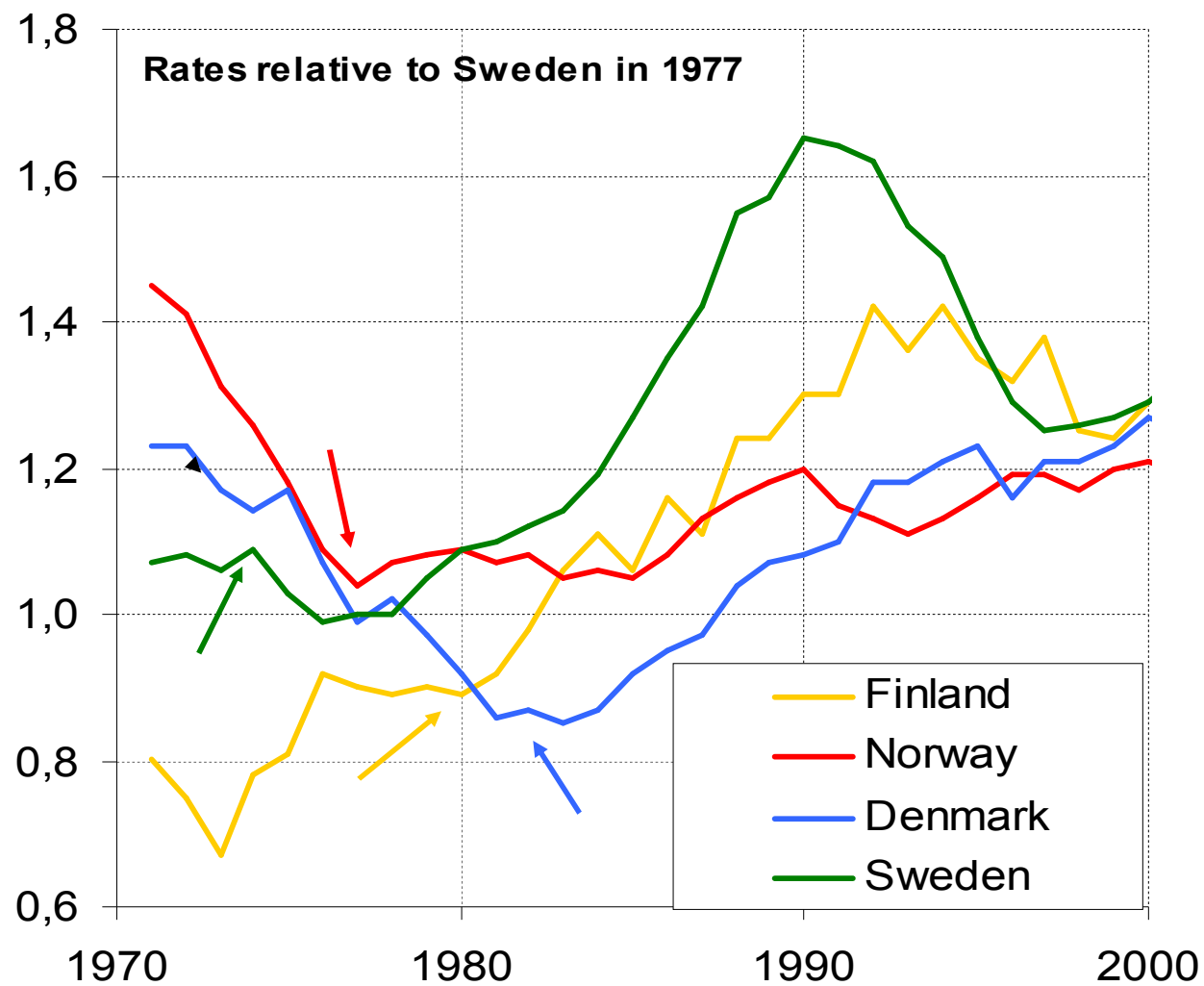
“most-similar system” comparison

## Comparison across Time

→ **“critical juncture” , Example 1:**

introduction of similar policy (parental leave) in similar systems

## Effects of Income-related Parental-leave Benefits on Second-birth Rates





## Comparison across Time

(1) comparison of effects of similar policy in similar (and in different) systems:

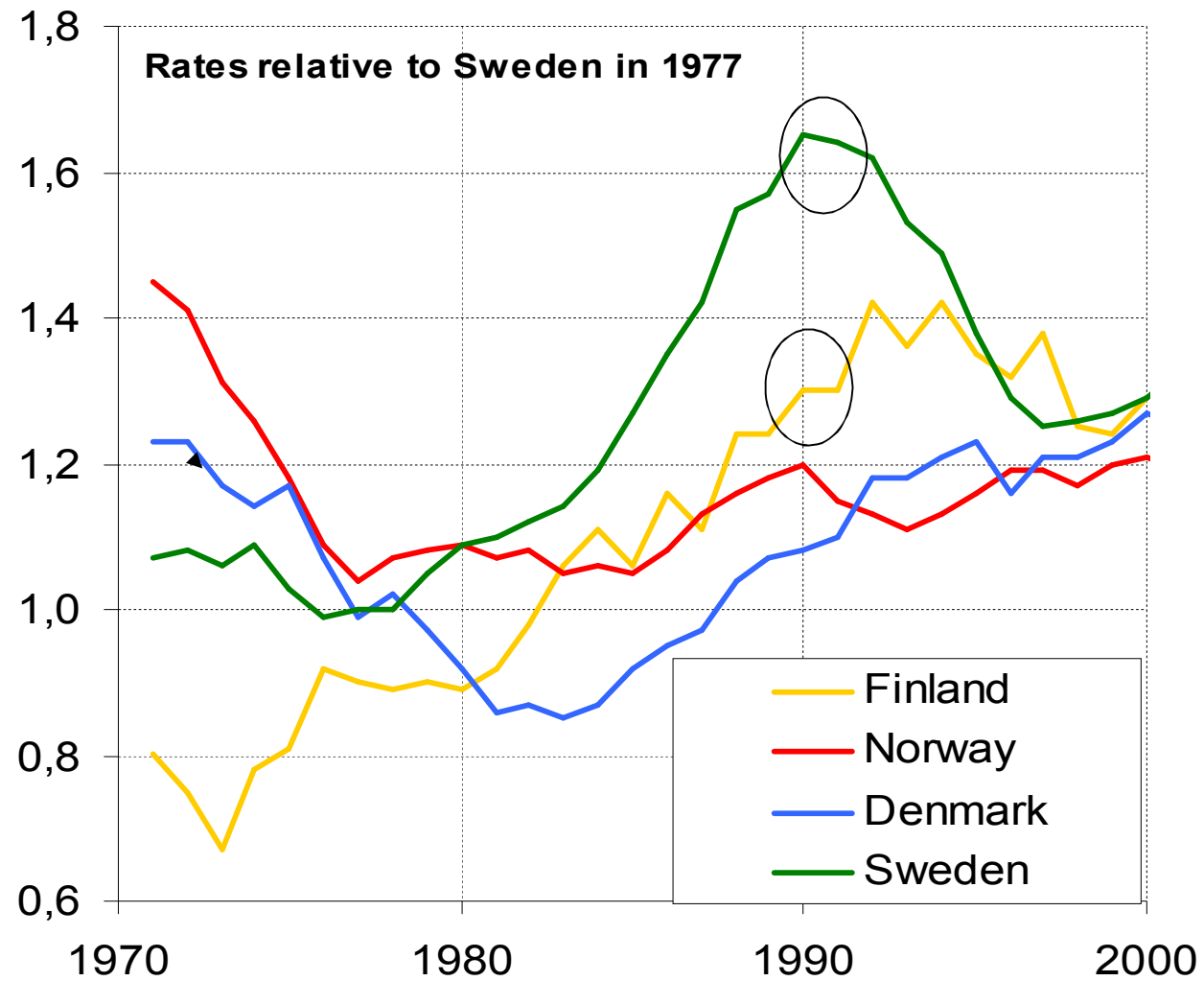
 **assertion of effect**

## Comparison across Time

→ **“critical juncture” , Example 2:**

similar “critical juncture” (economic crisis) under different policy conditions

# Impacts of Family Policies & Economic Development on Second-birth Risks



## Comparison across Time

(1) comparison of effects of similar policy in similar (and in different) systems:

→ **assertion of effect**

(2) comparison of effects of same critical juncture under different circumstances:

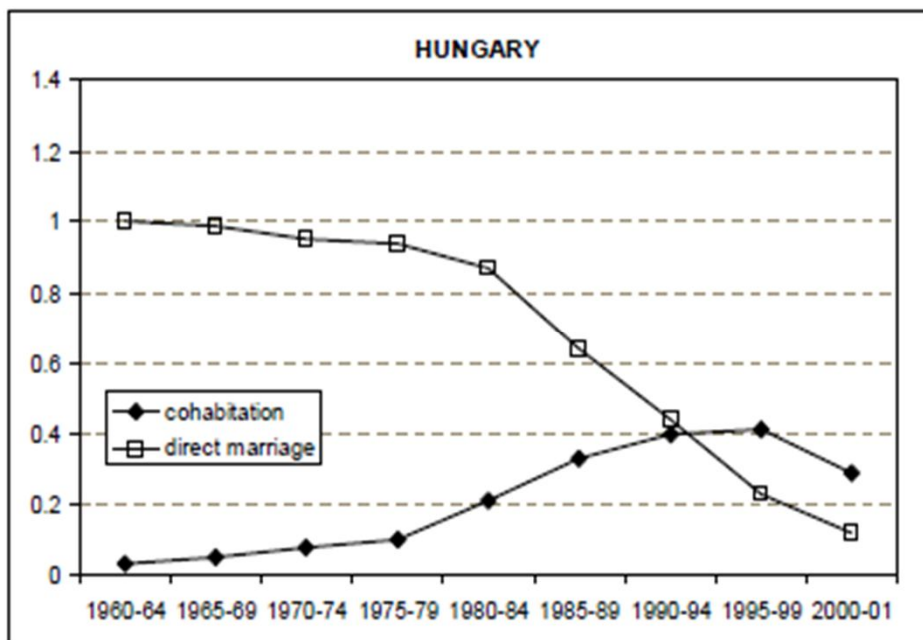
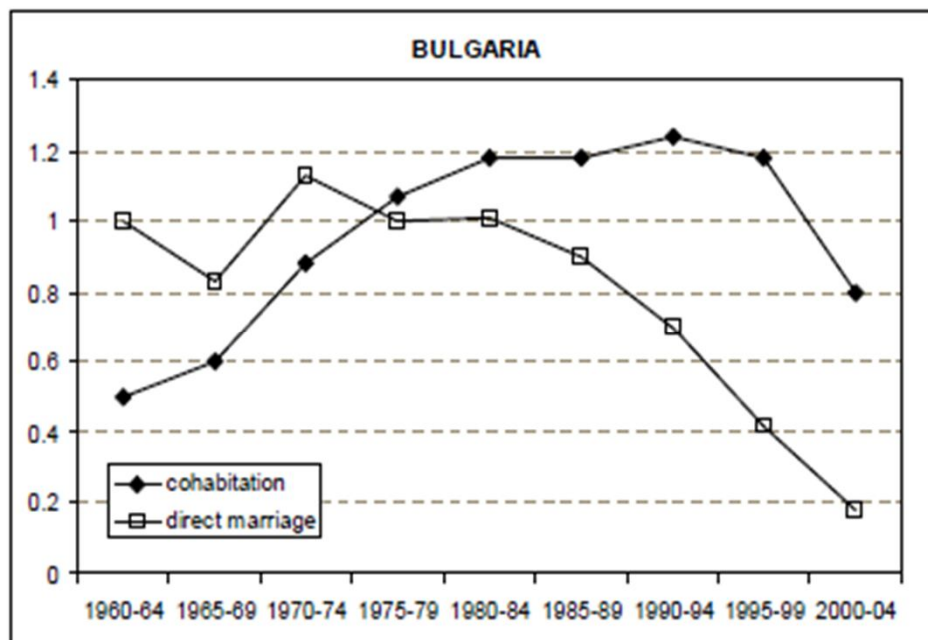
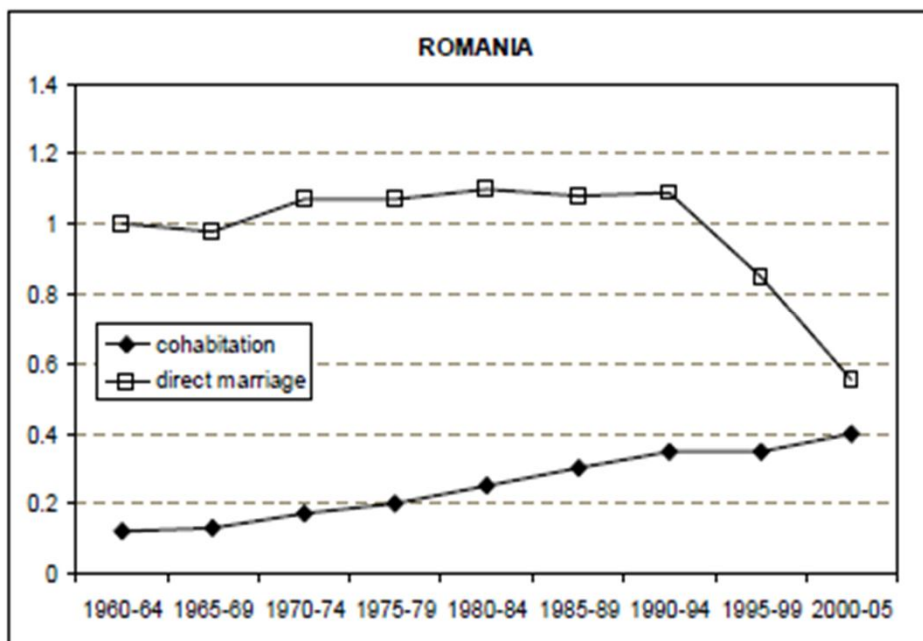
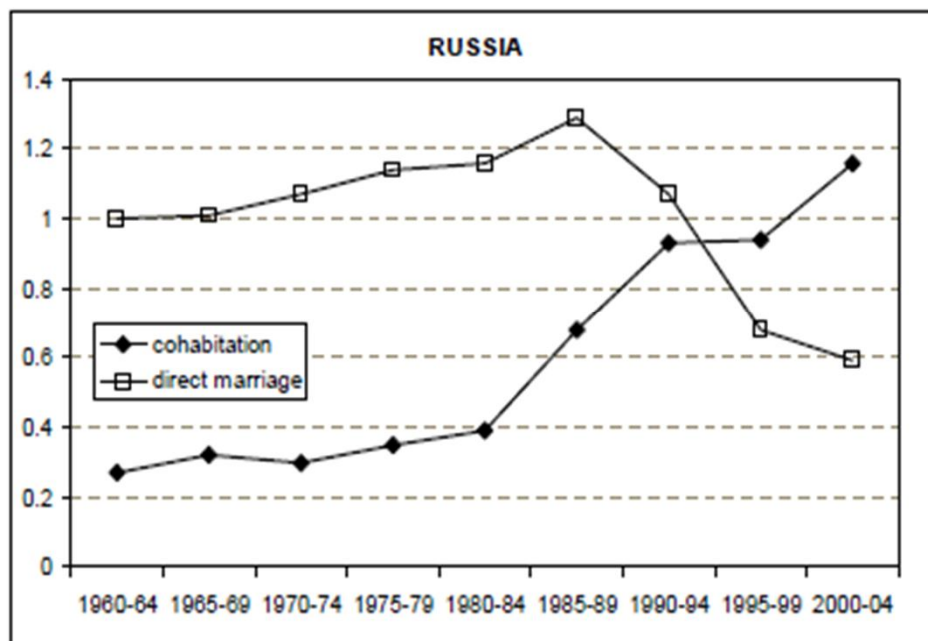
→ **avoid exceptional fallacy**

## Comparison across Time

→ **“critical juncture” , Example 3:**

similar “critical juncture” (collapse of communism) of similar systems

# Trends in union formation (Hoem et al. 2009)



## Comparison across Time

(1) comparison of effects of similar policy in similar (and in different) systems:

→ **assertion of effect**

(2) comparison of effects of same critical juncture under different circumstances:

→ **avoid exceptional fallacy**

(3) comparison of effects of same critical juncture in similar systems

→ **avoid exceptional fallacy; take longitudinal and comprehensive contextual view**

## Problems with (International) Comparisons across Time

- ➔ How long is “before” and “after” a critical juncture?
- ➔ How to account for “cummulation of changes” at a “critical juncture”?
- ➔ How to account for gradual institutional change?
- ➔ How to determine whether a change is a “critical juncture”?





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# Comparative Family Research

**across Space**

## Comparison across Space



**Welfare state regimes:** employment – social policy nexus  
classification by Esping-Andersen (1990)

**Feminist extension of welfare-state regime** (Lewis 1992; Gornick et al. 1996, etc.): social policy – family – employment nexus

Other dimensions to classify welfare states:

Family policy regimes

Gender regimes

Care regimes



**Common dimensions of classification**



**Makes countries comparable in a structured way**

## Problems with Comparisons across Space

- ➔ Which **dimensions of classification** matter? (Germany after 2007?)
- ➔ Assumption that **similar = same** and **same = identical**
- ➔ No account for **difference within a welfare regime**, e.g.:  
**Sweden, Denmark, Finland** vs. Norway (childlessness-education)  
(Andersson et al., 2009)
- ➔ **Hybrid cases** which do not belong clearly to any welfare regime:  
**Netherlands**: conservative – liberal  
**Switzerland**: liberal – conservative
- ➔ **Regional differences** (e.g., in policies) within welfare states  
**Regional similarities** across (welfare) state borders  
(Klüsener et al. 2013; Nedoluzhko 2013; Neyer et al. 2011)

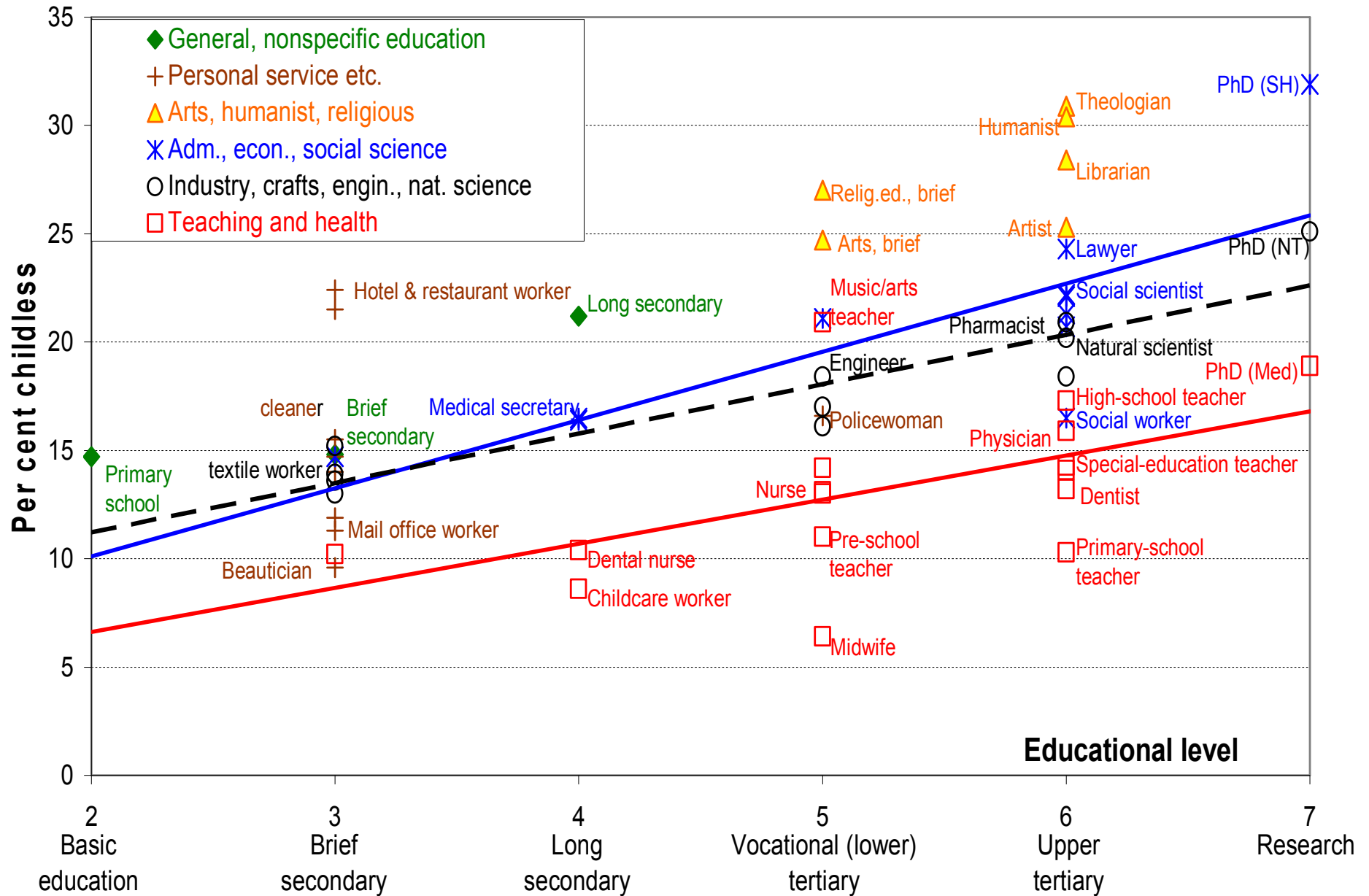
## Comparison across Space



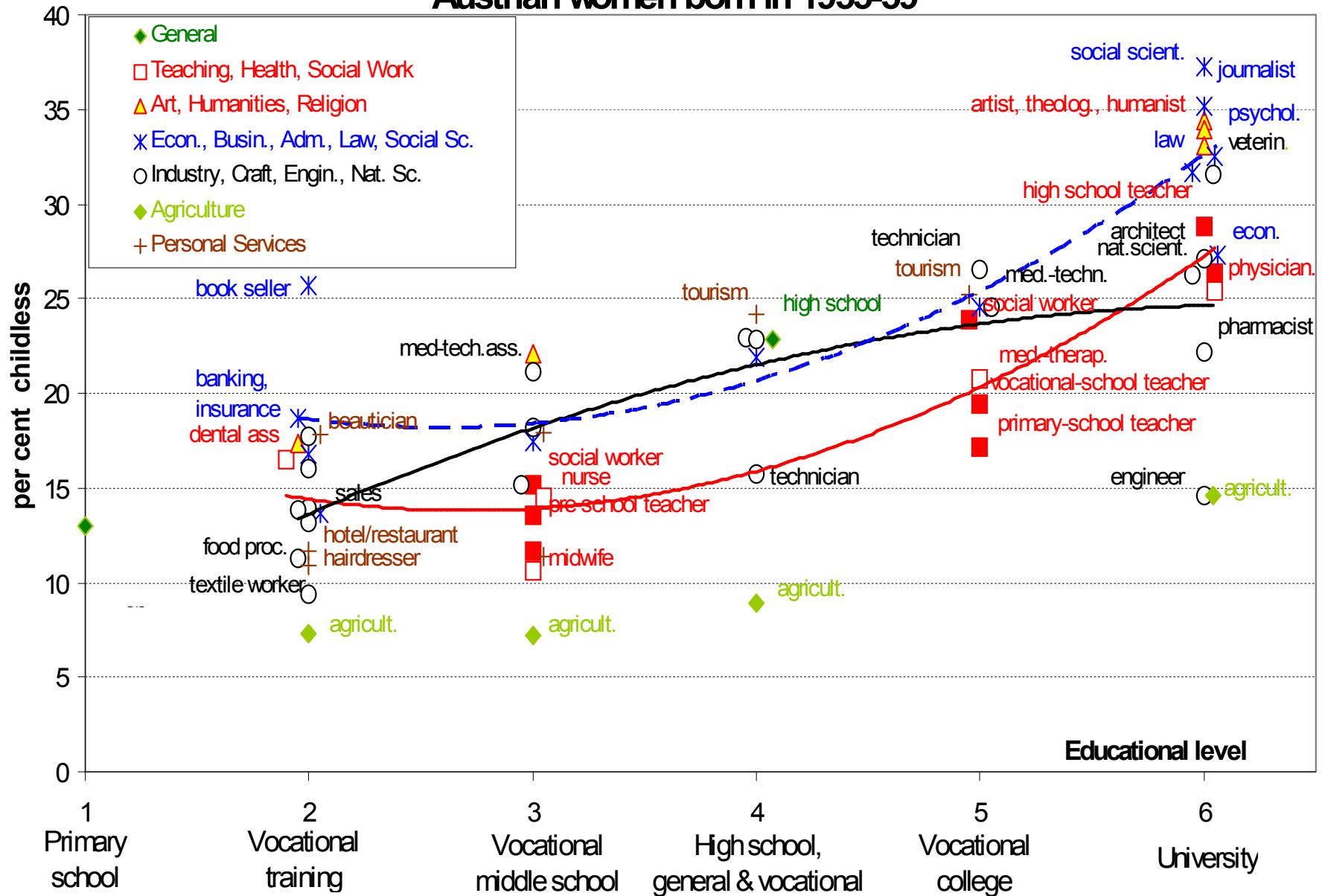
### **Varieties of Capitalism:** (Hall and Soskice 2001)

- coordinated market economies vs. liberal market economies
- account for the interlinkages between  
social policies – employment – educational systems

## Per cent permanently childless, by educational group; Swedish women born in 1955-59

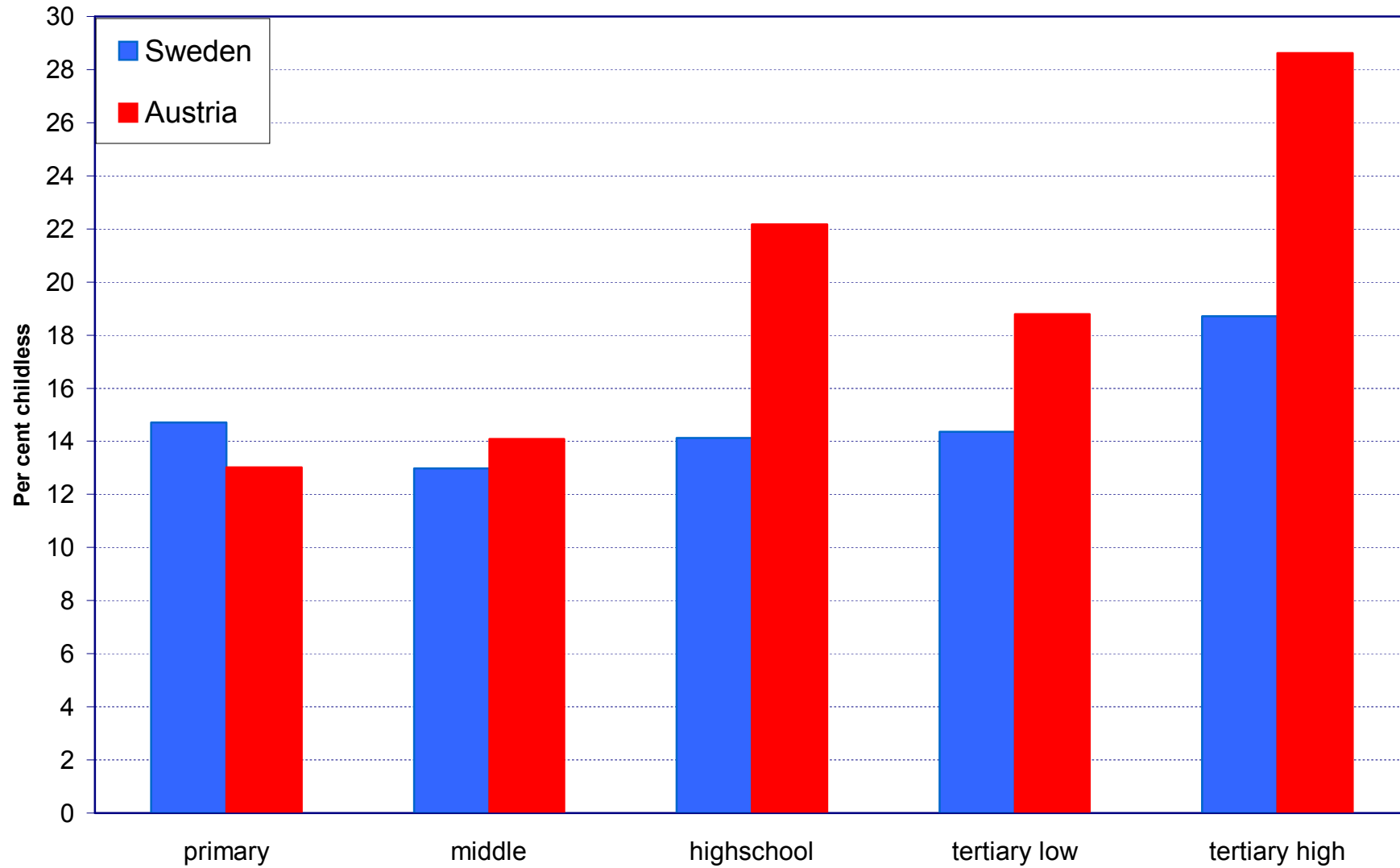


## Percent permanently childless, by educational group; Austrian women born in 1955-59



# Childlessness by Educational Level

## Swedish and Austrian Women, cohort 1955-59





## Explanations – Institutional Differences

### Sweden

#### educational system

flexible  
equality oriented  
gendered

#### labor market

horizontally gendered  
vertical „gender equality“  
„liberal“ coordinated market

#### welfare state

equality oriented

#### family policies

compatibility  
gender equality

### Austria

#### educational system

inflexible  
class oriented  
gendered

#### labor market

horizontally gendered  
vertical male dominance  
strongly coordinated market

#### welfare state

class oriented/conservative

#### family policies

incompatibility/choice  
mother-oriented/choice



## Comparison across Space



### Varieties of Capitalism:

- more comprehensive approach than welfare-regime approach
- “structures” labor-market/educational contexts
- “meso-level” (firm)

but:

- categorization (CME vs. LME) too crude for multi-country comparisons
- only case study comparisons possible

## Problems with Comparisons across Space

- ➔ No account for **difference within same welfare regime** (partly solvable with multilevel analysis with regions nested in states)
- ➔ “**Fixed borders**” of welfare states (“fuzzy border” / historical legacy)
- ➔ **Strong vs. weak states?**
- ➔ Continuity of welfare states: **emerging, changing, unstable** policy regimes? (Eastern Europe)
- ➔ **Classification and linkages** between regime “components”:  
state – market – society/culture

## Summary: Does International Comparison Help?

- international comparisons provide insight into family behavior and family dynamics & elicit which factors shape them
- proper design and methods:
  - across individual
  - across time
  - across space
- structured approach: acknowledge similarity, account for differences; pooled data vs. case studies
- conceptual and methodological problems persist:
  - multi-disciplinary, multi-method approach



**Tack!**  
**Thank you!**

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