

# APPARENT



## **THE APPARENT PROJECT** financed by the European Research Council (ERC) | ERC Starting Grant

The project assesses contemporary parenting norms and practices and their diffusion in six European countries. The international collaboration includes Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Poland. The project develops a comparative framework to study prevalent motherhood and fatherhood norms, images, identities and behaviour in current societies. The focus is on how mothering and fathering is constructed by professionals, welfare states, and popular media, and will assess how cultural and institutional norms and images are perceived and realized by expecting and new parents. Apparent is a 5-year research program which started in January 2011.

## **AIMS**

The aim of this project is to develop a contemporary sociology of adult sex roles and parenting norms: A theory of the social creation of parenting norms and a comprehensive framework to study empirically the change of men's and women's roles, identities and practices as earners and care givers in the early phase of family formation. The project is methodologically innovative in its aim to combine diverse quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data and methods. By combining expert interviews, policy analysis and content analysis of print media with analyses of qualitative and quantitative data on (nascent) parents, the four subprojects will address the diverse layers associated with changing gender roles and parenting norms over the adult life course.

## **CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What do contemporary motherhood and fatherhood norms look like? How are norms and images of male and female parenting roles evolving and changing in recent European societies? What are the central mechanisms and institutions involved in the creation and dissemination of parenting norms and standards?
2. How do expecting and new parents in different European countries perceive the standards created by medical and social experts, welfare states, and popular media, and to what extent do they embrace and live these standards? When do legal options to share care and paid work become 'real' options for new parents?

## **COGNITIVE INTEREST**

- (1) How are standards of 'good' mothering and fathering perceived, shaped and disseminated by professionals (gynaecologists, midwives, family councils)?
- (2) How do welfare states, labour markets and family policies target at mothers and fathers roles as earners and care givers? How has this changed in recent decades?
- (3) How have images of mothers and fathers roles been portrayed in print media from 1980 until 2010?
- (4) How do (expecting) mothers and fathers perceive, embody and represent parenting norms and images in their own work and family roles?
- (5) How do new parents divide paid and unpaid work and how do these divisions shape career patterns over the life course?
- (6) How do these patterns differ cross-nationally?

## **THE APPARENT PROJECT is organized in four subprojects:**

**Apparent ROLES** – Professional perceptions of new parent's roles

**Apparent NEWS** – Portraying new parents in the paper

**Apparent ACTS** – Actualizing new parenthood in everyday life

**Apparent CAREERS** – Employment transitions at entry into parenthood

### **ROLES**

#### ***Professional perceptions of new parent's roles***

The objective of this project is two-fold. First, it aims to map parenting roles and standards as defined and disseminated by health care and family professionals who work in the prenatal and postnatal sector. As virtually all expectant mothers in the selected countries use prenatal and postnatal health care services, these professionals have a direct influence on what new parents know and do. The study seeks to explore how these professionals define parenting roles, and how they view their own role in shaping and disseminating social norms and standards about parenting behaviour of new fathers and mothers. Second, the project utilizes these professionals as experts of the local and national prenatal and postnatal field. The data for this project will consist of expert interviews with gynaecologists, midwives, and family councils in the six countries and will use verbal probing and questioning. The interview data will be supplemented by the analysis of documents and secondary materials.

### **NEWS**

#### ***Portraying new parents in the paper***

The main objective of this project is to look at the way new fathers and mothers have been represented in mass print media in all six countries, and how apparent changes of gender roles and parenting norms came about. This project will consist of quantitative content analysis of advertisements and editorial content in mainstream and leftist daily news papers, between 1980 and 2010. It will compare not only cross-nationally, but also over time how parenting norms and standards – as disseminated in the media – have changed and whether these images converged across countries. A second objective of this project is to identify contemporary national profiles of 'good' mothers and fathers in the media, and to compare them with the features identified in the first project, and also with the features of the traditional male breadwinner and female homemaker norm as portrayed in the 1950s. This subproject will require development of a codebook that will capture quantifiable variables and will make extensive use of findings from the first project.

## **ACTS**

### ***Actualizing new parenthood in everyday life***

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## **CAREERS**

### ***Employment transitions at entry into parenthood***

This last project will complement the other three projects and assess how common the qualitative samples from the third project are in terms of demographics, attitudes, and the behavioural patterns of dividing paid and unpaid work and child care. The project assesses how welfare states, labour markets and family policies target at mothers and fathers roles as earners and care givers, and how this has changed in recent decades. The focus is two-fold: First, the project will explore gendered patterns of employment interruption and part-time work for parents and assess their career consequences in comparative perspective. Second, the project will assess associations between national context and gender roles using multilevel regression, where institutional and other macro-level variables will be merged with individual-level data. Based on the findings from the other three projects it will also supply important methodological innovations in how to measure sex roles in cross-national perspective.

## **FUNDING**

THE APPARENT PROJECT is financed by the European Research Council (ERC) in the framework of an ERC Starting Grant .

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Agreement no.: **263651**



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