Cultural family conceptions as inhibitor for changes in family lives:

The "leitbild" approach

Introduction: Why turn to cultural theories?

Looking at family lives in Europe over the past decades, we find both change and continuity. Change is visible, for instance, in declining birth rates, in a later age at marriage or at first birth, or in an increasing number of births out of wedlock (Eurostat 2015). At the same time we observe continuity, for example, in the desire to have children (Mayer/Trommsdorff 2010; Virtala et al. 2011), in the prioritizing of paid work by fathers and of childcare by mothers (Miller/Sassler 2010, Lewis et al. 2008; Fuwa 2004; Hakim 2003, Reher 1998, 2004) as well as in a structure of similarities among specific groups of countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, the German-speaking countries or Southern Europe (Sobotka 2008). The question arises: *Why* do we find both? What makes some patterns of European family lives change? And what stabilises others?

There have been many theoretical explanations of change. The second demographic transition theory, for example, assumes that industrialisation has led to stable economic wealth, which in turn has caused a change in values connected to a series of changes in the orientation in family lives (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995; Surkyn/Lesthaeghe 2004). The individualization theory (Beck 1986; Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1993) identifies a push towards individualization that encourages people to develop and pursue individual life plans, leading to a pluralisation of forms of living. The human capital approach (Becker 1981) argues that in today's Europe women are achieving higher educational levels, which increases their opportunity costs when they leave the labour market to take care of children. The value of children approach (Nauck 2005; Nauck/Klaus 2007) argues that in modern societies with improved systems of healthcare and care in old age, the economic-utilitarian value of children has declined, leaving us with the psychological-emotional value of children, which is attained as early as with the first or second child thus giving little incentive for large families. Other approaches do not assume a change in a specific direction but still make it seem likely that change of some kind occurs since they describe patterns of family lives either as a construct of social (inter-) action or of subjective definition. This is true, for example, for the approaches of family practice (Morgan 1996, 1999, 2011), of family dynamics (Jamieson 1998; Smart/Neale 1999), of "doing family" (Jurczyk 2014; Jurczyk et al. 2014), or the configurational approach (Widmer 2010; Widmer/Jallinoja 2008).

What is lacking is a convincing theoretical explanation for the continuity we nevertheless observe. Although the psychological-emotional value of children may be attained with the first

child (Nauck 2005) in many European countries the most frequent parity is two children (Sobotka/Beaujouan 2014). Assuming utilitarian decision-making, women's high human capital should have led either to a prevalence of childlessness or to equal sharing of paid and unpaid work by couples, yet a majority of couples still expresses the desire to have children (Mayer/Trommsdorff 2010; Virtala et al. 2011) and men remain the principle earners in the clear majority of family households (Lewis et al. 2008; Fuwa 2004). Despite the notion that "family is what families do" (Morgan 1996), which should today allow for a large variety of types "beyond the nuclear family" (Widmer/Jallinoja 2008), basic contours of the nuclear family are persistently identified (Huinink 2014; Charles et al. 2008; Brown 2005; de Singly 1991). Even cross-country differences within family lives in Europe appear quite robust over time (Duranton et al. 2009; Reher 2004). And cultural factors seem to be stabilising them: higher birth rates, for example, are found not only in those countries with above-average availability of public childcare (which reduces the opportunity costs of children) such as Sweden or France, but also in countries like Great Britain, the United States or Australia where public childcare is hardly provided at all (Sardon 2006).

It seems obvious that, given the manifold changes in socio-economic structures, in value orientations, in social acceptance, in legal and institutional constraints and support, family lives in Europe could have changed much more than they actually have. So we assume that there must be a substantial influence holding change back and stabilising given patterns. And we further assume that this influence is cultural. Theories describing such a cultural stabilising influence exist, e.g. Parsons' structural functionalism (Parsons/Bales 1956), role theory (Dahrendorf 1958; Scanzoni/McMurry 1972), the theory of gender arrangements (Pfau-Effinger 2004), or various approaches emphasizing the importance of a country's religious orientation (Voicu et al. 2009) or history (Kalmijna 2007; Reher 1998, 2004; Hakim 2003). However, there are, in comparison, few that play a significant role in contemporary family research. And the ones being used contemporarily tend to be restricted to very specific research interests.

Our aim is to review, to reawaken and to restructure the cultural theoretical explanations we have for the persistence of given behavioural patterns and to make them usable for contemporary family research. This may mean reformulating details or reorganising and reframing arguments so that they are in line with the current state of research and respond adequately to recent critiques. In this way, we aim to present a renewed cultural theoretical concept that is able to explain persistent behavioural patterns in the family context and thereby supplements these with existing theories that explain why, to a certain degree, change occurs. The concept we want to introduce is called "leitbild." In the theoretical outline we also present a methodological approach of measuring "leitbilder" as well as first descriptive results for Germany that support our theoretical assumptions.

The term "leitbild"

The German term "Leitbild" (plural: "Leitbilder") is hard to translate. In English texts it therefore mostly remains untranslated and is used as a German-ism instead (e.g. Pfau-Effinger 2004; de Haan 2002). We also decided to use the terms "leitbild" and "leitbilder" (plural). The verb "leiten" means to lead or to guide. The noun "Bild" means picture or image. A reasonable translation for the compound word "Leitbild" therefore could be "mental picture" or "guiding image" as it is suggested by Birgit Pfau-Effinger (2004: 382). It expresses an idea or a conception of how things in a certain context should be, work or look like. It can have the character of a role model to emulate or of an ideal or a vision to strive for. Companies, for example, will often have a corporate mission statement that describes their goals and how they ideally would like to operate ("Unternehmensleitbild"). In the eyes of their fans, celebrities may embody an ideal of how to live, behave and dress. A political party or a religious group may share a vision of an ideal society that motivates their work. These are examples of what the term expresses in general.

The theoretical concept of leitbilder in the literature

Leitbilder are used occasionally as a theoretical concept in German-language social sciences, however not always in the same sense and rarely based on an explicit definition. The interpretations of the term have in common that they imply a normative concept that provides orientation. Most publications address a cultural phenomenon, similar to attitudes, values, or social norms, but typically somewhat more complex and holistic (e.g. Mühling et al. 2006; Kuhnhenne 2005; Klement/Rudolph 2003; Horvath 2000). Some publications address the political visions behind the policies of governments or individual politicians (e.g. Baas 1998; Meyer 1990). A few additionally or predominantly address the explicit corporate mission statements or implicit self-conceptions of companies or other organisations (e.g. Giesel 2001; de Haan 2001, 2002).

The only work that gives a systematic overview of the various conceptions is the one by Katharina D. Giesel (2007). As a synthesis or a compromise between the existing explicit or implicit definitions, she suggests defining leitbilder in a way that they "bundle socially shared (mental or verbalised) imaginations of a desired or desirable and principally achievable future, which are supposed to be realised by corresponding action" (Giesel 2007: 245, translated by the authors of this paper). We consider this definition very inspiring, although not yet ideal for application in empirical family research. Firstly, we find it important to leave the question open whether and when leitbilder are achievable and strived for through action. Secondly, we think that leitbilder may, much more often than envisioning a *future*, be imaginations of a (presumed) desirable *present* that seems important to maintain and reproduce.

The most prominent and elaborated application of the concept in family research is the work by Birgit Pfau-Effinger (1996, 2004). She uses leitbilder as an element in her theory of gender arrangements. Based on macro level research Pfau-Effinger distinguishes five leitbilder or "cultural models" for arrangements of sharing paid work and care work between women and

men and the state in Western Europe (Pfau-Effinger 2004: 383). This work seems path-breaking to us as it combines structural and cultural influences in a theoretical model in order to explain cross-national differences as well as gradual social change. Pfau-Effinger defines leitbilder as "typical societal ideal representations, norms and values regarding the family and the societal integration of women and men" (Pfau-Effinger 2004: 382). From our viewpoint this definition seems useful since it proves applicable in empirical research, even if it remains somewhat vague. We consider it desirable to provide a clearer definition and develop the concept in a way that it may also be applied to other research topics on the macro as well as on the micro level.

An elaboration of the concept of leitbilder

Our research takes up the conceptions of leitbild by Giesel and Pfau-Effinger. Our aim is to define the term "leitbild" in a way that it is precise and applicable for a variety of family-related research topics. We suggest a definition according to which a leitbild is a bundle of collectively shared and visually imagined conceptions of normality – with "normality" implying that something is personally desired, socially expected, and/or presumably very widespread, i.e. common and self-evident.[1]

This concept assumes that people have pictures in mind of how the various spheres in their everyday life should and usually do look. This is true also for family life and its various aspects: partnership, parenthood, the distribution of work between mothers and fathers, etc. For instance, people may envision that a "normal" family consists of three to five people, including a man and a woman, both being married to each other, with the man being two to four years older and around 10 cm taller than his wife, including also one to three children, all common biological children of the couple, all about 30 years younger than their parents and about two years apart from each other. Each of these nine aspects is a conception of normality. Each of them may be either personally desired by an actor, or presumably expected by their social environment or taken for granted. Typically they would be all of that at the same time. All of these aspects – and others – are associated with one another and thereby bundled to a comprehensive imagination that we call a family-related leitbild.

Leitbilder can also refer to *processes* like the "normal" progress of a partnership career or of family formation. For example, people may envision that an adult should have found a steady partner between ages 25 and 30, after two to four years both move in together, after another year or two they marry, the first child comes along when the mother is about 30 years old, the second one about two years later. In that case, leitbilder correspond to what Dorthe Berntsen and David C. Rubin describe as "cultural life scripts" (Berntsen/Rubin 2002; Janssen/Rubin 2011): a "normal" life course with ideal ages for specific biographical events, in comparison to which people can be "on time" or "off time." Similarly, Billari et al. (2010) describe "social age

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[1] In German we defined the term as "ein Bündel aus kollektiv geteilten bildhaften Vorstellungen des ‚Normalen', das heißt von etwas Erstrebenswertem, sozial Erwünschtem und/oder mutmaßlich weit Verbreitetem, also Selbstverständlichem" (Diabaté/Lück 2014: 56).

deadlines" for childbearing, Settersten and Hägestad (1996) find that people perceive "deadlines" for several life-course transitions, and Riley (1987) describes an influence of age norms. So leitbilder have two facets that are interrelated: They define states or structures in the sense of how things should be at any given point in time, and they define processes in the sense of when and in what order things happen.

Leitbilder in comparison to other cultural concepts

There are many cultural concepts that formulate similar assumptions and describe similar phenomena, most of all role theory and the frame-selection approach. So the questions arise of what distinguishes the leitbild concept from others and in what way it can be considered renewed or more adequate.

Most cultural concepts draw on one mechanism of how and why they influence behaviour: An attitude, for example, expresses an actor's personal desire of how things should be and is put into action due to this personal interest. A social norm is put into action because actors fear social exclusion if they deviate from the way others expect them to behave. A frame activates a certain behavioural routine ("script"), which the actor has learned in a socialisation process due to a cognitive mechanism that allows him to act without previous conscious decision-making and thereby reduces the complexity of options to a manageable amount. The *conceptions of normality* that are bundled in a leitbild could partly be addressed as attitudes, preferences or values (if they are personally desired), partly as social expectations or norms (if they are socially expected), and partly as frames, scripts or everyday knowledge (if they are taken as common and self-evident). However, the leitbild concept assumes that conceptions of normality mostly fulfil all three criteria at the same time and that these are interrelated. If a behaviour seems so common that we hardly reflect it in everyday life we can usually assume that other people would disapprove if we behaved differently. And vice-versa, if we learn that certain behaviour is socially expected by the people around us, we tend to conclude that this is what everybody else does. Both the impression that a way of behaving is common and the experience that it is socially expected are likely to shape our personal subjective evaluation of what is desirable. And our personal sense that something is desirable in turn may let us think that others should feel the same way, behave accordingly and approve of us behaving this way. If these assumptions are true, it is sensible to use conceptions of normality and leitbilder as categories that may affect behaviour due to all three described mechanisms (personal desire, social expectation, nonreflective behavioural pattern).

As a second distinction, leitbilder are much more complex than most cultural concepts. An attitude, for example, consists of the subjective evaluation of one single issue. A norm is the societal expectation regarding one rather closely defined way of behaving. Leitbilder bundle numerous conceptions of normality to one complex, consistent mental picture. The leitbild concept assumes that (as the examples in the previous section illustrate) many single ideas regarding how things are and should be done are typically associated with each other and shape

comprehensive imaginations of an entire sphere of life. A leitbild describes a very complete mental picture of how everyday life in a family, in an office or in another sphere of life "works." Only because this picture is quite complete does it effectively allow actors to escape the overwhelming torrent of decision-making situations in which choices with uncertain outcomes need to be made from an infinite number of options. At the same time, addressing the whole comprehensive imagination as one concept rather than all its single elements is useful because it also reduces complexity in interpretation and analysis. The leitbild concept can be applied quite flexibly because a matching leitbild can be identified for almost every social situation in which behaviour requires explanation.

Role theory corresponds well to the leitbild concept. Despite the number of theories that actually have used and shaped the term, there is a common sense that "social roles represent society's demands on the incumbents of social positions" (Dahrendorf 1958: 133). In analogy to our definition of leitbilder one could say that a role is a bundle of conceptions of what is expected by the social environment. One main criticism of role theory, and especially its application to gender and family issues, has been that roles should only exist in specific social contexts. We can identify the role of a mother or a father – if a person has children – so that specific duties towards these children can be defined and controlled by others. However, we hardly can interpret being a woman or a man as a role since it remains unclear who would be entitled to raise expectations towards a person based only on this person's sex (Hirschauer 2001: 215). Accordingly, role theory may be suitable for explaining behaviour within families but seems unsuitable for interpreting behaviour before family foundation, such as being more or less career-oriented, choosing a partner or deciding (not) to have children. The leitbild concept overcomes this problem since it assumes that a leitbild is internalised by the actor. Therefore a person can have ideas regarding how a woman or a man (without children) normally behaves and can maintain these ideas even if he or she moved to an uninhabited island for the rest of his or her life. Furthermore, the concept of roles is mostly applied to individuals in specific social contexts whereas a leitbild may characterise individuals as well as societies sharing a common leitbild, making the leitbild concept seem better suited for a cross-cultural comparison on the macro level.

A second theoretical approach that is closely related to the leitbild concept is Hartmut Esser's model of frame selection (Esser 1991, 2002, 2009; Kroneberg 2006). It assumes that actors either make decisions based on rational reflection of costs and benefits or rely on non-reflective routines, called "scripts." The latter happens if the situation in which actors find themselves matches a culturally pre-defined category of situations, called a "frame." The better the situation matches, the more likely it is that the automatic-spontaneous mode of action is used instead of the reflecting-calculating mode. Each frame is linked to at least one script that is then activated. In analogy to leitbilder one could say that a frame and its script are a bundle of conceptions of what is common and self-evident in a certain type of situation. One advantage of the leitbild concept in comparison to the frame selection approach is that it allows gradual differences as well as combinations of the reflecting-calculating and the automatic-spontaneous mode of

action. For example, an actor may rationally reflect between two options he or she perceives that each are culturally pre-defined by leitbilder. (Should I become a mother and do all the things mothers "normally do" or should I remain childless and focus on my career, as childless women "usually do"?) The leitbild concept also assumes that all leitbilder an actor has internalised are active simultaneously (e.g. the leitbild of motherhood, the leitbild of a childless woman, the leitbild of a job career, etc.) whereas the frame selection approach only allows one frame to be active at a time.

Two further closely related theories are the Sociology of Knowledge by Peter L. Berger and Luckmann Thomas (1966) as well as the concept of social representations in social psychology by Moscovici (1988). A social representation is similar to what is called "common-sense 'knowledge'" by Berger and Luckmann (1966: 27): a universe of all socially learned convictions, rules and habits that are shared within a society or social group and that enable us to successfully act and interact in society – including the knowledge how to turn on an electric light or how to dress appropriately for a funeral. Leitbilder are small segments of this universe, bundling only the knowledge related to a specific topic or life sphere. The advantage of a leitbild, in comparison to the concept of common-sense knowledge, is that it is downsized to a level at which it is possible (or much easier) to operationalize it for empirical research.

Facets of leitbilder

Like common-sense knowledge in general, leitbilder are learned early in the life course in a process of socialisation and are steadily reproduced through personal experience, social interaction, as well as media perception. The similarity in socialisation backgrounds of people within one society (same laws, same infrastructure, same media, same cultural patterns, etc.) means that leitbilder tend to be homogeneous within a given country or region. The higher chance of people in one social group interacting with each other and the mutual influence of the interacting people's leitbilder on each other additionally supports a convergence within any given social group.

As a consequence, leitbilder are located on both the macro and the micro level. They are micro level phenomena, on the one hand, because every individual has leitbilder and these might differ from those of others. So differences in family-related behaviour can be explained on the micro level, referring to *personal or individual leitbilder*. On the other hand, leitbilder tend to be shared by many individuals within a society or a social group, such as social milieus, regional populations, age groups or generations. Therefore they can be characteristic for certain societies or social groups and also explain differences in behaviour on the meso and macro level, then referred to as *collective or cultural leitbilder*. We should expect somewhat more heterogeneous leitbilder within national societies and large collectives with weak social ties and rather homogeneous leitbilder within small social groups with strong social ties.

The similarity of leitbilder within social groups and societies reduces social conflicts and it facilitates mutual communication, cooperation and collective action. It furthermore supports

social coherence and stability. The fewer contradictions exist regarding a leitbild in a given society the more this leitbild will direct collective action, policies and legislation. It will be reflected by institutions and infrastructures. These again will make the underlying collective leitbild seem appropriate and stabilise it further.

Nevertheless, different opposed leitbilder can exist regarding one sphere of life (e.g. regarding the distribution of paid and unpaid work within couples) and potentially cause conflicts. Such contrasts can be found when comparing societies or social groups as well as when comparing individuals. Opposing leitbilder may even simultaneously exist within an individual. One person can have internalised two or more leitbilder that contradict each other. Inner conflicts and a lack of orientation may be the consequence. Mechanisms of reducing cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) will work towards resolving such inner conflicts.
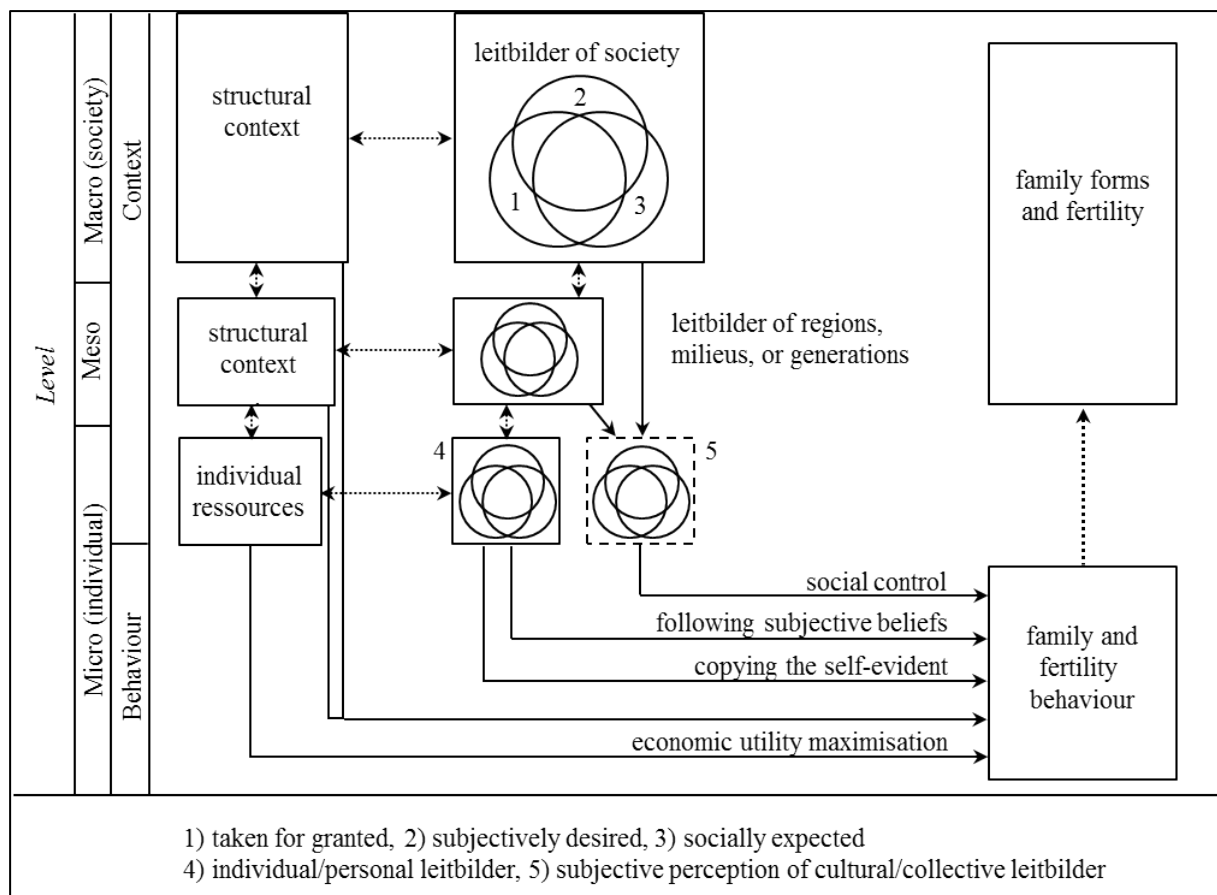
Leitbilder may be clear-cut in core elements. However, their edges will mostly be blurry. This means that among the various conceptions of normality bundled to a personal leitbild there usually will be some that a person visualises clearly and some of which he or she has only a vague conception. Among the elements bundled to a collective leitbild, there usually will be some that are perceived identically by the vast majority of people and some that vary rather strongly. As a consequence leitbilder, as cultural phenomena in general, exist only in gradations. The fact that there always will be a lack of precision in specifying a leitbild is only partially a methodological problem and partly a facet of the leitbild as such.

The influence of leitbilder on behaviour

According to the character of the conceptions bundled to a leitbild, the leitbild can have an impact on individual behaviour in three ways (cf. figure 1): (1) by the actor's motivation to put their personal desires into practice (like attitudes), (2) by the motivation to fulfil other people's social expectations and to avoid social exclusion (like norms), and (3) by the nonreflective following of routines or social practices in order to save time and effort (like frames and scripts). The actor's personal leitbilder are decisive for the first and third type of influence. For the second type of influence the cultural leitbilder are relevant that are predominant within the society and social groups to which the actor belongs.

Leitbilder influence behaviour simultaneously with rational reflection and decision-making as well as in interaction with it. The influence of leitbilder reproduces and stabilises the customary patterns of family life and decelerates social change (such as the convergence of gender roles). In this sense it is complementary to utilitarian rational decision-making.

Figure 1: Influence of leitbilder on behaviour

1) taken for granted, 2) subjectively desired, 3) socially expected
4) individual/personal leitbilder, 5) subjective perception of cultural/collective leitbilder

Source: Diabaté/Lück 2014: 60, translated.

Leitbilder of the family: an operationalization

In order to describe how contemporary leitbilder of the family look in Germany and their impacts on decisions about childbirth and family life, we carried out a representative *Family Leitbild Survey* (FLB 2012)[2] between August and November 2012. The study was funded by the Federal Institute for Population Research in Germany (BiB) and conducted by the polling institute TNS Infratest. The target population was German residents aged 20 to 39 since the survey's focus was on family formation and the relevant life-course phase. Among them, a representative sample of n=5,000 was drawn. The sampling strategy followed the dual frame approach (Gabler/Ayhan 2007) that combines landline and cell phone numbers and applies a design weight according to the number of landline and cell phone numbers respondents' have access to. The response rate was 41.1% in the landline sample and 56.5% in the cell phone sample. Respondents were interviewed based on a standardised questionnaire using the CATI (computer-assisted telephone interview) technique. The questionnaire was developed based on different qualitative preparatory studies, including guided interviews with individuals, focus group interviews as well as a cognitive pre-test. An interview took 32 minutes on average.

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[2] For a detailed documentation in German compare Lück et al. (2013).

Aside from information regarding the respondents' socio-demographic and family situation, the survey aimed to operationalize the leitbild concept and to measure leitbilder regarding a number of issues in the context of family lives. The questionnaire is divided into the sections: (1) partnership, (2) the meaning of family, (3) family foundation and extension, (3a) having children, (3b) the ideal age for having children, (3c) number of children, (3d) childlessness, (3e) parenthood, (3f) large families, (3g) preconditions for becoming a parent, (3h) siblings, (4) the parent-child relationship, (4a) the responsibility of parents, (4b) motherhood, (4c) fatherhood, (4d) intensity of parent-child contact.

In each section, first of all the respondent's *personal* leitbild was measured. This was done by asking about their (dis) agreement with a number of statements, based on a four-answer rating scale. Each statement represents a conception of normality according to the afore-described theoretical concept. These are, to a large share, attitudes in a strict sense (e.g. "Fathers should spend less time at work for the sake of their children"[3]). Some are rather worded as an assumption (e.g. "It's not natural for a man to be a househusband"[4]), although they are still linked to an underlying normative evaluation and could still be considered attitudes in a broader sense. Among the statements, sets of correlating items were identified by factor analyses. These sets then were interpreted as representing a leitbild. The respondents' (dis) agreements to the items within a set was summarised in an index measuring this leitbild. Among the three characters a leitbild can have (cf. above), personal desirability is emphasised by the operationalization, so that the measured personal leitbild comes close to a value or a complex of attitudes. This is practicable inasmuch as the personal leitbild is assumed to affect behaviour based on its characteristic of being desired by the actor himself (cf. figure 1).

The identification of *cultural* leitbilder in Germany was *not* based on the aggregation of individual leitbilder for two reasons. Firstly, the leitbild characterising a society does not need to be the individual leitbild of a majority of people within this society; it may be the one being communicated the most or being the most visually reflected by institutions and infrastructures. Secondly, the sample only consisted of people aged 20 to 39, whereas the cultural leitbild of a society is shaped by people of all ages. Therefore, a different approach was used for capturing collective leitbilder:

Each interview measured the interviewee's perception of the cultural leitbild. This was done by asking the respondent's estimation how "people in general"[5] would evaluate the same statements. An index was then generated accordingly. The concept of "people in general" is supposed to be understood as an abstraction in the sense of "the generalized other" by G. H. Mead (1934). It represents the cultural climate in which individuals live and by which their behaviour is influenced. It was explained to the respondents at the beginning of the interview ("By that we mean the prevailing opinion in Germany, or what one might hear about most often

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[3] In German: "Väter sollten für ihre Kinder beruflich kürzer treten."
[4] In German: "Es liegt nicht in der Natur des Mannes, Hausmann zu sein."
[5] In German: "die Allgemeinheit".

in everyday life from the media or contact with other people."[6]). For a random sub-sample (n=537), at the end of the interview respondents and interviewers evaluated how well the questions regarding "people in general" worked with positive results. Furthermore the questions were tested for validity in a cognitive pre-test before the field work by GESIS (Porst et al. 2012). The operationalization of cultural leitbilder seems to emphasize their character of being socially expected, so that the measured leitbilder come close to a complex of social norms. This is practicable inasmuch as a cultural leitbild is assumed to affect behaviour based on its characteristic of being expected by others (cf. figure 1).

Empirical evidence for "leitbilder" and their impact on family lives

Initial analyses of the *Family Leitbild Survey* support the assumption that leitbilder exist – or at least that they are an applicable heuristic approach for empirical research – and that the survey is a suitable tool for measuring them (cf. Schneider et al. 2015). We find significant differences between personal leitbilder and leitbilder perceived in society. This finding supports our argument that in addition to individual beliefs and attitudes there are independent cultural leitbilder in society that influence individual behaviour and that only a concept that encapsulates both can explain the phenomena we are interested in. This feature makes the leitbild concept valuable for international comparison because individuals in different societies with similar personal leitbilder may nevertheless act differently due to the contrasting societal leitbilder. Some findings also support the thesis that leitbilder are a key for understanding why change in European family lives occurs slower than expected or not at all. Due to limited space, we will not present actual empirical analyses in the following, but a summary of findings published so far (Schneider et al. 2015).

According to their personal leitbild, most Germans between 20 and 39 feel that it is a father's responsibility to be actively involved in childcare and reduce his paid work. However, according to the cultural leitbild they perceive in Germany, a father should be able to provide an income sufficient for the whole family to live on whereas it is not in his nature to be a househusband (Lück 2015). Even if the personal (dis) agreement might be somewhat biased in reporting more gender equality than people actually believe in, this finding reveals a notable contradiction between personal and cultural leitbilder. It can be explained by the fact that the cultural leitbild in Germany is also shaped by Germans aged 40 and older who were not included in the sample and have more traditional mental pictures of family and fatherhood than the 20 to 39-year-olds (Junck/Lück 2015). Furthermore, the cultural leitbild is shaped by existing institutions (e.g. the German tax system) that still correspond to a degree to the father leitbild of a male breadwinner.

The coexistence of such opposed leitbilder presumably leads to inner conflicts and to a lack of orientation, potentially also to conflicts with significant others and to dissatisfaction. This is an analogy to role conflicts and to the concept of ambivalence, suggested by Lüscher for analysing

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[6] In German: "Damit meinen wir die vorherrschende Meinung in Deutschland, also was man im Alltag durch die Medien oder durch den Kontakt mit anderen Menschen besonders oft mitbekommt."

intergenerational relationships (Lüscher/Pillemer 1998; Lüscher 2004). Just as the contradiction between various role expectations an individual is confronted with or between needs for independency and mutual dependency, the contradiction between personal and cultural leitbilder also requires cognitive strategies how to handle it. And an individual's identity, orientation, subjective well-being and social relations depend on the success of this balancing act. We do not assume that either the cultural or the personal leitbild has "master status" (Krüger/Levy 2000) in the sense that it superimposes other orientations. Rather cognitive mechanisms of reducing cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) are required to resolve the inner conflict.

A relevant number of men, especially of childless men, even perceive it personally as a fathers' responsibility to do both: be actively involved in childcare and provide the family income at the same time (Lück 2015). This may indicate that the lack of orientation leads men to expect more of themselves than they are capable of. We find similar results for mothers. A majority of 20 to 39-year-old Germans feels that a mother should work for pay to be independent but also have time for her children in the afternoon. A similar result is found regarding the perceived cultural leitbild in Germany (Diabaté 2015), only here the traditional leitbild of a stay-at-home mother is more pronounced. Therefore similarly to fathers, mothers experience a conflict between their personal and the cultural leitbild in society. Additionally, however, their personal leitbilder alone are already highly demanding and may cause stress since they imply the (self) expectation of combining intensive childcare with a career.

Looking at couples with children and their arrangement of paid and unpaid work, a minority of less than 10% of the 20 to 39-year-olds have the leitbild of a male breadwinner and female caretaker arrangement. People sharing this personal leitbild have a significantly higher chance of actually living in a male breadwinner arrangement; people who deny it have a significantly higher chance of living in a dual-earner arrangement (Diabaté et al. 2015). This may reflect an impact of the leitbild on behaviour or an influence of everyday experience on the personal leitbild or reciprocal interdependence. Diabaté et al. (2015) also identify a group of people living in arrangements contrary to their personal leitbild, which reflects that other factors also influence behaviour including cultural, political and economic factors. Such a contradiction is likely to create similar inner conflicts as the contradiction between personal and cultural leitbilder described above.

The leitbild of a male breadwinner and female caretaker arrangement is linked to the idea that a mother looks after her children personally and goes without public childcare. The more prevalent leitbild of mothers and fathers both engaging in childcare (about 40% of Germans aged 20 to 39) does not oppose public childcare, but this is combined with a very demanding idea of what childcare implies in terms of duties and responsibilities. It is combined, for example with the idea of the parents putting their own needs last and always keeping up-to-date on proper child raising in order to not make mistakes (Diabaté et al. 2015). About 90% of Germans aged 20 to 39 disagree with the statement that "Children will grow up no matter what, so it's not

necessary to put a lot of thought into it"; about 40% think, "Children between 1 and 3 years suffer when they are cared for mostly in a day-care centre" (Ruckdeschel 2015).

Several leitbilder show a correlation with having children. One of them is the idea of what childcare should look like. Agreement with the statement that "Parents can do a lot wrong in raising children, so they should become well informed" lowers the chance of being a parent to less than 50% (Schiefer/Naderi 2015). This cross-sectional finding can be interpreted in different ways; one is that highly demanding imagined parental responsibilities discourages young adults from having children.

Our research does not identify an overall leitbild of the family in a sense that statements regarding all various aspects of family lives, from the appropriate age for leaving the parents' home to the ideal number of children, are correlated. Rather we find leitbilder in our data that are limited to a certain aspect of family life, such as living together as a couple, necessary preconditions for having children, responsibilities of parents towards their children, how to be a good mother, how to be a good father, etc. This does not necessarily mean that individuals do not have an overall mental picture of family life as a whole. However, when they do these mental pictures vary too strongly between people to identify them by means of quantitative analyses.

Discussion

Our motivation to develop a theoretical concept starts out with sorting empirical findings and attempting to interpret them. We find ambivalences and contradictory concurrencies of fast change and continuity in European family lives. Yet we lack convincing theoretical interpretations, especially for the persistence of basic contours of the nuclear family and of gender-specific orientations. As a consequence, we propose strengthening and renewing cultural approaches to explain behaviour in the family context – not as a counter-model, but to supplement other rather well-developed approaches that are highly suitable for explaining change in family lives. We assume that a combination of approaches is needed in order to understand ambivalent empirical reality. After a revision of existing cultural approaches, we consider the concept of leitbilder especially promising and propose developing it further. Neither the concept of leitbild as such is new, nor are the key arguments we present about how culture influences behaviour. What is innovative is our elaboration of the leitbild concept presented here and the way it organises the well-known arguments of cultural theories.

One of the advantages of the leitbild concept is that it can integrate the characteristics and arguments of other cultural-normative concepts, such as attitudes and values (which describe something personally desired by the actor), expectations and norms (which describe something that is socially expected) as well as frames, scripts and everyday knowledge (which describe something perceived as common and self-evident). Leitbilder are complex constructs comprising several conceptions and ways of conceiving normality. The leitbild concept assumes that actors usually do not have single isolated perceptions but rather sets of interrelated views that are better understood as sets than separated into their elements. Thereby the concept

sacrifices a certain degree of precision in revealing the exact mechanism behind a cultural-normative influence on behaviour; but it does so by arguing that the mechanism is actually too complex to be specified precisely.

The complexity of a leitbild is comparable to that of a role. In a sense, the leitbild concept attempts to reinvigorate role theory by avoiding weaknesses for which role theory has been criticised and largely replaced by more constructivist approaches. This is, above all, the dependency of a role on a position and on significant others being entitled to raise expectations towards the holder of this position. By assuming that actors are not only influenced by the expectations of others but just as well by their own evaluations and perceptions, the leitbild concept offers a more flexible and maybe also more plausible theoretical basis than role theory. Compared to constructivist approaches, it offers a cultural-normative view based on methodological individualism that therefore can more easily be connected with economic approaches and linked to quantitative research. In this way it fills a gap in understanding the concurrencies of change and continuity in European family lives and in instructing empirical research on contemporary European family lives.

A leitbild can have a retardant impact on change in family lives in several ways. Germans' understandings of the responsibilities of mothers and fathers regarding paid and unpaid work demonstrate how different leitbilder can coexist simultaneously and lead people into inner conflicts and disorientation. This may be the contradiction between a person's personal leitbild and the cultural leitbild of the society in which she or he lives (as in the case of father leitbilder). This may be the coexistence of two contradictory leitbilder that one person perceives at the same time (as in the case of mother leitbilder). The highly demanding idea of parenting in Germany is an example that a leitbild as such can make a certain step in a family career seem so challenging that it leads to postponement of this step or even discourages people from pursuing it. The influence of leitbilder may interact with rational decision-making by leading the actor to a different estimation of benefits and costs (such as the benefits and costs of becoming a parent). And it may interact with the available economic resources (such as public childcare) by making their availability seem more or less relevant. On an international level, comparative research on leitbilder has high potential to explain cross-national differences and diverging processes of change in family lives.

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