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Employed or housewife? Factors influencing the transition of employed women into housewifery. Comparison of three countries: West Germany, Italy and Spain.

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Summary

Over the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the female employment in Europe increased while simultaneously there was a decline of male employment. However in spite of the policy change towards an “adult worker model” women are more affected than men by non-continuous employment. In my dissertation I examine the factors influencing the non-continuous employment of women in the 1990s. Thereby the transition of women from employment into housewifery will be analysed.

In the 1990s West Germany and Italy were explicit familialistic welfare states concerning child care, while Spain was implicit familialistic. However in Spain and in Italy women were more continuously employed than in West Germany. On the basis of the country comparison it becomes clear in the dissertation, that the family policies of the states are influential but these policies are not enough to explain the non-continuous employment of women.

In both southern European countries a high level of education has a relatively strong negative effect on the transition of employed women into housewifery, which does not exist in West Germany. Furthermore the membership in different social classes shows significant effects in both southern European countries, which cannot be found in West Germany. Because of the statistical control of the income the results of education and social class cannot only be ascribed to material conditions. The non-continuous employment of women is influenced by resources, opportunities and restrictions, but also by cultural processes and processes of identity. These processes are associated with the membership to a particular social class or to a particular educational level.

In Italy and Spain considerable importance is attached to the labour market. Although in all three countries temporary employment and employment in small companies influence in a positive way the transition of women into housewifery, the influence in West Germany is not as strong as in Italy and Spain. The part-time work influences in a positive way the transition exclusively in both southern European countries. In Italy the employment in the public sector plays a key role: it influences negatively the transition into housewifery.

Furthermore the analysis shows similarities between all three countries. Spells of housewifery in all three countries influence positively the transition into housewifery. They belong to the concept of living of employed women and refer to traditional values concerning gender roles. The existence of a husband shows also positive effects in all three

countries while the income shows negative effects on this transition. Because of the statistical control of the portion of the woman's own income in the household income, the positive effect of the existence of a husband is less related to the allocation of resources than to the traditional gender roles and values in the marital partnership. Both income and spells of housewifery show stronger effects in West Germany than in Italy and Spain. These results refer to more traditional gender roles of West German employed women than of employed women in Italy and Spain. A descriptive analysis about the attitudes of employed women in all three countries concerning gender roles confirms these results.

In all three countries an additional transition was analysed. In West Germany the transition into housewifery is important in combination with simultaneous marginal employment, while in Italy and Spain this transition is relevant if combined with unemployment. In all three countries different results could be detected depending on whether housewifery was combined with non-employment, with marginal employment like in West Germany or with unemployment like in Italy and in Spain. This leads to the necessity of a more precise description of housewifery.