Transmission of Precariousness in Belgium: Inter- and Intragenerational Analyses (1991-2006)

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Key-Words

Inter- and Intragenerational analysis, Precariousness, Social Groups, Households, Belgium

Objectives

In Belgium, despite the improvement of the quality of life, social exclusion continues to exist and inequalities even increase. The increasing instability of the family networks and of the occupational careers increases the risks of social relegation for a large number of people. This paper has two main purposes: [1] to identify the determinants of intergenerational transmission of precariousness, at an individual level and on the whole population living in Belgium. In order to meet this purpose, we explore the intergenerational change, both forward (from 1991 to 2001) and backward (from 2001 to 1991); in order to understand under what conditions precariousness is transmitted or eliminated from one generation to the other. Do the children reproduce the positions, behaviour and trajectories of their parents, or do they on the contrary, develop a divergent social mobility? What trajectories do children of immigrants follow? Do those born and "socialised" in Belgium have a different trajectory from those arrived in the country with their parents? [2] To identify the determinants of intragenerational transmission of precariousness, by exploring the intragenerational change, both forward and backward, in order to understand under what conditions precariousness is transmitted or eliminated between partners who split during the inter-censuses period, and also between brothers and sisters. Highly informative data sets are used, on the basis of coupling census data (1991, 2001) and National Register (from 1991 to 2006) at the individual level, yielding their exhaustive, individual and longitudinal nature.

Data and Methods

The paper exploits the population censuses of Belgium in 1991 and 2001:
- Education, with questions about the last obtained diploma, type of education, age at the end of studies, …)
- Employment with questions on the activity status (identifying employed, unemployed, pensioned persons, …), occupational status (distinguishing for instance manual and non-manual workers, employees in private and public sectors, self-employed and managers, …), activity sector (agriculture, industry, trade, finance, administration, ….), working time (full or part-time, temporary or permanent), place of employment …
- Housing characteristics with questions about tenure, dwelling type (single family dwellings, apartments, caravans, …), housing composition (number of rooms), surface, construction period, equipment and heating facilities …

We also use another exhaustive dataset at the individual level, namely the National Register. It contains information about the demographic characteristics of the population, age, gen-

der, family type and size, nationality, population change (birth and death, residential change, international immigration and emigration, nationality change). The individual identifier enables us to link the individual data of the 1991 and 2001 censuses and the data from the population register. This huge database, comprising several dozens of million data, allows to compare the situation of individuals in the two years, but also to combine them with all demographic changes between 1991 and 2006 (household change, migration, nationality change, marriage, birth, death). Usually the census is considered as a picture of households and housing characteristics at one point in time, but thanks to the coupling with register data it becomes a tool for longitudinal and intergenerational observation. This is a powerful tool to revalue the scope of the population census as an information device, which is presently neglected in many countries.

Methodologically speaking, we identify social groups by classifying individuals according to their position in the fields of education, employment and housing, and typify these groups in terms of level and nature of precariousness. Only individuals belonging to the potential active and post-active population are analysed (excluding children and students). We thus end up with a social ladder going from the most deprived groups accumulating all handicaps (without a job, low educational level, bad housing …) to the groups cumulating all social assets.

The analysis of the data obtained after these couplings and classification, involve classical descriptive statistical methods, but also multivariate techniques, among which principal component analysis, cluster analysis, correspondence analysis, discriminant analysis. Given the type of data, multiple social and spatial levels can be considered (individual, household and social group on the one hand, household, neighbourhood, municipality, region and country on the other hand). Therefore multilevel analysis techniques and spatial analysis are also applied. More specifically, to identify sociodemographic determinants of inter- and intragenerational transmission of precariousness, logistic regression models are used.

The results of this analysis will be framed in the context of broader societal changes over the last decades as aging population, the second demographic transition (i.e. increasing diversification and instability of household structures), growing gender awareness, multiculturality and socio-spatial polarisation. These changes relate to the transition from intensive to flexible economic growth regimes, or from fordism to postfordism, which took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s.