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## “The Apple doesn’t Live Far from the Tree”: Living Distances between Parents and their Adult Children in Europe

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**Abstract:** Geographic proximity or distance between parents and their adult children is a fundamental, if not the decisive prerequisite for intergenerational solidarity. But why do some parents and their children live closer together than others? And why are there national differences in Europe? The objective of this article is to better understand the causes of geographical proximity or distance using the SHARE data of 14 European countries. In addition to personal characteristics of the parents and children, familial structures and cultural contextual differences between the countries are also in the focus of interest. The findings suggest that especially age and family-cycle influences have an impact on the living distance between the generations, but that socio-economic and origin-specific correlations are also important. A comparison reveals that geographical proximity or distance varies across countries. In the south of Europe parents and adult children live far closer together, which is not merely due to co-residence. The differences can primarily be ascribed to cultural as well as institutional influences and the associated social consequences.

**Keywords:** Geographical distance between family members · Intergenerational relationships · Europe · SHARE

### 1 Introductory remarks

Even in modern societies familial intergenerational relationships continue to be the most stable interpersonal bonds and have even become more significant in recent decades. Since (measured in numbers) less and less children will – due to an increased life expectancy – spend a longer lifetime together with their parents and even their grandparents (cf. *Bengtson* 2001; *Szydlik* 2000: 11). This is mainly a consequence of ageing processes and the demographic change, which is manifested in (1) the increasingly declining birth rate, (2) a drop in marriages and the associated rise in cohabitation, (3) the constantly rising number of divorces, (4) the decline in

multi-person households as well as the increase in one-person households and (5) the rise in the average life expectancy (cf. *Hoff* 2006).

This does not only alter the quantitative, but also the qualitative relationship structures between the generations. While in earlier times low life expectancy meant that the family mainly fulfilled a socialising and reproductive function, today family members are increasingly dependent on mutual solidary assistance. Intergenerational solidarity is a chief element of familial support networks (*Bertram* 1997). Besides the subjective significance of intergenerational relationships, marked by emotional closeness and affection (affective solidarity), the bonds are also reflected in the contact frequency and mutual activities (associative solidarity). Yet the most striking aspect in today's societies is the extent of functional solidarity, i.e. the giving and taking of money, time and space, as numerous empirical studies show (cf. e.g. on financial transfers *Deindl* 2010; on assistance *Brandt* 2009; on care *Haberken* 2009 as well as on co-residence *Isengard/Szydlik* 2010, 2012).

Beside existing family structures and the norm of solidarity (cf. *Szydlik* 2000: 85), the geographical proximity or distance between generations is a central prerequisite for many types of intergenerational solidarity. For instance, the living distance is not only decisive for the assistance and care within family networks, but also for the care of grandchildren (*Igel* 2012). It is only possible for parents and their adult children to render regular acts of assistance, for which direct contact is essential, when they live close enough together. Exceptions to this are financial assistance, which can easily be transferred across greater distances, or types of assistance that can basically also be given over the phone such as emotional support or assistance with administrative matters. Nevertheless, many types of (intergenerational) support are dependent on geographical proximity or distance.

Although it is known from earlier findings for Germany and other European countries that parents and their adult children usually do not live far from one another (*Kohli et al.* 1997; *Lauterbach* 1998; *Hank* 2007), there are individual and family related differences in geographical proximity or distance. In addition, cultural contextual circumstances also have a major influence on living distances and explain differences within, but primarily also between countries. These convergences and divergences have not yet been given sufficient attention, however. Although there are some studies comparing geographical proximity or distance, these are in most cases studies that only examine two nations (cf. e.g. *Bordone* 2009; *Glaser/Tomassini* 2000; *Höllinger/Haller* 1990) and that do not analyse the culturally and institutionally related causes more closely. The study by *Hank* (2007) examining ten European countries and ascribing the differences to such aspects as divergent familial bonds also does not supply a systematic country comparison that examines the correlation between living distances and social circumstances outside the context of the welfare state more closely. Especially, cultural contextual structures may be able to supply a significant contribution to explain the differences within Europe. The following study aims to close this research gap.

The research issue is therefore two-fold: (1) What determines the geographical proximity or distance between parents and their adult children in Europe? and (2) What cultural and institutional factors can explain national differences? To answer

these two questions, cluster-robust ordered logit models for 14 countries based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) are estimated. In addition to personal and familial indicators, the research interest is mainly focused on macro-structural causes in order to illuminate the previously quite neglected sphere of culturally and institutionally related convergences and divergences more precisely.

## 2 Theoretical background and empirical evidence

Intergenerational solidarity depends on three central basic prerequisites (*Szydlik* 2000: 85): (1) the relevant family structures should exist (in this case: familial generations), (2) the living distance should not be too great for many forms of solidarity and (3) a certain feeling of obligation to assist family members (solidarity norm) should dominate. Against this background, the living distance between the generations is an important prerequisite for a number of types of support. Unlike co-residence, i.e. giving and taking living space, geographical proximity is not a direct form of solidarity, but it makes many forms of intergenerational solidarity possible at all. Nevertheless, the theoretical assumptions and supposed effects of the formation of intergenerational solidarity can be transferred to the living distance between the generations. This is possible since the geographical proximity or distance on the one hand (in the form of the special case of co-residence) is a direct form of functional intergenerational solidarity and is on the other hand indirectly closely linked to it (as a potential).

In order to explain why some parents and their adult children live more closely together than others and why there are specific national differences in Europe, the theoretical model designed by *Szydlik* (2000: 39) to explain intergenerational solidarity is used (cf. also *Bengtson/Roberts* 1991). According to this model, it is assumed that three central structures have an influence on intergenerational support. These are (1) individual possibilities and needs, (2) familial factors and (3) cultural contextual structures. All three of these groups are also relevant for explaining the living distance between parents and their adult children. Theoretically, they assume that the personal needs and the possibilities of the adult children and their parents influence the formation of solidarity. Transferred to the geographical proximity or distance this would mean that a lesser or a greater living distance depends on the personal needs or opportunities. Yet in this context, being embedded in familial structures is also relevant, since “competing” family members can decrease the necessity for proximity. According to the model, differences within but primarily between countries can be ascribed to divergent cultural contextual circumstances.

But how should be adequately dealt with co-residence, in this case cohabitation of parents and their adult children? Previous findings have shown that in addition to age and its associated status within the life and family cycle, mainly the children’s economic needs either promote or impede co-residence (cf. e.g. *Aassve et al.* 2002; *Choi* 2003; *Deindl/Isengard* 2011; *Isengard/Szydlik* 2012). Therefore, taking co-residence into account in countries with high rates leads to overestimations of the influ-

ence of economical resources in a joint approach. At the same time, a theoretical and empirical elimination of co-residence would only lead to an incomplete picture of geographical proximity or distance, since this type of living arrangement is very frequent in some European countries and thus would exclude a fundamental part of the population per se. Against this background, it appears wise to look at both manifestations in the empirical section – including and excluding co-residence – in order to reveal the causes and reasons for living distances.

Previous research (with the exception of the study by *Hank* 2007) mainly focuses on individual countries or on two-country comparisons and identifies three indicator groups at the individual and familial level. *First*, age and life cyclical patterns are important that also result in gender-specific differences. In general, it becomes apparent that the geographical distance or proximity between the generations is considerably determined by age (cf. *Clark/Wolf* 1992; *Lin/Rogerson* 1995). Moving out of the parental home is usually the first step into independence, which often does not lead too far away. Using data from the German Socio-economic Panel (SOEP), *Leopold et al.* (2011) can show that on their first move children on average only move about ten kilometres away. For parents, age usually plays a role in combination with health (*Silverstein* 1995). In addition, increasing isolation caused by divorce or the death of a spouse or partner and of friends with advanced age can lead to parents and children moving (again) closer together (*De Jong Gierveld/van Tilburg* 1999; *Dykstra et al.* 2005).

Age-specific effects have not only a direct, but also an indirect influence since they are closely associated with family cycle processes (*White* 1994) – and hence with familial structures according to *Szydlik* (2000). Entering or being in a relationship, the birth of a child or grandchild, separation or dissolution of relationships through divorce or death: all of these events can have direct effects on the living distance between the generations. Two opposite trends are apparent for geographical proximity or distance. Although children frequently leave their parents' home when they enter into a relationship (for Europe *Iacovou* 2001: 10), at the same time, they usually do not move as far away as singles (*Glick/Lin* 1986; *Aquilino* 1990; *Lauterbach/Pillemer* 2001 for Germany and the USA), although the opposite is the case in the Netherlands (*Michielin/Mulder* 2007). The distances are lesser for the parent generation if mothers are single or both parents live together. This is not the case for widowed fathers; here the distances between the generations are also greater (*Lawton et al.* 1994). *Smits et al.* (2010) find for the Netherlands that children live more rarely with their parents when the parents are not single, but live with them far more often if they themselves are not married but have children.

When parents have a number of children this also has a direct effect on the distance to each individual child (*Shelton/Grundy* 2000). While – from the child's point of view – siblings enlarge their geographical distance to the parents, for the parents it is more probable that they have at least one child living close to them (*Hank* 2007: 159). Grandchildren usually also lead to the generations living closer together (*Crimmins/Ingegneri* 1990; *Rogerson et al.* 1997; *Pettersson/Malmberg* 2009). However, *Madigan* and *Hogan* (1991) discover that single mothers do not live closer to their parents than mothers who cohabit with the child's father.

The gender of the children also has an influence on geographical proximity or distance, whereas scientifically the correlations are not quite uniform. Although it is unquestioned that adult sons live together with their parents far more frequently (cf. e.g. *Billari et al.* 2001), but the picture is not as clear for living distances outside the household. Empirically it has been shown that although daughters live less often under one roof with their parents, when they do move out, they do not move very far away (*Clark/Wolf* 1992; *Lawton et al.* 1994). For Sweden *Pettersson* and *Malmberg* (2009), however, show that daughters live further away from their parents than sons. Yet even in this context, the familial situation is relevant. *Leopold et al.* (2011) find out that when daughters leave their parents' home, they usually move further away than sons, but this is only true when they leave a couple household. A current study for the Netherlands shows that couples live closer to the husband's parents than those of the wife. However as soon as young children live in the household, the family structures of women gain influence (*Blaauboer et al.* 2011).

All in all, based on the theoretical assumptions and previous empirical findings it can be assumed that with increasing age and position in the family cycle (relationship, parenthood, etc.) the probability is greater that parents and their adult children live further apart (*hypothesis 1a*). Since women usually marry earlier and have children, the geographical distance should be greater for daughters than for sons (*hypothesis 1b*).

The personal needs and opportunity structures used by *Szydlik* (2000) to explain intergenerational solidarity are closely associated with the *second* indicator group: the socio-economic variables. Earlier findings suggest that the geographical distance between the generations' increases with rising status (*Bengtson/Harootyan* 1994; *Clark/Wolf* 1992; *Silverstein* 1995), since this considerably influences personal opportunities and needs. Key factors are education and the employment status as well as the associated level of prosperity. A higher level of education is related to a greater geographical distance, since higher educated children and parents usually have better career opportunities, which are often associated with greater demands for mobility and are frequently already relevant during studies (*Kalmijn* 2006). But the financial opportunities, primarily of the parents, can also have an influence. In Italy for instance, due to the poor labour market situation and high rents, parents can frequently control where their children move either by passing residential property on to them or by financially supporting them and by traditionally being involved in the choice of residence (*Glaser/Tomassini* 2000; *Giannelli/Monfardini* 2003). Analogous to the assumptions of the heuristic model by *Szydlik* (2000) and on the basis of the state of research for individual countries, it is expected that better socio-economic opportunities and lesser need structures are accompanied by a greater geographical distance between the generations (*hypothesis 2*).

*Thirdly*, the effects of origins can influence the living distances between the generations. On the one hand, this can be the social origin, which is closely linked with socio-economic structures. Children with a more highly educated background are themselves frequently more highly educated and thus they should be more accustomed to mobility than children from less educated social classes (on inherited education see *Schimpl-Neimanns* 2000). But regional origins are also important (*Hank*

2007; *Lauterbach* 1998; *Lauterbach/Pillemer* 2001), because they considerably determine the opportunities and needs of individuals. In larger cities and conurbations the labour market opportunities as well as the supply of educational institutions are usually far better than in rural or isolated regions. This results in parents and children from urban regions living closer together more often since the “compulsion” to move is lesser due to better opportunity structures than in the countryside. The housing market can also have an influence. In rural regions there are often only few rented flats available and therefore the necessity of moving further away from the parents can be greater than in the city (*Georg et al.* 1994). Finally, ethnic origins can also explain the geographical proximity or distance between the generations. Two contrary trends are possible. On the one hand generations might live further apart because they live in different countries; on the other hand a migration background can lead generations not to move far apart since they often take advantage of a support network of relatives and friends from their country of origin, which is settled close together (*Aslund* 2005). *Mulder* (2007) can empirically prove that parents and children with migration backgrounds live closer together (see also *Angel/Tienda* 1982 for the USA, who confirm more frequent co-residence). In the tradition of previous findings for individual countries, it is assumed that also children in European countries with parents of high social status (*hypothesis 3a*), without a migration background (*hypothesis 3b*) and from rural regions (*hypothesis 3c*) live further away from their parents than children from less-educated classes, with migration backgrounds and from cosmopolitan or urban regions.

Finally and *fourthly*, cultural contextual structures, which vary socially and help explain national patterns, are relevant. Generally it can be assumed that not only co-residence of parents with their adult children is a far more common living arrangement in southern European countries than in continental Europe and in particular in comparison with northern Europe (*Kiernan* 1999), but also that living distances in general are closer (*Hank* 2007). Some of the possible convergences and divergences are related to welfare state arrangements. On the one hand, the need or necessity for intergenerational solidarity is structured by the welfare state and on the other hand the attitudes towards and significance of the family are closely tied to the historic development of the welfare states.

In countries where the church had a strong role in the development of the social state, the social and, in particular, the family-related benefits are still rather weakly today and the family is more important than in countries with extensive benefits and well-developed social systems (for a comprehensive portrayal, see *Esping-Andersen* 1998 as well as modifications by *Leibfried* 1992 and *Keune* 2009). Correspondingly, in social-democratic systems such as those in Denmark and Sweden, the role of the family is rather weak, since social benefits are very extensive. By contrast, the significance of the family in the continental European, conservative countries, among them Germany, France and Belgium, is rather strong due to the influence of the church. In the southern European, familialistic welfare systems such as Italy, Spain and Greece, the church had a significant influence on the design of the social benefits. In an OECD comparison, this means that the family-related, public support payments are quite low (cf. for example *Ferrera* 1997; *Sciortino* 2004),



but at the same time strong, traditional family structures predominate. In the post-Socialist systems such as those in Poland and the Czech Republic even today the state is “universally responsible” due to the experience of earlier times. The effects of the transformation processes can only gradually become effective. Presently we can expect that the demand for intergenerational solidarity is still relatively pronounced in these countries due to the lack of state infrastructures. In the liberal welfare states, which are mainly spread in the Anglo-Saxon area, there is means-tested public welfare with few universal benefits.

In this context, *Giuliano* (2007) ascribes the differences between the countries to cultural divergences, which are expressed in a differing self-concept of family. According to *Reher* (1998), family relationships can typically be classified as “strong ties,” which traditionally predominate in southern European countries, and the “weak ties” traditionally existing in northern and western European countries. Thus it is “not difficult to identify areas where families and family ties are relatively ‘strong’ and others where they are relatively ‘weak’ [and] these divergent practices appear to have deep historical roots” (*Reher* 1998: 203 and 204). The role of the family is one of the driving forces behind the cultural divergences, but the actual social benefits and their direct and indirect consequences for the objective living conditions also play a role. For example, welfare benefits in general have direct effects on poverty and inequality, but also on (regional) unemployment and thus on the necessity of moving or generating the family as a support network. But actual family-related benefits such as maternity leave or child benefits can have an influence (*Neyer* 2003). In general, these benefits are far more comprehensive in the north than in the south.

Against this (theoretical) background, it is expected that country-specific differences can be explained through institutional and cultural circumstances. It can be assumed that (1) the less comprehensive the welfare benefits in a country, the smaller will be the geographical distance between the generations (*hypothesis 4a*); (2) the greater the social inequality, the shorter are the living distances (*hypothesis 4b*) as well as (3) the more important the familial obligation norms and the role of the family, the closer parents and their adult children will live together (*hypothesis 4c*). The cultural contextual explanatory factors are closely linked here. In countries with weak social welfare systems – also due to the influence of the church – the family has a greater significance and correspondingly social inequality is more pronounced due to a lesser redistribution.

Living distance between generations is not only related to institutional and cultural circumstances, but is also influenced by geographical circumstances. National differences are also ascribed to whether there is a chance at all to move far away. If we disregard emigration, in smaller, densely populated states it is more difficult to live far apart from one another than in countries with larger areas. It is therefore assumed that the larger (in area) a country is, the further apart the parents and their children will live (*hypothesis 5a*), but the denser the settlement structures, the lesser will be the living distances between the generations (*hypothesis 5b*).

### 3 Data and methods

#### 3.1 Data

The second wave of the SHARE data (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement) coordinated by the Munich Center for the Economics of Aging (MEA) were used for the analyses. This is a data set supplying relatively consistent information about older people for fourteen European countries. They are Belgium (BE), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), France (FR), Greece (GR), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Sweden (SE), Switzerland (CH), Spain (ES) and the Czech Republic (CZ). The advantage of these data is that the procedure is standardised in the countries and that a broad spectrum of subjects is measured. The survey covers people over 50 years of age as respondents and their (younger) partners and asks about various topics such as demographics, income, health, residence, education and employment, behaviour, social support, activities and expectations. In addition, the partners living in the same household, who may also be younger, are interviewed. A total of approximately 33,000 people were interviewed, each of whom provided information about their parents and their children, of whom the age, gender and living distance are asked. Additionally more specific information is included about four children, chosen by the parents, such as marital status, employment status, the number and the age of their own children and highest level of educational attainment. Since not many parents in Europe have more than four children, the number of cases not accounted for is limited (almost 4 percent). The living distances between the parents and all of their adult children, for whom this additional information is available, are analysed in this article.

#### 3.2 Operationalisation

The living distance between parents and their adult children is captured by using the following variable: *“Please look at card 5. Where does {child name} live?: (1) In the same household, (2) in the same building, (3) less than 1 kilometre away, (4) between 1 and 5 kilometres away, (5) between 5 and 25 kilometres away, (6) between 25 and 100 kilometres away, (7) between 100 and 500 kilometres away, (8) more than 500 kilometres away, (9) more than 500 kilometres away in another country.”*

Based on this question, the *dependent variable* is formed. Essentially, the ordinal categories are kept and are used in the first model estimation. Only the categories 8 and 9, which measure living distances of more than 500 kilometres (once within a country and once outside a country), are combined. Since co-residence is a direct form of intergenerational solidarity, in a second model specification children who live in the same household or the same building (near co-residence, see *Isengard/Szydlik 2012*) with their parents are excluded to see whether the results differ substantially. This is because co-residence can be explained by the economic needs of the children to a large part (cf. *Deindl/Isengard 2011*).

As *explanatory variables* factors are used that reflect the age, gender and life-cycle determinants as well as socio-economic variables and origin effects. In order



to explain the country-specific particularities, cultural contextual variables are taken into account. Since the *age* of the parents and their adult children are strongly correlated a combined age variable is included into the models. Younger children (18+ to 29 years of age) and older children (from 30 years of age) are each combined with younger parents (up to 64 years of age) and older parents (from 65 years of age); the age of the oldest parent in the household is used here. The familial structures taken into account, which are closely associated with the age and the position in the life cycle, are the relationship status of the parents and children, the number of children of the respondents (corresponds to the number of siblings of the children) as well as the number of grandchildren (or number of children's children). The *relationship status* of the children is included as a dummy variable, whereby children living in a relationship (marital or non-marital) are compared to children living alone. The *status of the parents* is linked with the *gender of the children*, since, as previous findings show, the gender-specific living distance varies with the parents' relationship status. For data technical reasons, the gender of the parents is not included because the information about the living distance is available at the household level and is thus identical for both parents. Four dummy variables are taken into account: daughter-relationship parents, daughter-parent alone, son-relationship parents, son-parent alone. Moreover, the *additional number of children* is included in four dummy variables and the variables measure whether someone has next to the each recorded child no additional child, has one additional child, has two more children or has three and more children. The same differentiation is used for the number of *grandchildren* (none, 1, 2; 3 and more). The *health* of the parents is also an indicator that is closely linked with age and reflects a possible need for solidarity, in particular if the parent has no (or no longer a) partner. For this reason, an interaction term between health and the existence of a relationship is formed. Health is recorded as the number of restrictions according to ADL and IADL and added. These are instruments that measure restrictions in activities of daily living (ADL) as well as instrumental activities of daily living (IADL). ADL includes, for example, eating, dressing, personal hygiene and walking, IADL includes shopping, preparing meals, housework and managing money. The value for the parent with the most restrictions is used and interacted with the relationship status, which is a dichotomous variable.

As socio-economic variable the education of the parents is used as well as a proxy for the economic situation of the household, the "living on earnings", an indicator that measures how well the household makes ends meet. The *personal level of education* is measured according to the ISCED classification (International Standard Classification of Education), developed by the UNESCO to make different school systems and types comparable (cf. *OECD* 1999). Three categories are established that portray a low (*ISCED 1*), intermediate (*ISCED 2*) and a high level of education (*ISCED 3*). The so far highest attained school education or professional achievement is recorded as the qualification. People who are still attending school and have no certificate yet are subsumed under *ISCED 1*, as are people who are still attending vocational school but only completed compulsory schooling so far. People with an "other" achievement are also included in the lowest category since this means there is no information about their level of qualification available in this case. Since this

only applies to less than 1.5 percent of the cases, however, this type of categorisation does not affect the results. The assessment of the *individual income situation* is stored in four dummy variables and implies the following categories: *with great difficulty*, *with some difficulty*, *with reasonable ease* and *with ease*. This variable is preferred over the actual income since it highly correlates with the educational level thus making the estimation instable. The economic opportunities of the children are reproduced through the *education*, which was measured analogously with the parental information, as well as through the *employment status*. This is done using six dummy variables that differentiate between employment, unemployment, in training, economic inactivity (housewife/househusband), (early) retirement and a residual category (other).

The third group of variables includes the origin effects. The *social origin* overlaps with the economic variables. Moreover, the regional origin (city vs. country) and the ethnic origin are measured. The *community size*, which is developed using variables generated by SHARE, only differentiates between city and country and thus combines the original five categories, which were *large city*, *suburbs of a large city*, *large towns*, *small towns* as well as *rural regions and villages*. People living in a (large) city or a suburb are given the specification of city, while people living in smaller towns and communities fall under the category of villages and municipalities. It is also taken into account whether it is a *household with a migration background*. For this, at least one parent must cite that they were born abroad or have no domestic citizenship.

Finally, in order to analyse the influence of cultural contextual differences in greater detail, a model is estimated containing all of the individual and familial indicators of the basic model (with fourteen country dummies), the respective macro-indicator however is varied. These are the (1) classification in four welfare state regimes as well as indicators that (2) reflect the extent of social benefits, (3) measure poverty and inequality, (4) consider the labour market situation as well as (5) take geographical circumstances into account. The countries are classified in the four *regime types* conservative (AT, BE, DE, CH, FR, IE, NL), social democratic (DK, SE), familialistic (ES, GR, IT) as well as post-socialist (CZ, PL). Since no liberal social states are included in SHARE, unfortunately this type cannot be examined here. The extent of social benefits in the year 2006 is incorporated using *social expenditures* in general (per capita in current prices and adjusted for purchasing power in US dollars, OECD) as well as *family expenditures* (in percent of the GDP, OECD). The level of prosperity is indicated using the country-specific *poverty rate* (60 percent median, new OECD scale) and the extent of income inequality using the *Gini coefficients* also from 2006 (UNDP 2006). Additionally, the social labour market situation is taken into account using the country-specific (*youth*) *unemployment rates* (according to *Weltalmanach* 2006). The significance of family is operationalised using the *percentage of non-marital births* in all births in a country in the year 2006 (OECD) as well as using an index derived from the SHARE data indicating familial obligation norms. For this, six individual items that indicate such norms were added and recoded so that high values indicate approval of the family and its responsibilities. Then, the average value was ascertained for each country and used as macro-indicator in

the analyses. The bases are the following questions: (1) The following statements are related to the duties people may have in their family. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each statement: (a) Parents' duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being; (b) Grandparents' duty is to be there for grandchildren in cases of difficulty (such as divorce of parents or illness); (c) Grandparents' duty is to help grandchildren's parents in looking after young grandchildren; (2) In your opinion, who – the family or the State – should bear the responsibility for each of the following...? (a) Financial support for older persons who are in need? (b) Help with household chores for older persons who are in need such as help with cleaning, washing? (c) Personal care for older persons who are in need such as nursing or help with bathing or dressing? Finally, the geographical circumstances are taken into account by recording the *population density* and the *national area* (Weltalmanach 2006). Other macro-indicators which are relevant for co-residence like the rate of residential property and the percentage of rent costs in the total expenditures of the households prove irrelevant for geographical proximity or distance between generations and are therefore not taken into account in the following analyses (cf. Isengard/Szydlik 2010).

### 3.3 Methods

Since the dependent variable, the living distance, is a categorical variable, ordered logit models are estimated (cf. e.g. Greene 2003; Agresti 2002). These are an enhancement of the binary logit regression and are used when the dependent variable has an ordinal scale and has more than two categories that can be ranked hierarchically. The size of the intervals between the categories is insignificant. The corresponding regression equation is:

$$\text{Logit}(Y_{1...i/i+1...I} | X) = \beta_{0i} - \beta_1 X_1 - \beta_2 X_2 - \dots - \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon. \quad (1)$$

Exactly one regression coefficient is estimated for each of the independent variables, but a number of constants  $\beta_{0i}$ , which can be interpreted as threshold values between the categories of the dependent variable.

The probability of falling in categories 1 to  $i$  of a dependent variable, in this case the living distance, with  $j$  categories results from it being correlated to the probability of falling in the category  $i+1$  to  $j$ .

The probability of an event ( $y$ ) is calculated according to:

$$\Pr(y = i) = \Pr(k_{i-1} < \sum_j \beta_j X_j + u \leq k_i). \quad (2)$$

The question of the living distance from each individual child was only answered once per household so the information has to be transferred to the non-responding partner. This, however, results in no variation in the responses since the living distance to the parental home is a circumstance that cannot vary for both parents if they live together in one household and if it was not recorded when the parents

lived separately. For this reason, the information was regarded at the household level and the data were processed so that for each family one line per child exists in the data set. Since, however, multiple observations may exist per household, in these cases robust standard errors were estimated for clustered data according to households (cf. *Bye/Riley* 1989). Using an additional Stata ado (cf. *Petersen* 2009) it is also possible to calculate cluster-robust standard errors for two dimensions, however only for linear regressions and logit, probit and tobit models. For this reason, additional models (not shown here) were estimated for the macro-indicators (Table 2 in section 4.2), which treat the living distance as a linear variable and estimate cluster-robust standard errors according to households and countries. The results proved to be very robust and show no notable differences compared with the one-dimensional observation.

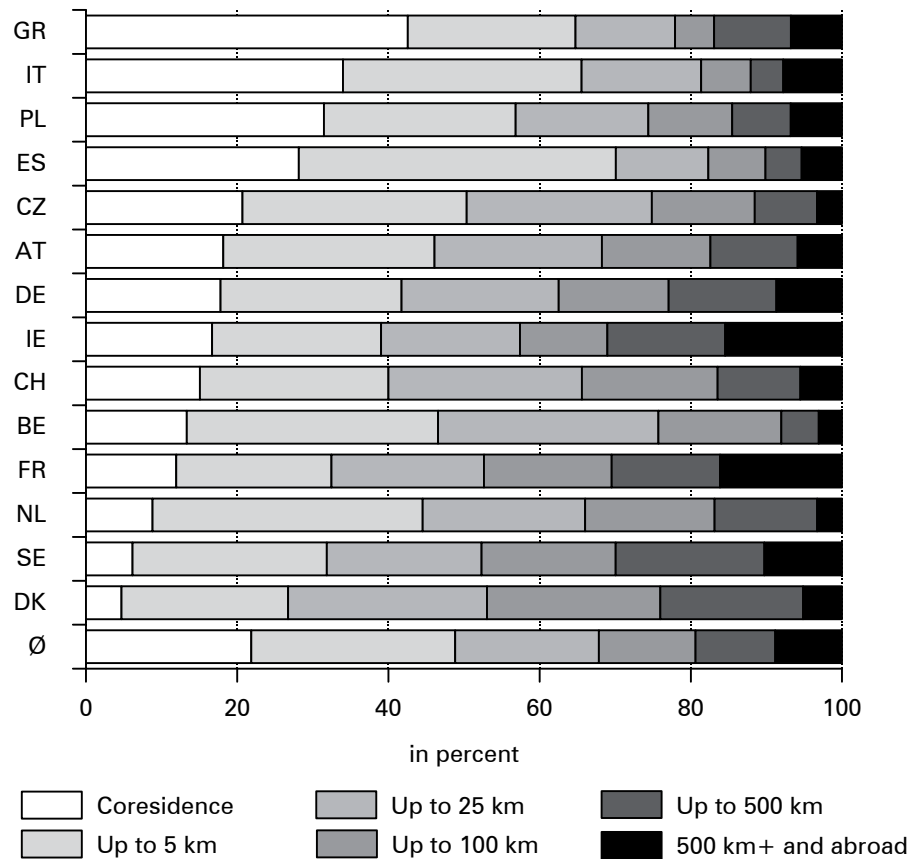
Mainly independent variables, which are additively linked, are included in the model estimations. However, an additional interaction term is used between the *number of health restrictions* (metric) and the *relationship status of the parents* (categorical), which indicates a multiplicative correlation. The effects of the number of restrictions without and with partner each show the main effect; the interaction term denotes whether both groups differ significantly from one another (cf. in detail *Aiken/West* 1991).

## 4 Empirical findings

### 4.1 Living distances in Europe

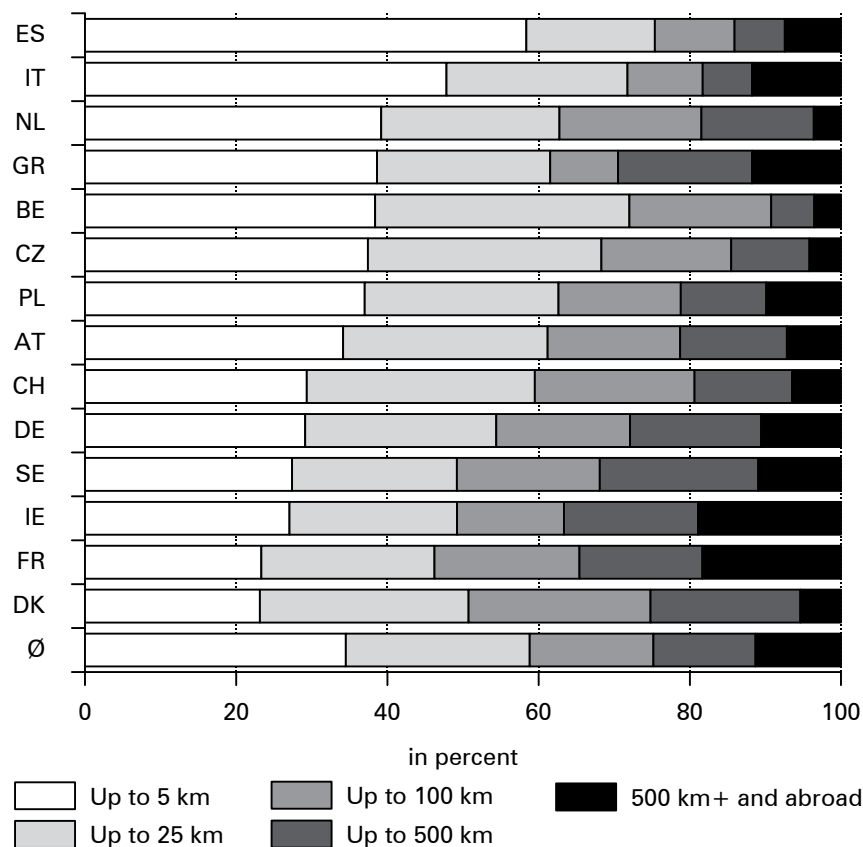
A first look at the living distances between parents and their adult children reveals distinct differences in the European comparison, in particular between the north and the south (cf. Fig. 1). Especially co-residence occurs relatively frequently in the southern countries (Greece, Italy and Spain) as well as in traditionally Catholic Poland. In Denmark and Sweden, by contrast, parents and their adult children rarely live together under one roof. But here, too, the generations (irrespective of co-residence) live close together, whereas the trend of geographical proximity is again more pronounced in the southern European countries where about 80 percent live in a radius of 25 kilometres, while in Denmark and Sweden but also in France, by contrast, it is only almost 50 percent. In France and Ireland large distances are far more probable than in many other countries of Europe. Germany, Austria and Switzerland lie within the European standard; about 40 percent of the parents and children live up to a maximum of five kilometres apart. In the European average, which lies at roughly 50 percent, this is almost every second family. All in all, we see that the living distance increases from the south to the north. This might also be explained by the fact that co-residence plays a rather marginal role in Scandinavia where only 5 percent (in Denmark) and 6 percent (in Sweden) of generations live together under one roof.

**Fig. 1:** Living distances in Europe (in percent)



Source: SHARE, Wave 2, rel. 2.5.0, own calculations (weighted, except for Ireland). n=47.510.

So what does geographical proximity look like if we only observe children who live outside the household or home? Excluding children which co-reside the pattern largely remain the same (cf. Fig. 2). In the southern countries the geographical distance is far lesser than in the north of Europe as well as in France and Ireland, whereas the Netherlands is an exception. Here, the percentage is comparable to that of Greece: slightly over 60 percent live within a maximum radius of five kilometres apart. Austria and Switzerland lie within the European average; in Germany the living distances are somewhat greater, almost 30 percent of parents and children live more than 100 kilometres apart (of which approx. 11 percent live even more than 500 kilometres apart). In the Czech Republic, Belgium and Denmark the generations rarely live more than 500 kilometres apart, perhaps due to the respective size of the country.

**Fig. 2:** Living distances in Europe, excluding co-residence (in percent)

Source: SHARE, Wave 2, rel. 2.5.0, own calculations (weighted, except for Ireland).  
n=38.262

Whether these differences also remain stable if we control for individual variables and familial structures will be more closely examined in the following section. Furthermore the influence of cultural and institutional circumstances will be illuminated.

## 4.2 Determinants of geographical proximity or distance between the generations

The correlations shown previously reveal that the degree of geographical proximity or distance between parents and their adult children in Europe shows country-specific differences. These results, however, only comprise the living distances in a quantitative manner, and reveal nothing about the possible causes or backgrounds. In order to find out what determines the living distance between the generations, ordinal regression models are estimated, which take the personal, familial and cultural



contextual structures into account. In Table 1 the personal and familial influencing factors are included (controlling for countries), before then the country-specific differences are examined in greater detail (Table 2).

It can be shown (cf. Table 1) that younger adult children (up to 29 years of age) live significantly closer to their parents than older children (30 years and older). Children from the ages of 18 to 29 live particularly often close to their parents when the oldest parent is not older than 64 years. With an increasing age of the parents and primarily the children the geographical distance increases significantly. This is also true when co-resident children are not taken into account, whereas here the effects distinctly weaken. In addition to age, familial structures also play a role, whereas, in line with the life cycle concept, the existence of an own family is a central variable. The relationship status of the child shows significant correlations with geographical proximity or distance. Nonetheless this has different effects depending upon whether co-residence is included or not. When children live in a relationship, the living distances are greater in the first case and lesser in the second case. This is because although children usually leave their parental home when they move in together with a partner, they do not move far away (primarily, when children are born). With regard to gender, we only see that sons live less far away than daughters if there is only one parent left. This effect disappears however when co-residence is excluded, this is probably due to the known correlation that sons remain at "Hotel Mum" far longer than daughters. If co-resident children are excluded, the gender combined with the relationship status of the parents has no longer any influence.

"Competing" family members strongly influence geographical proximity or distance. If parents have at least two children the geographical distance for each child enlarges. This pattern is, however, broken when only those children are taken into account who no longer live under one roof with the parents. While a grandchild increases the geographical distance of the generations taking co-residence into account, grandchildren lead to the generations moving closer together if the children (of the respondents) have already left the parental home. The health of the respondents combined with the existence of a relationship has no influence on the proximity or distance of the generations if we control for other variables. Further results – not shown here – confirm however that health has an impact on co-residence to such an extent that the probability increases with a rising number of restrictions if only one parent is still living or lives alone. If the parent has a partner, health restrictions do not lead to an increase in children living with their parent.

How do socio-economic variables affect proximity or distance? For education, the expected correlations are confirmed: the better the parents' education as well as their children's education, the further apart the generations live. This is also associated with the fact that both generations are generally more mobile and children already move further away for their studies. On the other hand, the economic situation of the parental home, operationalised via the living on earnings, has hardly any influence on the living distance (but it does have an influence on co-residence). Things are different when looking at the labour force status of the children: unemployed children live more frequently near their parents (to a major part due to co-residence) than employed children. Economically inactive children (housewives

**Tab. 1:** Determining factors for geographical proximity or distance: Results of ordinal logit analysis

	Including co-residence		Excluding co-residence	
	Coeff.	z-Value	Coeff.	z-Value
Age and life course indicators				
Age ( <i>child up to 29 years/respondent up to 64 years</i> )				
up to 29 years/65+ years	.21*	(2.08)	.28**	(2.96)
30+/up to 64 years	.77**	(21.12)	.11**	(2.82)
30+/65+ years	.79**	(21.80)	.15**	(4.04)
Co-habitation, child ( <i>no</i> )				
yes	.65**	(26.77)	-.11**	(-4.06)
Gender child/partner, respondent ( <i>daughter-partner</i> )				
daughter-alone	.06+	(1.94)	.05	(1.33)
son-partner	.03	(.93)	-.01	(-0.47)
son-alone	.26**	(5.66)	.04	(0.80)
Additional children, respondent ( <i>none</i> )				
one	.11**	(3.02)	.05	(1.14)
two	.25**	(6.61)	.14**	(3.33)
three and more	.27**	(6.73)	.12**	(2.61)
Number of grandchildren, respondent ( <i>none</i> )				
one	.22**	(7.53)	-.27**	(-4.06)
two	.04	(1.57)	-.34**	(-8.39)
three and more	-.02	(-0.46)	-.33**	(-10.81)
Health, respondent (ADL + IADL)				
number of restrictions (without partner)	-.01	(-1.18)	.00	(0.10)
IA effect: number*partner	.02+	(1.91)	-.00	(-0.06)
number of restrictions (with partner)	.01	(1.42)	.00	(0.06)
Socio-economic indicators				
Education, respondent ( <i>intermediate</i> )				
low	-.08**	(-3.02)	-.13**	(-4.36)
high	.29**	(8.55)	.23**	(6.75)
Income situation ( <i>great difficulty</i> )				
some difficulty	-.07+	(-1.90)	.04	(0.90)
reasonable ease	-.07+	(-1.85)	.05	(1.16)
ease	-.00	(-0.05)	.06	(1.11)
Education, child ( <i>intermediate</i> )				
low	-.12**	(-4.67)	-.14**	(-4.35)
high	.47**	(18.66)	.53**	(19.87)
Employment status, child ( <i>employed</i> )				
unemployed	-.44**	(-8.88)	-.04	(-0.66)
in training	-.64**	(-9.36)	.71**	(11.94)
homemakers	.20**	(5.81)	.10*	(2.22)
(early) retirement	-.15**	(-2.91)	-.02	(-0.39)
other	-.31**	(-2.57)	.65**	(5.61)
Origin effects				
Community size ( <i>villages and townships</i> )				
(large) cities	-.08**	(-3.78)	-.19**	(-7.66)
Migration background ( <i>no</i> )				
yes	.17**	(3.87)	.21**	(4.71)
N [HH-Cluster]	38.812	[17.486]	30.973	[15.357]
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.06		.03	

Note: Reference categories in italics. Significance levels: \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$ . Z-values in brackets. The significances for the main effect *number of restrictions (with partner)* were calculated based on the statistical post hoc probing (cf. in detail Aiken/West 1991). Models controlled for countries (results see Table 2).

Source: SHARE, Wave 2, rel. 2.5.0, own calculations.

or -husbands) by contrast live further away, which is linked to family cycle events (relationship and child).

Finally, the origin effects also prove to be relevant. Children with a more highly educated background live further away from their parents than children from less-educated social classes. Yet while living in cities significantly lessens the distance between the generations as expected, the generations live much further apart when they have a migration background.

Based on the empirical findings, it can be shown that individual and familial characteristics have a considerable influence on the geographical proximity or distance between generations. But what about country-specific differences? Table 2 contains the regression coefficients based on cluster-robust standard errors for various country-specific variables controlled for the individual and familial variables from the basic model. In general, the national differences found in the bivariate results are confirmed here. In the northern European states, the geographical distance between the generations is much greater than in the southern European countries. But how can these differences be explained? In order to illuminate the correlations more precisely, the results of the influence of various macro-indicators are shown below.

The influence of the macro-indicators also proves significant when controlling for individual variables and familial structures. In general: (1) the higher the social and family expenditure, the further apart the generations live from one another, (2) the poorer the national labour market situation, the closer parents and children live, (3) the more poverty and inequality, the lesser are the distances, (4) the greater the percentage of non-marital births and the lesser the value of family, the greater the geographical distance between the generations and (5) the larger the country, the greater the living distances and the more densely populated, the lesser the geographical distance.

All in all, the effects are stronger if co-residence is included; nonetheless the directions and significances of the correlations remain stable. Only the country-specific income inequality shows no effect for geographical proximity if co-residence is excluded and youth unemployment then has the effect that the living distances increase. This means that children frequently live with their parents when youth unemployment is high, but also that in countries with high rates they are apparently rather forced to move further away from their parents to escape the precarious job situation. The likelihood ratio test shows that the influence of the countries or types of welfare states are the greatest, but also that family expenditure as well as the social status of the family measured via the percentage of non-marital births and agreement with familial obligation norms are of significance. If we only observe children who do not live with their parents, then the geographical circumstances are also important.

Finally, we can note that overall the expected correlations were confirmed. Since it is shown that age and family-cycle processes and, conditionally, also gender-specific differences have an influence on the geographical proximity between the generations (*hypotheses 1a and 1b*). But socio-economic structures also have an influence. In particular a better education of parents and children promotes greater

**Tab. 2:** Cultural contextual differences in Europe

	Including co-residence		LR ratio test	Excluding co-residence		LR ratio test
	Coeff.	<i>z-value</i>		Coeff.	<i>z-value</i>	
Country ( <i>Germany</i> )			2704.73			940.20
Austria	-.29**	<i>(-4.20)</i>		-.20**	<i>(-2.84)</i>	
Sweden	.48**	<i>(8.05)</i>		.34**	<i>(5.67)</i>	
Netherlands	-.10+	<i>(-1.47)</i>		-.30**	<i>(-5.04)</i>	
Spain	-1.02**	<i>(-14.88)</i>		-.77**	<i>(-8.98)</i>	
Italy	-1.06**	<i>(-16.94)</i>		-.41**	<i>(-5.86)</i>	
France	.43**	<i>(6.69)</i>		.48**	<i>(7.59)</i>	
Denmark	.44**	<i>(7.44)</i>		.02	<i>(0.33)</i>	
Greece	-.98**	<i>(-14.44)</i>		-.03	<i>(-0.42)</i>	
Switzerland	.09	<i>(1.47)</i>		-.09	<i>(-1.25)</i>	
Belgium	-.51**	<i>(-9.40)</i>		-.54**	<i>(-9.79)</i>	
Czech Republic	-.34**	<i>(-5.70)</i>		-.12+	<i>(-1.95)</i>	
Poland	-.84**	<i>(-13.67)</i>		-.13+	<i>(-1.87)</i>	
Ireland	-.11	<i>(-1.20)</i>		.02	<i>(0.26)</i>	
Country groups ( <i>continental Europe</i> )			2078.20			245.84
Northern Europe	.55**	<i>(18.21)</i>		.32**	<i>(10.12)</i>	
Southern Europe	-.93**	<i>(-27.55)</i>		-.26**	<i>(-6.40)</i>	
Eastern Europe	-.51**	<i>(-15.50)</i>		-.02	<i>(-0.43)</i>	
Social expenditure <sup>1</sup>	.15**	<i>(25.43)</i>	905.94	.04**	<i>(6.61)</i>	60.96
Family expenditure	.48**	<i>(32.64)</i>	1576.96	.20**	<i>(12.65)</i>	228.32
Poverty rate	-.10**	<i>(-28.44)</i>	1278.20	-.03**	<i>(-8.87)</i>	117.70
Income inequality (Gini)	-.06**	<i>(-21.08)</i>	644.52	-.00	<i>(-0.76)</i>	0.78
Unemployment rate	-.08**	<i>(-16.28)</i>	378.72	.02*	<i>(2.73)</i>	10.35
Youth unemployment rate	-.03**	<i>(-15.63)</i>	356.20	.01**	<i>(4.65)</i>	30.31
Non-marital births	.03**	<i>(30.02)</i>	1442.66	.01**	<i>(8.93)</i>	122.07
Familialism	-.04**	<i>(-39.33)</i>	1563.83	-.01**	<i>(-5.54)</i>	30.67
Population density	-.08**	<i>(-8.59)</i>	92.76	-.16**	<i>(-15.83)</i>	323.61
National area	.04**	<i>(6.86)</i>	71.05	.08**	<i>(12.12)</i>	220.07

Note: Models controlled for the variables from Table 1, whereas each of the macro indicators were varied.

<sup>1</sup> value was divided by 1,000 for the purpose of better portrayal.

Reference categories in italics.

Significance levels: \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$ . z-values in brackets.

(Number of cases:  $n = 38.812$ )

Source: SHARE, Wave 2, rel. 2.5.0, own calculations.

geographical distances. The income situation of the parents and the employment status of the child are, by contrast, less important. *Hypothesis 2* is only partially confirmed. Likewise, social, regional and ethnic origins play a role when explaining living distances. Children with a higher social status background from rural regions

live further from their parents (than children from lesser-educated social classes and from urban regions (*hypotheses 3a and 3c*)). Contrary to the expectations, which are supported by previous empirical findings from other countries, children with migration backgrounds, who cite the availability of networks of relatives and friends from the country of origin as the reason for geographical proximity, live further from their parents. Therefore this analysis does not confirm *hypothesis 3b*. This might be due to the fact that the older generation, for example those in retirement age return to their homeland while their children stay abroad.

The empirically observed differences between the countries can be explained by referring to the type of welfare state. Social benefits have both a direct (*hypothesis 4a*) and an indirect influence on geographical distance through the varying country-specific levels of prosperity, measured here via poverty and inequality (*hypothesis 4b*) the same applies to the importance of the family (*hypothesis 4c*). In addition to the cultural and institutional circumstances, however, geographical circumstances also play a role. The living distances rises with increasing national area (*hypothesis 5a*), while the settlement structure has the opposite effect: the more densely populated the country, the closer parents and their adult children live (*hypothesis 5b*).

## 5 Conclusions and outlook

From a historical perspective, families are the most stable form of human co-existence and, due to incisive demographic changes, in recent decades especially relationships between parents and their (adult) children are gaining more significance. Since most European countries demonstrate a trend towards fewer children, an ever lesser number of children spend a longer lifetime – due to the increased life expectancy – together with their parents. This purely quantitative change in relationships is accompanied by a qualitative change and familial bonds are characterised by a lifelong solidarity.

Against this background, the study of the geographical proximity or distance between the generations is not only of scientific interest, but it is also relevant for social policies since the living distance is a necessary prerequisite for many forms of intergenerational solidarity. While financial transfers are even possible across great distances, timely support is often tied to geographical proximity: assistance in the household, with nursing or care of grandchildren, can only be provided if the givers and recipients do not live too far apart. Yet why do some parents and their adult children live closer together than others? What is it like in the single European countries? And how can country-specific differences be explained?

As could be shown, based on the empirical analyses, the generations in all of the countries studied live relatively close to one another. Nevertheless there are personal, familial and cultural contextual differences, which are also important from a socio-political position. Not least due to processes of demographic change, the relationships between the generations are becoming more important and familial support networks often help where the state is not obligated to do so. The living

distance is an important prerequisite for this. At the individual and familial level, geographical proximity in Europe is promoted or impeded by (1) age and life course variables, (2) socio-economic factors and (3) origin effects. Not only individual, but also social inequality structures strongly influence the living distances between the generations. Against this background, co-residence cannot only be assessed as a direct reaction to socio-economic and social uncertainties – as known from the literature – but also intergenerational proximity or distance as a whole. Since it can be shown that not only individual needs and opportunities of individuals but also contextual circumstances promote or impede proximity.

The cultural and institutional structures can vary in each country and can partly be subject to welfare state influences. This results in both direct and indirect differences in the geographical distances between the generations in these countries. Overall, it can be shown that in nations with generally better social benefits and specifically family-policy expenditures, parents and their adult children live further apart from one another. This might also be explained by the fact that in these countries not only the familial obligation norm, but primarily the necessity to provide assistance and support decreases compared to weak welfare states. Since the geographical distances become smaller with increasing poverty and income inequality at the societal level, this hypothesis is supported. This argument can be underpinned with the example of co-residence, since this living arrangement increases in countries with the lowest welfare benefits. This enforces the assumption that co-residence is frequently not a voluntary living arrangement chosen by parents and children who want to live together, but rather that economic necessities or uncertainties exert influence.

Finally, however, it should not be forgotten that in addition to personal needs and opportunities, existing family structures and social opportunity structures, an action-based perspective can also be of significance. Ultimately, also the living distance is (almost) always the result of an individual decision and subjective action structures play just as much a role as objective variables. The psychological and social disposition of the generations is of significance here. Emotional bonds between parents and children as well as personal values also influence the co-existence between the generations.

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