

Community Characteristics and Demographic Development:

Three Württemberg Communities, 1558 - 1914

Sheilagh Ogilvie, Markus Küpker and Janine Maegraith

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Abstract

Demographic behaviour is influenced not just by attributes of individuals but also by characteristics of the communities in which those individuals live. A project on 'Economy, Gender, and Social Capital in the German Demographic Transition' is analyzing the longterm determinants of fertility by carrying out family reconstitutions of three Württemberg communities (Auingen, Ebhausen, and Wildberg) between c. 1558 and 1914. A related project on 'Human Well-Being and the "Industrious Revolution": Consumption, Gender and Social Capital in a German Developing Economy, 1600-1900' is using marriage and death inventories to investigate how consumption interacted with production and demographic behaviour in two of these communities. This paper examines the historical, political, institutional, geographical, and economic attributes of the communities analyzed in these projects and discusses their potential effects. The aim is to generate testable hypotheses and relevant independent variables for subsequent econometric analyses of demographic behaviour.

JEL Classifications: N0; N33; N43; N53; N63; N73; N93; J1; J13; O13; O15

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1. Introduction

Demographic behaviour is influenced not just by human biology and attributes of individual persons, such as wealth and occupation, but also by characteristics of local communities – factors specific to the particular village or town in which people are living. Such community characteristics work in two ways. First, there are exogenous features – natural endowments of the locality and events that strike it from the outside, without its inhabitants having any significant capacity to affect these features. Second, there are endogenous characteristics – features of the locality arising from, or significantly shaped by, collective decisions reached by the community or its decision-makers.

The exogenous influences seem at first sight to be straightforward. Different localities experience different historical events – for example, territorial annexation, military invasion, revolution, or fire. Alternatively, different localities experience the *same* event, but at different times – thus ultimately all communities may get clean drinking-water, good roads, agrarian reforms, or railway links, but they get them decades or even generations apart. Endogenous community influences work through collective decisions or shared norms of the inhabitants. Thus a community may hold particular norms – or embrace particular decisions – about religion, education, women's status, child labour, poor relief, extra-marital sexuality, or permission to marry. Such norms can be self-sustaining and will influence demographic decisions both directly (through mandating marriage age or family size) and indirectly (through altering the costs or benefits of fertility). Even apparently exogenous influences may turn out to be partly endogenous, when a community decides collectively on whether to resist invaders, set up fire brigades, organize revolts, reform agrarian institutions, or pay for connection to infrastructure.

This paper examines those community characteristics with a potential to affect demographic decisions for three German communities – a small town and two villages – between 1558 and

1914. A project on 'Economy, Gender, and Social Capital in the German Demographic Transition' is analysing long-term fertility change in Europe over three centuries by reconstructing demographic behaviour in these three communities.¹ It uses the technique of 'family reconstitution', which involves linking birth, marriage and death records to reconstitute all families in each community over the entire period of analysis. The technique of 'record linkage' is then applied to link socio-economic information from other documentary sources such as censuses and tax registers to the reconstituted families. This makes it possible to analyse the socio-economic determinants of fertility, on the level of both communities and individuals.

A subsequent project on 'Human Well-Being and the "Industrious Revolution": Consumption, Gender and Social Capital in a German Developing Economy, 1600-1900' builds on the family reconstitution database for two of these communities – the small town and one of the villages.² It investigates how changes in consumer demand and time allocation – particularly by women and the poor – contributed to economic development on the microlevel over three centuries (c. 1600 – c. 1900). It links inventories of ordinary people's possessions with information (derived from family reconstitutions, tax registers and censuses) on their occupation, land-ownership, wealth, office-holding, sex, literacy, fertility, mortality, and membership in communities, guilds and voluntary associations ('social capital'). These data will then be analysed statistically to identify the interactions between consumption, production, and demographic behaviour in a historical developing economy.

A necessary first step in the analysis is to understand the community-level characteristics that had the potential to affect individual and group behaviour. This paper examines the historical,

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political, institutional, geographical, and economic attributes of the communities analysed in these projects, and discusses their potential effects, with a specific focus on demographic behaviour. The aim is to generate testable hypotheses for later econometric analyses of the longitudinal and cross-sectional determinants of demographic behaviour.