

Macht sich stark für die Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie sowie für einen großen Niedriglohnsektor: Zu Gast in Luxemburg, der Soziologe Gösta Esping-Andersen über die wandelnde Rolle des Wohlfahrtsstaates. Die woxx hat ihn interviewt - auf Englisch.

(Foto: privat)



GÖSTA ESPING-ANDERSEN

"We need women-friendly jobs"

woxx: *You once wrote that the model of the male breadwinner today is counter-productive. What did you mean by that?*

Gösta Esping-Andersen: It is counterproductive for both individuals and for society in general. As regards individuals and families it is increasingly clear that male earnings in our societies are declining, especially the earnings of young and less skilled men. This is one reason why we see sharp increases in child poverty in young families. We also know that when mothers work, poverty almost disappears. The effect of an additional income, even part-time employment, is dramatic in terms of upraising the living standards families with children.

This evolution also helps to increase women's independence from male earnings.

That is the feminist side of the coin. And there is another advantage that is much less discussed but that is potentially very powerful. Women who move from being a housewife to taking up paid employment create new jobs. The two-earner family consumes more services outside the home. They take their clothes to the laundry, they go to cafeterias and restaurants and so on. Estimates I have done for France show that for every hundred housewives who become working women, an additional ten jobs are created.

What are the implications of this for social policy? Should more attention be paid to improving the compatibility of family and work?

Women want to work regardless of whether they have children or not. But when

it comes to having children, the compatibility problem immediately arises, in the form of: a very low fertility or of an impeded career. There is a penalty on either side in the new situation. We know that people in Europe want about 2.2 children on average. So the two-child-family is very much the norm in terms of what people want but it does not reflect reality. The most acute symptom of a welfare crisis in our society is the baby deficit.

The unemployment rate among women in Europe is high. Better day care facilities alone won't bring them into jobs.

More family-friendly policies that include day care, generous parental leave et cetera are necessary preconditions but they are not enough. We also need women-friendly jobs. Scandinavian women tend to be highly educated. Research shows that when women working in the private sector start their 'fertility career' they begin to move into the public sector even if that means taking a cut in income.

Why is that?

Jobs in the public sector are much more compatible. There is clear evidence that female fertility depends very much on having a secure, 'cushioned' job. That is one precondition. Another one which is mainly associated with highly educated Scandinavian women is the contribution of fathers to the care of their children. Men have to help out in the reconciliation process. Working women who are married to conventional males generally have fewer children because they know their partners will not help out with child care.

In your recent book you call for a flexible labour

market with plenty of low paid jobs. It is often women that do part-time or badly paid work. Is that your future scenario: to get more women into low paid jobs?

There is a lot of confusion in the EU debate about part-time jobs being bad jobs. In some countries like Britain for example, part-time jobs tend to be bad jobs but generally equating part-time jobs with bad jobs is a mistake. Surveys on part-time employment show that in most countries the percentage of women wanting to go into full time rather than part-time work is small. Part-time work is actually their own choice.

Even so, many women - and men - have bad and low paid jobs.

I am not saying that we should maximize bad jobs. What I mean is that our wage setting system and especially our indirect labour costs are so high that low paid jobs and services tend to disappear rather than grow - even if there is a demand for this kind of work. I think that it is the wrong strategy to be against flexibility here. The

question is not: 'Do we have a lot of bad paid jobs?' but: 'Are people stuck in those jobs?' When I was young I had a lot of badly paid jobs - and I did well. Experiences in bad jobs can be positive as a first step into the labour market for young people, for immigrants, for returning women. The real question has nothing to do with the number of bad jobs but rather with the mobility of people in the labour market.

The U.S. has a very flexible labour market. But American experiences also show that with low paid jobs comes a higher risk of poverty. What do you suggest can be done to avoid the emergence of the 'working poor'?

One of the great myths in the discussion about mobility is that the Americans are very mobile. They are not. In fact there is less mobility in America than there is in most European countries. This has a lot to do with the much more polarized nature of American society. There is a large population of young Americans with extremely low lear-

ning abilities and this group is never going to be mobile.

Not even through further skills training?

Evaluation conducted on active labour market policy show that training programmes are no longer effective once a person reaches adulthood. The problem starts when the young people concerned are still children. International research on social inheritance patterns are stronger in the U.S. than in any other advanced country.

What can we do? Educate earlier?

Yes. Day care not only helps families to reconcile work and family. It also helps to homogenize the early cognitive stimulus of children. The more homogenous the level of skills, abilities and education achieved, the more we can ensure that there are very few people that get stuck in bad jobs or bad lives. Once children start school it is very difficult to remedy differences in their levels of preparation for learning, motivation and learning skills. Those differences remain throughout the years of schooling. It is the early years of childhood that are crucial.

If a person moves on to a better paid job this means that somebody else has to fill the empty space. To support people's mobility seems like a zero sum game: the state invest in early education but the problem of low income and poverty risks remains.

It depends how you look at it. If you look at it as a snapshot in time there will always be a lot of people in bad jobs. But they will always be different people. Poverty will be transient. Is that bad or good? I worked on life-time income, estimating income inequality in terms of people's total cumulated life-time income. One of the paradoxes you find if you look at income inequality this way is that poverty becomes almost universal. In Denmark which has the lowest poverty rate of all countries, you suddenly find that 93 per cent of Danes are poor - because Danish youngsters leave home very early at the age of 19 and tend to have little income.

This is trivial poverty. But is social mobility really possible for everybody?

Of course there are always people with very low abilities. Whatever you do they will never make it. That is one reason why we need a very strong welfare state. We cannot pretend that there will ever be a world of completely equal opportunities. It is a question of more or less. Cognitive abilities are very important in our knowledge-based economy. If we look at Pisa-winner Finland we find the percentage of children that fall into the very bottom category of learning dysfunctions is somewhere around four per cent - compared to around fifteen per cent in the U.S. Of course, the U.S. is potentially capable of reducing this figure to four or five percent. It is purely a question of the social arrangement of society.

Many European countries face high unemployment rates. In this situation, social mobility surely has its limits.

Again, that is a question of flows and mobility. In Europe unemployment tends to be very long-term and for many it is almost a permanent, recurring phenomenon. Unemployment here is highly concentrated among youth and women. It is a question of the profile of the unemployed person rather than the overall level. This is where I do agree with people who advocate more deregulation of the labour market. There is no evidence that deregulated markets are the real cause of high unemployment rates. But it is very clear that a rigid labour market is one of the main causes of youth and long-term unemployment. I am in favour of deregulating the labour-market in order to create more flow. Because it is precisely easy-access jobs what help to integrate young people, women and immigrants into the labour market for the first time.

The welfare state was created to help the poor. If we force people into flexible, low paid jobs doesn't this mean denying the responsibility of the welfare state to support the weakest member of society and to ensure the provision of a certain level of security and standard of living?

I do not agree with your definition of welfare state as being mainly about the poor. But for me the essence of the welfare state is that it is there for everybody. The main raison d'être of a welfare state is to provide security against life risks. And we all potentially face very similar life risks. But the risk and need structure in society has been changing dramatically over the last twenty to thirty years. This is very much due to the changes of women's behaviour patterns. The risks tend to be lower in older age and more frequent in the early phase of life when people are forming families and having children. In order to respond to many of the new risks it is the provision of services and easy-access jobs that are required rather than financial support.

Left-wing trade unionists would call this a dismantling of the former welfare state.

I am certainly not calling for a dismantling of the welfare state. I am just calling for a complete overhaul, a recasting of the welfare state to make it fit better the new type of risks. If we stick to the old debate between neo-liberals who want to dismantle everything and old-fashioned social democrats and trade unionists who say: 'Don't interfere with anything', we are really lost. Then we will miss the boat.

Interview: Ines Kurschat

Zur Person

Gösta Esping-Andersen, geboren 1947 in Dänemark, ist Professor der Soziologie an der Universität Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. Der Vater zweier Kinder spricht Dänisch, Englisch, Italienisch und Spanisch. Bevor er seinen Lehrauftrag in Spanien wahrnahm, arbeitete Esping-Andersen unter anderem für die Harvard-Universität und das Berliner Wissenschaftszentrum. 1990 schrieb er mit "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" einen Klassiker der Wohlfahrtsstaatsforschung. Sein aktuellstes Buch heißt "Why We Need a New Welfare State" (2002). So lautet auch der Titel des Vortrages, den Esping-Andersen am Donnerstagabend im Rahmen der Konferenz "Quelle politique sociale pour le Luxembourg en Europe?" hielt.