

## “THE DEMOGRAPHIC ECHO OF WAR AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN RUSSIA”

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Wars can have a lasting effect on demography by forcing the rescheduling of births. To various extents this happened in many nations which were involved in the WW2, where the temporary drop in fertility gave rise to the slim cohorts of ‘war children’ followed by the massive cohorts of post-war baby boomers. In the absence of strong compensatory forces affecting birth rates, similar disparities can ‘echo’ in the sizes of successive generations substantially affecting population age structure in the long run. This has been the case in Russia, where the demographic ‘echo of war’ has been particularly pronounced due to especially high initial impact of the WW2 on fertility and the lack of effective demographic and migration policies in its post-war period. In my current research, which I carry out for my doctoral thesis at the European University Institute (Florence, Italy), I exploit this peculiar demographic setting *to broadly explore whether and how such developments in the population age structure affect the process of social mobility in different generations.*

Within this broad research agenda, I can suggest three different topics as the focus of my talk at the conference. In the following, I briefly describe each of these topics and their state of the art, and welcome panel organizers to choose between any of them in accordance with their specific interest. Otherwise, I can decide on the more specific focus myself. In any case, my presentation will include a short overview of the whole project to provide the necessary context guiding my inquiry. The presentation can be delivered in Russian.

In the first of my inquiries titled “**Cohort Size at Birth and Educational Attainment in Russia**”, I use Max Planck Education and Employment Survey for Russia (2006), to analyze differences in the process of educational attainment among different generations of Russians, whose educational careers unfolded primarily during the Soviet era. Consistent with Sørensen’s theory of structural constraints on social mobility (1977), I find that smaller (‘war echo’) cohorts were consistently advantaged in term of educational attainment process due to lower competition for existing educational opportunities. Cohort size at birth affected both 1) access to and successful completion of higher quality (i.e. full-time) education and 2) the time it took individuals to acquire a given amount of schooling. I also find that for the Russian men the disadvantage of being born to large cohorts was partly compensated due to their liability to military conscription (which, in larger cohorts, they could more easily avoid and therefore more safely try their fortunes in education). In light of these findings, I call for revision of the dominant agency-based explanations widely embraced by economists who have consistently revealed the same relationship in market contexts (primarily, the US: e.g. Ahlburg et al, 1981; Falaris & Peters, 1991, 1992), and argue that they may have seriously downplayed the role of structural factors in shaping the educational outcomes in different cohorts.

In the second of my inquiries titled “**The Demographic Echo of War and Labor Market Outcomes in Post-Soviet Russia: a Life-course Perspective**”, I use Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (1994-2016) to analyze how the demographic ‘echo of war’ affects individual labor market outcomes over the life course during the post-Soviet era. Easterlin’s standard theory of relative cohort size (1980) suggests that the negative relationship between cohort size and career

success is rendered by imperfect substitutability between young and old workers. Yet, I argue that this may not have been the case in post-Soviet Russia, where older generations may have lost some of their competitive advantage (i.e. specific skills and experience) with respect to younger ones in a rapidly transforming labor market (e.g. Sabirianova 2002), essentially meaning that different cohorts were competing for positions in the new labor market structure on par with each other. Indeed, my findings reveal that relative cohort size *per se* turns out to have little if any effect on the labor market careers among post-Soviet Russians. What I do find, however, is that over individuals' life course the demographic 'echo of war' significantly affects other important aspects of the labor market demography, specifically the retirement rate, whereby employment and promotion for current labor market participants can be temporarily boosted or suspended in accordance with the swings of retiring age cohorts. Again, I find this consistent with Sørensen's theory emphasizing structural constraints to social mobility and, particularly, his insightful model of vacancy chains.

In my last inquiry titled “**The Demographic Echo of War and Intergenerational Social Mobility**” I explore more specifically how the demographic 'echo of war' shapes the patterns of intergenerational social inequality. The chapter tests the general conjecture from the theory of compensatory advantage of social background (Bernardi 2012, 2014), according to which intergenerational inequality in a group is expected to tighten whenever the group is exposed to disadvantaged conditions (because resourceful families are usually more equipped to protect their offspring from negative outcomes). Tailored to the context of my study this implies that the effect of social background on individual attainment is expected to increase, whenever large cohorts amplify competition for the limited supply of opportunities in the educational system and the labor market. This conjecture is also consonant with the Maximally Maintained Inequality hypothesis (Raftery & Hout, 1986), whereby cohort size directly determines the extent to which advantaged families can saturate their demand for status maintenance opportunities and thus allow upward social mobility for the less advantaged. The empirical evidence draws both on Max Planck Education and Employment Survey (2006) and Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (1994-2016) each addressing the specific context and conceptualization of social mobility (i.e. educational attainment and Soviet context in the former case, and occupational attainment and post-Soviet context in the latter case). Unlike the previous two inquiries, this is currently work-in-progress expected to be finalized by February 2017.

## References

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