

Children in the Liquid Modernity: best interests for whom?

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Children are seldom included in descriptions of the 'liquid modernity'. Bauman (2000) is portraying the 'upper circuits of global capital' (mostly men), travelling only with cabin luggage: attaché case, mobile phone and a portable computer, while Sassen (2003) describes the 'survival circuits' of the same economy, where maids, nannies, and sex-workers migrate from poor to rich countries (mostly women). But none of them take account of children. Nonetheless, children are not excluded from social structures; they are part of society at large as argued by Qvortrup (1990). I shall discuss how the 'liquid modernity' has become an important feature of childhood.

This paper is focussed on the consequences for children of family changes, and in particular how the perceptions of children's need of contact with both parents (the father) may conflict with children's everyday life such as networks of friends, leisure activities and community.

Children's mobility is primarily a result parents' decisions; where to live, and whether to live together or not. Hence, children are brought into the world of travellers by adult's decisions. The often referred notion of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 91) that 'Family life no longer happens in one place but is scattered between several different locations' captures a childhood condition about which little is known. This is not to say that the relationship between home and movement remains unexplored. But typically children's movement is seen in relation to one home (see Christensen et al., 2000). This paper focuses on children's movement between two homes.

The mobile child symbolises modern childhood where, as Gillis (2003: 150) tells us: '... family time has become one of the chief means by which adults connect not just with children, but with childhood itself, now commonly thought of as a principal source of regeneration'. It was space, not time, which defined family relationships. To the mobile

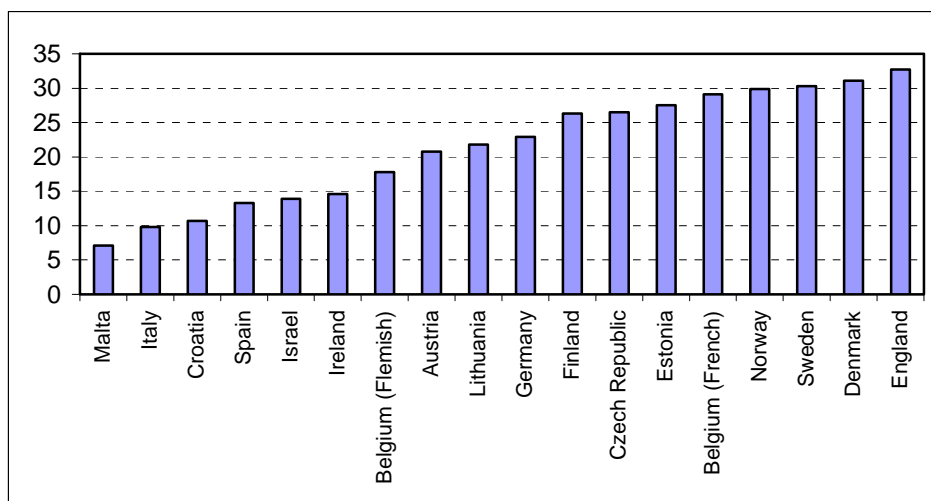
children family time is ensured through commuting. Can commuting be detrimental to children's welfare?

The shift from space to time detaches the child from a house, a locality and a community while attaching them emotionally to the parents through time. I shall rise the question if childhood is positioned between conflicting needs of adult society on the one hand, and children on the other.

Common trends - a European look

The international survey HBSC shows that most children in European countries¹ live with both parents (Currie et al, 2004). But knowing the proportions of children in different family types only provide one piece of information on their life situation, and large variations in family types are found. Figure 1 demonstrates that in a majority of countries the proportion of children (aged 11, 13 and 15 years) not living with both parents fluctuates around 25 to 30 per cent. The big picture indicates a South – North line, where children in the South are more likely to live with both parents, than children in the North. About 90 per cent of Italian children live with both parents, compared to 70 per cent in the Scandinavian countries, and even less in England. In Norway, which will be my case study later on, 30 per cent of the children live in single-parent families.

Figure 1 Children 11 to 15 years not living with two parents. 2001-2002



Source: Health Behaviour among School Aged Children (HBSC). 2001-2002

Increasing shares of children do not live with both parents in all countries, although the levels and rate of changes varies. The European research network COST A19 Children's Welfare

¹ Here selected among the countries participating in COST A19 Children's Welfare (see Jensen et al. 2004).

has explored children's family contexts of 13 countries (Jensen et al., 2004). It is reported a general fragmentation of family structures, and without exception children live with their mother if the two parents do not live together. Typically the proportion of children living with the father alone, swings between one and two per cent. However, frequency and regularity of children's visits may vary, among other things, with ideologies of fatherhood. Children's mobility depends on the ideas of father involvement in the particular country. Consequently there is no clear connection between single-parent families and mobile children.

The involved fatherhood is likely to appear where the patriarchal, married, nuclear families are substituted with open structures of cohabitation and single parenthood coupled with ideologies of gender equality Thomson argues (2003). New family patterns (measured as proportion of births outside marriage) and new fatherhood ideologies (measured as fathers time use on care of children) interact. Among European countries Thomson concludes that traditional family patterns (measured as low levels of extramarital births) as found in Italy, Spain and Greece, are associated with little father involvement in child care. By contrast, modern family patterns, as found in Scandinavia, are associated with new fatherhood ideologies of involvement. Paradoxically fatherhood ideologies seem to gain strength in countries where children are more likely not to live with the father on a daily basis.

The kind of problems commuting children may experience, if any, is under-explored and in many instances a 'black box' in research. Among the few studies on this subject, it is demonstrated how English children may feel that they are shared between their parents as were they a part of the other properties. While there is a growing presumption that 'equal' parenting is fair and moral, children over time start questioning why they are the ones to carry the burden of commuting between homes (Wade and Smart, 2003). Involved fatherhood is widely supported but we may ask whether this may overshadow other needs of children.

The needed father discourse

The discourse of the needed father stems from the increased propensity of children to live in a single-mother family. Most Norwegian children live with two parents but the increase in single-parent families has been substantial over the last decades (Jensen, 2005). Whereas 86 per cent of all children in 1989 lived with both parents this is now down to 75 per cent. Among the single-parent families nine out of ten children live with the mother. The proportion of children living with the father remains low despite a strong public attention to the new fatherhood.

About 12 per cent of the children were registered as living with the father in 1989. During the 1990's, along with a strong public debate on the needed father the proportion declined (down to 10 per cent in 1996) while over the last years it is now slightly above the 1989-level (14 per cent). However, the actual development is not that more children live with the father. An acceleration of children living in two homes on a half-and-half basis – a development concealed in public statistics. Children have two homes, but can for bureaucratic reasons only have one address in public registers. Comparing public statistics with surveys reveal that children commuting between two homes tend to be registered on their father's address while reality is that they live as much in their mother's home. About every second child registered on the father's address (among the 14 per cent) is commuting between the two homes on a half-and-half basis and the increase since 1996 is sharp. The actual proportion of children living with the father is stable and low (at about 7 per cent), 85 per cent live with the mother and 8 per cent live in two homes on a half-and-half basis (Jensen, 2005).

The needed father discourse is coupled with the growing single-mother families. One factor of importance to this paradox is the increase in births outside marriage. By the end of the 1980s, family dissolutions became more frequent and the change in marital status is a major vehicle of parental dissolutions. About every second child is now born outside marriage, the majority in a consensual union. Cohabiting parents have a high likelihood of breaking-up and the risk is not declining as more children are born into consensual unions (Jensen and Clausen, 1997). Important to the argument in this paper is the link between marital status and the legal parental responsibility in single-parent families.

Parental responsibility is a legal right to major decisions in children's life. It gives a parent access to information about the child, such as school and health. Traditionally the parental responsibility followed marital status at the birth of the child. To children born in marriage, parents automatically have joint legal responsibility even though many married fathers did not withhold this right after divorce. Children born outside marriage are automatically the legal responsibility of the mother only. With the growth of births outside marriage since the 1980s, and in particular with the corresponding family fragility, a problem of fathers without legal parental responsibilities emerged. Several initiatives are taken to strengthen cohabiting father's rights to parental responsibility. During the last decade a strong increase in joint parental responsibility has taken place. Both married and cohabiting fathers now tend to keep their parental responsibility after a break-up, but for about every second child the mother has sole responsibility. Clear differences by parent's marital status persist (Jensen 2005). As will

also be demonstrated in this paper families starting as 'modern' reinforce the likelihood that the mother has parental responsibility and the likelihood that a child will live with the mother after a split-up (ending as traditional) remains important (also in Jensen, 2001).

Joint parental responsibility is an important step to enhance involved fatherhood after a break-up and the needed father discourse is associated with a strong increase in parents with joint responsibility. Several policy measures to promote more contact between children and their non-resident children are introduced. While travel costs used to be covered by the non-resident parent (the father), the costs are now shared between the parents. Presently claims are forwarded on tax deduction for children's travel expenditures. As a result, the travel costs of non-resident fathers are declining. Furthermore, child allowances are linked to visiting frequencies. The higher visiting frequency, the lower is the child allowance paid to the other parent. As a result there are economic gains in elevating visiting frequency.

A prevailing discourse in Scandinavian societies is the fundamental need of children to keep in contact with both parents and gender equality is generally accepted as a norm. Public debate on fatherhood is intensive; in particular where father do not live with their children. Over the time visiting frequency between children and their non-resident fathers is increasing (Sætre, 2004). Still, the problem continues to be defined as too little contact.

As more parents live apart, rising numbers of children commute between homes. The basic argument for children's commuting is to maintain contact with two parents despite their living apart. I shall explore some issues involved through a focus on children. Through such commuting children do not only sustain their contact with both parents, they are also part of the 'liquid modernity'.

The rise in the number of children living with only one parent attracts much attention in a symbolic warfare over parental 'justice' in many countries. In public debates in England time with children is the yardstick for a 'fair' sharing of children (Wade and Smart, 2003). Visiting agreements are sacred and part of a 'parental war' where mothers, as a point of departure, are accused of denying fathers their right to a child. Similar debates are prevalent in Norway. There is wide acceptance of children's need of two parents, as reflected in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Art. 9: 3). However, typically children's voices do not enter the debates. It is taken for granted that the child's most important need is to keep in the most extended contact with the other parent, no matter the circumstances. What kind of circumstances is legitimate, from a child perspective, not to visit the other parent during a

scheduled week-end? Are children enslaved in their parent's struggle of a 'fair share' in 'the best interest of the child'?

Children's travelling in numbers

The travelling between homes has not been mapped until Statistics Norway carried out the Survey on Visiting Arrangements and Child Allowance in 2002 (Sætre, 2004). The survey has interviewed 2300 parents who do not live together while having children under 18,² among them 750 were mothers and fathers of the same children. They were asked questions about each of their children, which allowed a transformation of the statistical unit from adults to children. The number of children is 2600 as the 'doublet children' where a mother and father have provided information on the same child are deleted.³ The following analyses the data employ children as the statistical unit, but the information is given by a parent.

I want to analyse variations in children's travelling by parental responsibility. Parental responsibility is taken as an indicator of involved fatherhood. Where the mother has the sole parental responsibility, less involvement from the father can be expected. By contrast, joint parental responsibility is expected to be associated with more father involvement. I will leave out the group of children where the father has sole responsibility (4 per cent – about 100 of all children in the sample) and focus on the distinction between joint and mother responsibility. The number of remaining children is 2500.

From an analytical perspective parental responsibility is not without problems since independent variables are seen as 'causing' changes in the dependent variables. By contrast parental responsibility is a result rather than a cause of some of my independent variables (such as the marital status at the birth of first child). To disentangle the causes from the effects is very difficult since they operate in a web of inter-related decisions. I prefer to discuss relationships and associations rather than cause and effects and will use parental responsibility as a proxy of traditional (mother has sole responsibility) in contrast to more modern (joint parental responsibility) family characteristics.

Table 1 about here

² The response rate is 59 per cent, 55,4 among fathers and 62,8 among mothers.

³ Every second child is selected by deleting the mother or the father in order to include only 'unike' children.

Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the children by parental responsibility. From the bottom line we find that the group of children are divided in two almost equal shares. Looking at the characteristics for all children we find that one in three children visited the non-resident father three days or less during the previous month, while 42 per cent visited 8 days or more. About one in four children have walking distance between the homes, while almost 30 per cent have a long distance travelling either with private car (15 per cent) or public means such as air, bus or train (16 per cent).⁴ While no or low conflict between the parents dominates, almost 30 per cent have parents with moderate conflict and 18 per cent at a high conflict level. More than every second child has parents who had their first child (not necessarily the sample-child) outside marriage, and the majority of these were born in a consensual union. An overwhelming proportion of the children live with the mother (88 per cent) and the majority has elementary or high school education. Reading this table it is important to have in mind that children in single-parent families deviate from children living with both parents. Other studies have shown that children in single-parent families are more likely to be born to a single mother and their parents have lower education (Jensen and Clausen, 1999).

Turning to the difference by parental responsibility Table 1 indicates that visiting frequency is much higher with joint responsibility and there is shorter travel distance compared to mother responsibility. Conflict level does not reveal a clear association to parental responsibility. Being married at first birth is strongly associated to joint responsibility. Furthermore the likelihood to live in both homes on a half-and-half basis is much higher when parental responsibility is joint. Finally, we find that educational levels are higher. These features indicate that joint responsibility captures indicators of modern fatherhood (much involvement and high education), but we also find a strong association to traditional fatherhood (having the first child in marriage). This is where traditional family patterns conflict with modern. Starting as modern (having a child in a consensual union) still tends to fortify the probability of ending as traditional (residence with the mother after break-up). But even with joint parental responsibility the great majority of children reside with their mother and visit their father.

The last column of Table 1 - Cramer's V - informs about the strength of the association between parental responsibility and each of the characteristics. 0 indicates no association while 1 is a perfect association. The strongest association is found for parent's marital status

⁴ Short distance are less than ½ hour, long distances are more (two categories ½ - 2 ½ hours, 2 ½ hours or more. The children were distributed in similar proportions in the two groups).

at first birth (Cramer's V ,309***) confirming the much higher probability of joint parental responsibility if the first child is born in marriage. Similarly the probability that a child will live with the mother (residential parent) is very important (,301***). Most children live with the mother anyway, but among parents with joint responsibility this probability is lower. Next, in terms of strength of association is visiting frequency (Cramer's V ,258***). The table reveals a clear increase in visiting frequency if the parental responsibility is joint. Parent's education is significantly associated to joint parental responsibility (Cramer's V ,130) by not as strong as the other variables. Likewise, travel distance is significant (Cramer's V ,106) but relatively weak. Conflict between parents is not statistically associated to parental responsibility.

Table 2 about here

Table 1 has indicated strong associations between parent's marital status at first birth, residential parent and parental responsibility. Table 2 illustrates the associations between parent's marital status at first birth and residential parent in the single-parent family. Most children live with the mother irrespective of their parent's marital status at first birth. The mobile children are particularly likely to live in two homes and Table 2 reveals a strong association between the probability of living with both parents and having parents with a traditional family formation (first child in marriage).

In table 3 analyses the associations between family characteristics and the probability of joint parental responsibility in a logistic regression. Only significant associations are included in the model: residential parent, parent's education and visiting frequency. Travel distance and conflict between parents are not significantly and left out of the model and so are children living with the father (are very marginal as seen in Table 2). The question is what factors are associated to joint responsibility as compared to the reference group (mother responsibility).

Table 3 about here

Odds ratios above 1 are interpreted as a positive, while below 1 indicate a negative association. The regression model shows the strong association between having joint parental responsibility and residential parent. Where children live with both parents the probability of joint responsibility is almost six times higher compared to mother responsibility. Furthermore, educational level has a significant association. The probability of joint responsibility is about 3,5 times higher among parents with high university education. Finally, and most relevant to the issue of this paper, frequent visiting is positively associated to joint parental responsibility.

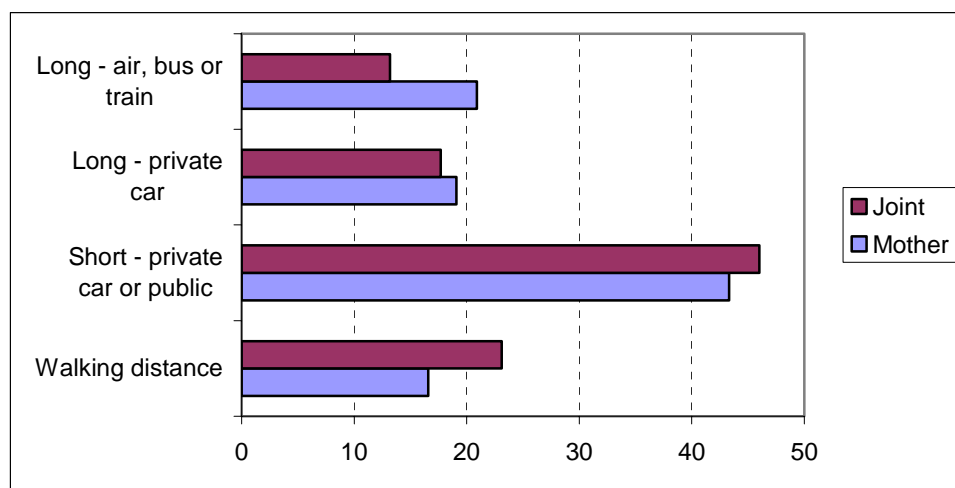
It is almost 3 times higher probability of having visited the other parent 8 days or more during the last month among those with joint parental responsibility.

In Table 1 we have found that most children have parents with low conflict levels but a substantial proportion have moderate or high levels (27,8 + 17,5 = 45,3 per cent). We have not traced significant associations to parental responsibility but will follow this up in Figure 2.

Cross tabulating children's travel distances and parental responsibility Table 1 indicated a clear association (Cramer's V ,106***) with shorter travel distances where parental responsibility is joint, in particular among children with walking distance between the homes. Almost 30 per cent of the children have walking distance in the joint responsibility group, compared to almost 20 per cent with mother responsibility. For longer distances the difference is narrower. Hence, children travel less where parents have joint responsibility, but even then the majority (70 per cent) do not live within walking distance and almost one in seven travel long distances by air, bus or train – mostly by air. As we saw from Table 1 there is no difference in the proportion of children with high or moderate conflict levels by parental responsibility (46 per cent with mother's responsibility and 45 per cent with joint).

Figure 2 exposes the three-variate relationships between parental conflict, travel distances and parental responsibility. The level of conflict is now grouped and the figure focuses on children with parents having moderate and high conflict level (45 per cent of all).

Figure 2 Children with parents having moderate or high conflict by parental responsibility and distance between homes. Per cent.



Source: Statistics Norway 2002

The group of children who are least likely to have much parental conflict seem to be those travelling long distances by air, bus or train and where parents have joint responsibility. The group of children who are most likely to have much parental conflicts are those travelling

short distances by private car and also having joint responsibility. Furthermore walking distance is associated with less conflict in general, but more conflict where there is joint parental responsibility. There is no systematic association between travel distance and high conflict level, since both long distances and walking distance are associated with low prevalence of high conflict. But more conflict seems to interact with parental responsibility. Where children live in shorter distances joint parental responsibility is associated with higher conflict, while longer distances are associated with less conflict. The relationships are significant at 0,002 level (Cramer's V ,122).

This may indicate that where the parents are in sufficient agreement to share the parental responsibility, long distance travelling is 'part of the package' and the travelling does not add to the conflict level. By contrast, short distances may imply more involvement in everyday life in particular if the parental responsibility is joint. This is associated with more conflict. Figure 2 confirms a rather complex relationship between children's mobility, parental conflicts and parental responsibility to be followed up in further analyses motivated by the trend of the mobile children. Assuming that the children travel on average every second month (a conservative estimate), and adding a couple of travels for holidays, we arrive at about 6 to 8 long distance travels per year. The air companies estimate about 100.000 child-travels per year in a child population of about 1 million.⁵

The 'mobile' children are a new feature filling the 'empty spaces' of waiting halls, bus stations and airports (Bauman, 2001). They are scattered, but also visible. They are not exposed to particular high levels of conflicts between the parents, but other aspects of their welfare may be at stake. Once your attention is turned to this phenomenon, it is easy to observe different kind of problems that may emerge. I shall explore some dilemmas below.

Children's travels – Norwegian case stories

Norway is not an easy country for travelling. Geographically the country covers a large area – actually if the country is turned upside down from the most southern tip, the northern part will reach Rome. Mountains, fiords and difficult roads complicate the matter. Being situated close to the polar circle winters are long and dark. In the Northern part there is hardly daylight during November through January, and travels will often take place in complete darkness. Winter storms, snow and fog cause delays and unpredictable travelling. The country is also

⁵ Oral information to Tonje Lauritzen, Dept. of Sociology and Political Science, NTNU, phd-student.

scarcely populated, with it's about 4,5 million people there is only 13 persons per km². With a regional policy emphasising that all parts of the country should be populated, many children have parents living far apart with long distances and challenging travels as illustrated below.

The long flight

The little boy could be 7 years old, travelling on a Saturday evening from the north to the south of the country. The journey would take about 2 ½ hours and the boy was bored after the first 10 minutes. I was seated next to him, but he showed no sign of wanting contact. His attitude was repressive with no smile in his face. The stewardess came around with crayons and a little booklet to all children, but this was finished in short time. A little relief was offered as he was allowed to play with his 'game-boy', similar to the rest of the children. But even this did not last long. He was up and down – with his seatbelt on, to the floor and again in his seat. Having tried out his limits of movement he finally turned to me and asked for the time. The question was repeated after a short while, and we were into a game where he guessed the time before I gave the answer, always guessing that more time had lapsed than the 'real' watch-time showed. Still being very reserved, we had a little conversation around this game and he told me that this was not his first travel. Actually he made this travel quite often.

The lone flight

This was also a little boy, maybe 8 or 9 years old. While the other children were picked up by their respective mother or father, no-one waited for him. After a (rather short) while a policeman (in full uniform) came to assist the boy in picking up his luggage. No, the boy did not remember what his suitcase looked like, but since only one was left at the luggage band and they agreed it was his. What happened later I do not know, but guess that the policeman was able to trace the parent and bring them together.

The late flight

Since the demand for child-seats is increasing, while the air companies keep a quota at eight children (aged 5 to 11 years) at each flight, the children are spread over a large number of flights. Most children will travel at reasonable times, but recently on a flight a boy – he was maybe 10 – entered the last flight along the coast. The flight landed about midnight, and happily a parent was waiting for him at the airport.

The issue is not only a national one. Children are also crossing borders.

The wrong flight

I was waiting for take-off on my flight from Berlin to Copenhagen. It was a Saturday morning in November 2004 as a problem caught my attention. The stewardesses were counting the passengers over and again. They had a mismatch of the numbers on their list and the persons in the cabin. After a while we were asked through the loudspeaker if anyone on board rather should have been on the Stockholm-flight, waiting for take-off at the same time. From the very bottom of the aircraft a girl came forward. She could be about 10 years with the identity-folder around her neck telling that she was in the wrong aircraft. Without knowing the circumstances my first reflection was that the little girl was travelling between a mother in Berlin and a father in Stockholm, or vice versa.

From time to time media may focus on problems such as parents not turning up at the airport or bus stop. The problems have been sufficiently large to find an institutionalized solution. The 'Child Bus' – immediately named the 'Divorce Bus' was introduced in 2003. The bus service would take children, with an employed child minder, on stretches from south to north, and east west (although not covering the whole country) promising both a fun journey to children and safe delivery for parents. After a short while the bus had to close down for the very reason why it was initiated: unreliable turn-up, including delays, by parents at the destinations would cause long waiting times for the next down the line. Similarly the Norwegian Railways has exposed difficulties of children down to five years travelling alone. The children would risk different kinds of problems, such as leaving the train at the wrong station. During Spring 2005 the railway has employed a host(ess) to take care of children travelling alone. These scattered observations indicate some problematic situations of children travelling between their parents by air, bus and train. Efforts to find institutionalized solutions have been introduced but until now these have not been viable.

Most children will master the travelling. A parent will follow them to the departure and the other will be there to meet the child, but as described above this is not always the case. They are on their own, and children may acknowledge the mastering of travelling and fulfil their parents' expectations with satisfaction. But they may also fear that they will not manage the rules of travelling.

The issue has spurred the Norwegian Child Ombudsman to develop a set of guidelines to parents of children travelling alone.⁶ A first glimpse at these guidelines reminds us of the topography of Norway (described above). Parents are advised that even though the air

⁶ www.barneombudet.no

company accept children to travel alone at age five, the Ombudsman finds this too young (without specifying an alternative age). Ferry and boat companies reject children's travelling alone if they are younger than 12 years, but some have their own arrangement of 'children's travels'. Bus, the Ombudsman suggests, should only be for children of 8 years or older, while children travelling by train should be 10 years. If children need to combine different means they should be older, 12 years.

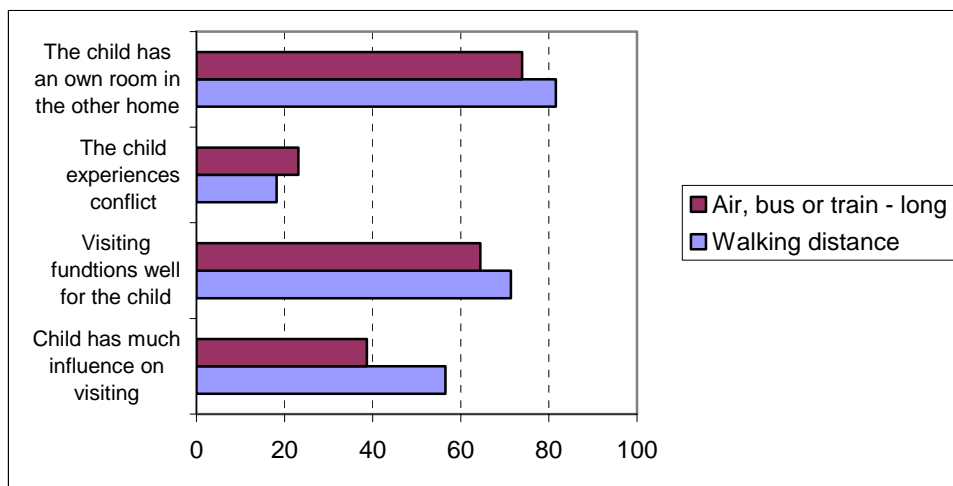
In public debates the problems of the emerging single-parent families are framed as too little contact between children and their fathers. Modern parenthood (joint responsibility) is broadly approved also in public policy and research. Table 3 indicates that that frequent visiting is significantly more common with involved fatherhood (joint responsibility) compared to a traditional pattern (mother responsibility). What do we know about the impact of children's commuting on their everyday life?

In the best interest of the child?

Children's commuting between homes arises from the growth in family dissolutions coupled with the ideology of children's need of contact with the father. The mobility is justified with 'the best interests of the child' where it is generally assumed that the most important problem is the threat of losing contact. However, while losing contact can be detrimental to children's welfare, one may also ask how much contact is needed and under which conditions? What is the ideal target of contact between children and their non-resident parent? Do we know that the more contact, the better off is the child? Is a fifty-fifty sharing between the parents necessarily better than a thirty – seventy sharing?

Long distance commuting may solve the issue of keeping in contact, but may also be problematic in everyday life. Figure 3 indicates that long distance between parental homes is particularly challenging children's social welfare.

Figure 3 Indicators of children's social welfare by distance between the homes



Source: Statistics Norway 2002

Interpreting this figure we should be reminded that the interviewed person is a parent. We do not get children's own stories. Nonetheless, our interest here is the different pictures a parent gives according to distance between the homes and maybe we can assume that parent's accounts are not influenced by this. We find that the children commuting long-distance have less often a room on their own, they more often experience their parent's conflicts (even if the level of conflict is relatively low as discussed), they are less satisfied with the visiting system, and have less influence on the visiting frequency than children with walking distance.

Following this, a pattern emerges where contact with the other parent may conflict with other components of children's welfare. Commuting does not solve all problems of single-parent families; it may even create some new. On the other hand, as seen in Figure 2, from the parental point of view having walking distance between the homes is not a guarantee for little conflict. Where parental responsibility is joint the level of conflict seems to rise.

Two patterns of children's mobility between parental homes emerge. One the one hand, children living in walking distance (and with short distance in general) may benefit from a shared neighbourhood and maintenance of children's of friends and leisure activities. But rather few children have parents living in walking distance. However, with joint responsibility short distances also indicate a higher level of conflict between parents. The majority of children have to travel by private car, or public means. Attention has been given to the long distance travelling by air, bus and train and to this group of children particular problems arise most pronounced by reduced child influence on the visiting. Potential problems associated to the travelling alone are under explored in research and so are potential problems in the father's home. The almost unconditional support to the needed father ideology is followed by

few critical voices in public policy and research. The position of the mobile children seems to be between a rock and a hard place, justified in the best interest of the child.

Children's commuting between two homes implies some delicate borderlines where contact with two parents needs to be judged against other needs of children. An important issue is whether children's rights to set own priorities may be jeopardised if these are in conflict with their parent's rights to fulfil their wishes for visiting frequencies. Commuting between parents may conflict with children's relationships with friends, their affiliation to a neighbourhood and their feelings of being 'at home' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 5): all of which are basic markers of a child culture.

Rootedness, but how and where?

Children are exposed to the 'world of travellers' as their parents' home is spatially separated. Children's spaces are expanded and children's homes are divided, but parent's time with children is no less precious than before. The focus of this paper is particularly directed to fathers, as the parent with the traditional more distant ties to children. Family life, Gillis told us (2003), used to be rooted in space while it is now shifted towards time. The social and geographically located space of a home is gradually substituted by an emotional space.

In the process a shift has taken place in the very definition of fatherhood. Fatherhood used to be defined through marriage (the Pater Est-rule), pregnancy was a major reason to marry and children a main reason to stay married (Jensen, 2003). 'The best interest of the child' was equated with marriage, probably without much consideration to the matter. By contrast, today ill-functioning family is regarded harmful and break-ups are justified by 'the best interest of the child' (Moxnes, 2003).

Along with the rise in single-mother families, family life is defined through time rather than space. The fatherless society is featured as *the crisis* of our day (as described by Blankenhorn, 1995 among others). Children's rootedness in a home, a neighbourhood, and long-term friendships is banished if in conflict with time with the father. On the other hand, through learning to navigate between family networks, often with assistance from people they will never meet again, it can also be argued that children are socialized into an adult society in need of people 'lighter on their feet' (Bauman, 2001). Is the mobile child in accordance with the needs of adult society in general?

Bauman (2000) argues that the 'liquid modernity' is part of the 'new economy' while Sennett (1998) claims that detachment has priority over strong feelings of belonging. Children take

part in the modernization process of ‘... complex movement of people, goods, money and information’ (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 7) through commuting between homes. This is a core element of preparing children to cope with differing routines and practices, habits and interactions essential to modern societies. Just as the home is invaded by the flexible labour market, childhood is invaded by the time-shared parenthood. As parents become ‘work nomads’ (Jurczyk et al., 2004), children are turned into ‘family nomads’. But Sennett’s core message is the mismatch between the individual life and the structural demands. What may compose a labour market, may decompose a life, he warns us (1998: 43). The mobile child may nurture a competent child in the liquid modernity and it is justified by the needed father ideology. But it is time to ask if children are trapped in an ideology where time is the yardstick of good parenthood.

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Table 1 Characteristics of children by parental responsibility

Parental responsibility	Mother	Both	All children	Number of children	Cramer's V
Visiting frequency – last month					,258***
None – 3 days visits	45,5	23,7	34,8	870	
4-7 days	23,7	22,2	23,0	574	
8 days or more	30,7	54,1	42,2	1054	
Travel distance and travel means					,106***
Walking distance	19,3	27,5	23,5	536	
Private car or public means short distance	45,7	44,7	45,1	1027	
Private car long distance	16,5	13,8	15,1	344	
Air, bus or train long distance	18,5	14,1	16,2	368	
Conflicts between parents					,049
No conflict	26,0	23,0	24,5	608	
Low conflict	28,3	32,2	30,2	749	
Moderate conflict	27,7	28,0	27,8	690	
High conflict	18,1	16,8	17,5	433	
Parent's marital status at first child					,309***
Married	33,0	59,8	46,2	1149	
Consensual union	48,6	36,5	42,7	1061	
Single mother	18,3	3,7	11,1	277	
Residential parent					,301***
Mother	97,4	77,7	87,8	2185	
Father	0,6	8,2	4,3	107	
Both	2,0	14,1	7,9	197	
Parents' education					,130***
Elementary school	14,3	8,2	11,3	280	
High school	65,6	67,1	66,3	1643	
University – low	18,3	19,5	18,9	468	
University – high	1,8	5,3	3,5	87	
Total	50,9	49,1	100		
Number of children	1261	1217		2498	

Source: Statistics Norway 2002 (own calculations) Source: Statistics Norway 2002 (own calculations)
 $P < 0.1 = *$, $p < 0.05 = **$, $p < 0.001 = ***$

Table 2 Residential parent by family type at first birth by parental responsibility.

Parent's marital status at first birth	Residential parent		
	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Father</i>
Marriage	44,1	61,8	62,5
Consensual union	43,8	34,4	33,7
Single mother	12,1	3,8	3,8
Total	100	100	100
Number of children	2186	212	184

Source: Statistics Norway 2002 (own calculations)

Cramer's V: Live with mother ,217***; Live with both ,255**, Live with father ,139

Table 3 Logistic regression models of joint parental responsibility. Children 0-17. Norway 2002. Odds ratio.

Visiting frequency – last month	Joint responsibility
Residential parent	
Mother	1
Both	5,794***
Parents' education	
Elementary school	1
High school	1,544**
University – low	1,569**
University – high	3,493***
None – 3 days visits	1
4-7 days	1,747***
8 days or more	2,757***
-2 Log likelihood	2988,105

Source: Statistics Norway 2002 (own calculations) $P < 0.1 = *$, $p < 0.05 = **$, $p < 0.001 = ***$