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Aims and Architecture of the Swiss Household Panel

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Aims and Architecture of the Swiss Household Panel

1. Introduction

The following text makes a sketch of the panel-architecture. Of course, the Swiss Household Panel draws upon the experiences of other existing panels.¹ Most themes and issues of concern for the panel therefore are not new. Nonetheless a panel-architecture does appear necessary for two reasons:

1. Panel data in social surveys are usually meant to meet various purposes and to be available to scientists with various interests (for example family or household dynamics, development of precarious living conditions, social reporting, shifts in political attitudes and participation)(Hill 1992, ix). The questionnaire though is limited by time. This requires either a selection or a relative weighting of topics included. A panel-architecture helps make our decisions transparent and guide potential users to the variables of interest to them.
2. Panels offer information about the same units over time. Panels are very useful for tracing and explaining changes of such units over time. Hence, the questionnaire must contain questions to be able to measure such changes and to associate them to former waves. Most questions must be asked identically over time. Specific thematic modules can be added either periodically (for example in every 5th wave) or uniquely, just once. Changes not only refer to already existing situations but also to the emergence of new as yet not existing situations, new combination of situations or shifts in existing combinations. Changes though may also refer to changes in assessments or norms and values. Thus changes occur either in light of socio-structural changes with reference to specific evaluations of these (cultural norms and values, perceptions and significance) or are produced by changes in cultural norms and values that redefine and or change structure (Haferkamp 1990). This requires to a certain extent a vision of what could be changing or emerging as new patterns within society and entails the inclusion of questions directed towards such patterns, as yet not necessarily evidenced by empirical research, a rather difficult task as Müller and Schmid (1994) remark.

¹ In our case in particular, the SAKE, Swiss labor force survey (Schweizerische Arbeitskräfte Erhebung), started 1991, the PSID, Panel Study of Income Dynamics, started 1968; the SOEP, the German Socio-Economic Panel, (Sozio-oekonomisches Panel) started 1984, the British Household Panel, started 1991.

The panel-architecture is based on aims formulated by Dominique Joye and Annette Scherpenzeel (1997), by Peter Farago (1996) and by François Höpflinger and Kurt Wyss (1997). The sketch of the panel-architecture emerges as a result of a review of various publications concerned with the structure and development of society. In the sketch we roughly outline a pragmatic point of departure for the panel describing elements found in the literature used as concepts for an empirical approach. It is in no way intended to present a new synthesis of the literature nor a theoretical approach, behold a theory. We simply outline elements found in the literature that appear to be crucial when studying social change.

The fact that a panel is being carried out in Switzerland is due to the lack of data collected continuously over time to adequately monitor social change and trace its effects on individuals and households (Farago 1996, 5). The Swiss Household Panel is carried by the Swiss National Science Foundation, the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics, and the University of Neuchâtel. The Household Panel team consists of six social scientists. The data generated should become available for analysis to all researchers interested.

1. 1 General Aims and Specific Objectives

The following general aims and specific objectives are formulated in the papers of Joye and Scherpenzeel (1997) Peter Farago (1996) François Höpflinger and Kurt Wyss (1997).

1. To identify and explain social change in Switzerland by following changes in the life course of individual respondents and to monitor adaptive processes of individuals and households to macro-level social change.
2. To generate data for other Swiss social scientists and making it available for them.
3. To ensure significant data for social reports about the dynamics in life and well-being in Switzerland.
4. To collect data complementary to that collected by the Federal Office of Statistics, emphasizing in particular well-being, social attitudes, values and expectations.
5. To allow comparisons with similar studies in other Western countries.

2 Panel-Architecture

Fundamental structural changes are taking place due to changes in the global economy, to global competition, and different regional developments as well as demographic changes. Not only have various options become available for individuals and households to model their life, but rapid and unpredictable changes within the life-course challenge livelihood in existing ways of life and life styles. Hence, coping, adjusting and/or modeling one's life course is not a matter of individual preferences only, but takes place within a larger structural framework and within a given set of norms and values (Giddens 1991, Leisering and Walker 1998a). In fact, the cultural background is one point of reference for evaluating changes occurring (Tenbruck, 1990; Eisenstadt 1990). Against the background of the dynamics of structure and culture, personal attitudes, perceptions and aims come to shape specific preferences and decisions, generating behavioral dispositions and ultimately impacting behavior. Individual ways of life and/or collective life styles are the result. Behavior again, shapes socio-structural conditions and norms and values (Hernes, 1995).² We thus see three important dimensions to consider in the panel: socio-structural opportunities and constraints, cultural norms and values, and behavior. Within the panel we concentrate mainly on the micro-level quality of these dimensions and consider these complementary to macro-level data available from the Federal Office of Statistics.³

The panel-architecture is based on elements of the structural and cultural dimension and distinguishes basically between micro and macro-level. The meso-level is the link between these two.⁴ Due to time limits in the survey, it is only the household as link between micro and macro-level that can be taken into account in greater detail. A planned retrospective biographical survey, though, will offer insights in individual careers through various meso-level entities, such as the labor market, the educational system or the family and

² "Entsprechend müssen Theorien des strukturellen Wandels zeigen, wie Makrovariablen individuelle Motive und Entscheidungen beeinflussen und wie diese Entscheidungen ihrerseits die Makrovariablen verändern" (Hernes, 1995, 87)

³ Of course the Federal Office of Statistics also disposes of much micro-level data, though not necessarily panel data (the exception is the SAKE, Schweizerische Arbeitskräfte Erhebung, Swiss Labor Force Survey). For the Swiss Household Panel, the macro data, i.e. aggregate level data, is essential in order to determine the national and regional contexts.

⁴ We thank René Levy for pointing out the importance of this intermediate level.

household and will thus enlighten more of the link between micro and macro-level. The micro-level focuses on features of the individual, on the material, social and cultural constraints and resources it draws upon, on its position in society determined by age, sex, nationality, and health, on the individuals' preferences, aims and on its behavior. The macro-level emphasizes institutional and collective features, the socio-structural, cultural and material environment. Amongst such features are, for example, material opportunities a region offers for maintenance of subsistence (agriculture, industry), laws regulating social behavior, infrastructure, age-structure or gender relationships, social policies, etc. (Hernes 1995, 88/89). The macro-level offers the framework for the micro-level. The elements will be described in greater detail below.

The **socio-structural dimension** contains the elements:

- Environment and life chances as elements of the macro-level;
- Living conditions and life events as elements of the micro-level (meso-level when referring to the household).

The **cultural dimension** contains the elements:

- Cultural norms and values on the macro-level;
- Personal attitudes, perceptions, significance and aims on the micro-level.

Behavior becomes visible in ways of life and life styles (Abel 1998). The distinction of these two terms, according to Abel (1998, also Nowak 1996) generally refers to the individual (ways of life) versus collective (life style). Behavior manifest in ways of life and life styles are considered the result of the dynamics between the structural and cultural dimension (Konietzka, 1995).⁵ The dynamics of behavior take place on a micro-level given the facts of the macro-level within the life domains the individuals participate in (such as family, work, leisure activities, politics or neighborhood). The patchwork resulting out of different combinations of life domains and their assessment is considered the way of life, if individual, and life style, if the individual way of life is shared by many, i.e. it is collective. Life styles understood as the particular combination of life domains on a collective level are situated on a meso-level, linking micro and macro traits. Life styles can emerge from a macro-level or from the micro-level. Ways of life and life style thus are in part structured through the social inequality order, in part result of reactions or adjustments to given situations or intervening life events, and in part result of choice and

preferences. Such deliberate choices can refer to specific consumption patterns (what type of leisure activities are preferred for example or what type of mobility patterns are chosen) or to actions aimed at producing change in social structures or in values (for example through participation in politics, neighborhood associations or religious affiliations). Life styles can in turn influence and shape the macro-level deliberately or coincidentally (Gershuny 1998,35; Therborn 1998,8).⁶

Data collection to trace social change, thus, must take into account the three dimensions, the socio-structural, the cultural and the behavioral one (Therborn 1995,7).⁷ The three dimensions are illustrated in Graph 1. Graph 1 points at the three dimensions as well as the micro and macro-level of data. Individuals and households are embedded within time, space, social structure and culture. Thus although the panel collects individual and household data only, the macro-level will be necessary to understand the mechanisms found on the micro-level.

2.1 Socio-structural Dimension

⁵ Konietzka (1995,95) gives a good survey of the studies on life style in Germany and summarizes the important traits in a table.

⁶ "People's actions are both constrained and enabled by social structures. However, social structures are themselves made up of aggregations of individual behaviour. How then can there be social change? How can social beings *act* so as to *alter* that very system of constraints and opportunities *within which they act*? This is what is referred to as 'the problem of agency'" (italics in original text, Gershuny 1998,35). Gershuny continues arguing that new types of narrative data (such as panel surveys) may offer the opportunity for "...the *empirical* basis for understanding the relationship between individuals' behaviour and social change" (ibid).

⁷ These three dimensions are related differently according to approach. From the point of view of recent life style analysis, they make up the conceptual framework for it: "In dieser Hinsicht kann der konzeptionelle Rahmen einer Lebensstilanalyse prinzipiell als die Erweiterung der Analyse von Sozialstruktur um den kulturellen Bereich (Stichworte Wertorientierungen, Lebensziele, Habitus) und den Bereich des Handelns (Stichworte Praxis, Lebensstile, Lebensführung) umrissen werden" (Konietzka 1995, 101). From the point of view of cultural sociology or anthropology an inverse relationship between structure and culture is equally possible: Social change is not necessarily determined by 'objective' change in social structures, for these must be perceived of and valued. In fact, social change can even occur when people perceive and assess the same objective situation differently. "Es gehört zu den Schwächen der Struktursoziologie, den gesellschaftlichen Wandel kurzweg aus objektiven Strukturveränderungen abzuleiten, deren Wirkung jedoch davon abhängt, wann und wie sie wahrgenommen werden. Umgekehrt kann ein gesellschaftlicher Wandel eintreten, wenn die Menschen aus welchen Gründen immer, ihre objektiv unveränderte Lage in einem neuen Licht sehen. Es sind erst die subjektiven Definitionen der Situation, die die gegebenen Lagen, wie ein Beobachter sie ermittelt, in Handeln übersetzen" (Tenbruck 1990, 22).

There is a broad consensus that tracing social change over time requires distinguishing differential patterns and/or mechanisms of opportunities, be this on an aggregate level or on an individual. To do this detailed information about socio-structural integration and position of actors within a defined framework is necessary, for example regions within a nation, or population groups within society (subsystems or subcultures). To trace social change, thus, opportunities of access to those realms of life considered as structuring society must be pinpointed (Therborn, 1995, pages 2 and 7). We consider these domains of life to have a macro and a micro-level, and refer to the macro-level of these with life chances and environment, and to the micro with living conditions and life events (see graph 1). Although we briefly comment on the macro-level, the panel collects data on the level of the individuals and households, i.e. mainly micro-level and few meso-level data.

Structure refers to a pattern of positions within society according to access or lack of access to resources.⁸ In other words, socio-structural inequality is assessed by information about the distribution of important societal resources, of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1983; Kreckel 1997). This may be done by determining the position of individuals relative to 'old' and 'new' dimensions of inequality, or to vertical and horizontal structuring principles of society, or to merited or ascribed factors known to be of importance for social structure (Levy et al. 1997, give an excellent theoretical overview about how these factors may work together and apply the concepts to the situation in Switzerland).

Therborn (1995,8) distinguishes between tasks, means, and rights as the manifest forms of constraints and resources. Tasks refer to what needs to be done within a social unit; means refers to how these general necessities are accomplished and who does them. Rights point at how social legitimization underpins the opportunities or the constraints of participating or not in accomplishing the tasks.

Life domains are the social context in which tasks, means, and rights become visible. The patterning of society occurs within life domains. Means and rights play one part as of access, use, and development of the tasks to be per-

⁸ Structure, according to Therborn, "involves ... a *situs pattern* within the social system" (Therborne, 1995,8, italic in original text). This pattern reveals "*institutionalized endowment* of resources and constraints, ... a *non-institutionalized ... patterned access* or lack of access to

formed within the life domains. Hence they structure positions within the life domain. Unequal positions take place within the contextual framework of a given time and space (place/region like housing, neighborhood, or environment) and are based on explicit (legal) or implicit rights (cultural norms) such as gender, age, nationality, health. Education, labor force attachment, occupation, division of labor, income and wealth, as well as social origin, social participation and integration (networks, household) foster information on social inequality within these domains. Further, life events impact socio-structural opportunities (war, political persecution, strong social movements or closing of factories, as examples for collective events, or divorce, accident, childbirth and the like as examples for individual events; Gershuny 1998, 36).

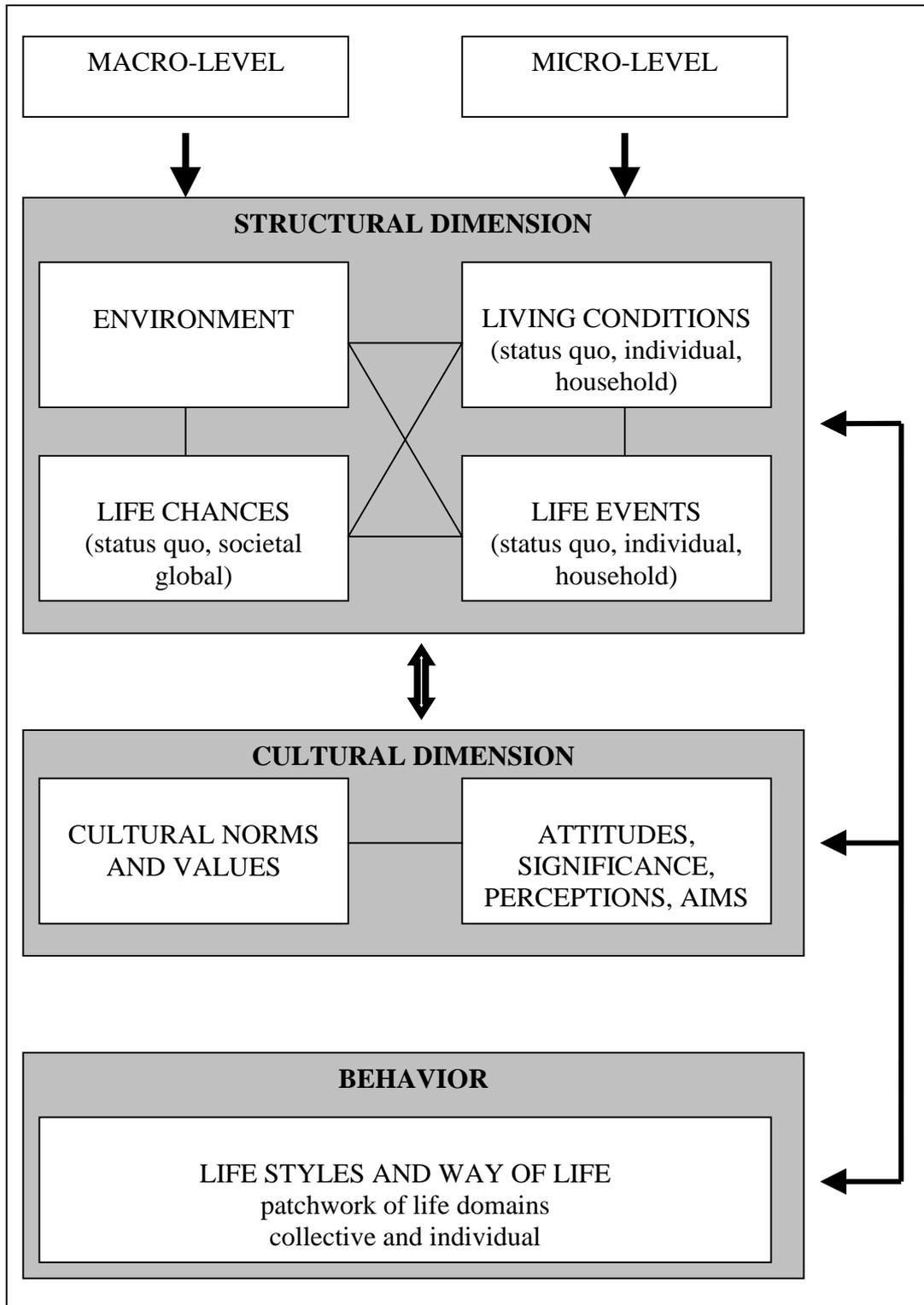
The elements of the socio-structural dimension as illustrated in graph 1, are environment and life chances on the macro-level, and living conditions and life events on the micro-level. Life events also occur on the macro-level but in the household panel we focus on their impact on the micro-level. We describe these elements from the perspective of what they may offer for social change. Although the panel is to capture individual changes, these must be linked to the overall social change (according to the aims mentioned above).

Environment (macro-level)

Environment contains concepts referring to macro-level information, such as environmental issues (air and water quality, availability of water, parks or other green areas in the surroundings, noise due to airplanes, traffic or neighborhood, pollution, etc.). These issues may or may not be perceived by the individuals, but affect life chances and risks, social structure, health and well-being (Beck 1986).

resources of action; and ... a set of *chances*, of risks and of opportunities, over time (Therborne, 1995,8, italic in original text).

Graph 1: Panel-Architecture



Life chances (macro-level)

Life chances are understood as opportunities or risks dependant upon socio-structural resources and constraints on an aggregate level, i.e. positions in the local, regional, national and global order at a given time and space. Such positions are located within encompassing structural contextual features, such as attributes of the labor market⁹, differences in rural-urban and/or center-periphery contexts¹⁰, available opportunities of participation¹¹, availability of social and health services, security (crime rates, traffic), etc.

Living conditions (micro-level)

Living conditions describe the resources and constraints an individual has personally or that it has due to its particular experiences in various life domains. We understand personal resources and constraints to be linked to the individual. Personal resources and constraints are for example socio-demographic traits (age, gender, race, personality traits, marital status, nationality, or health impairments or handicaps, but also for women, the number of children they have. To some degree social and cultural origin can be considered such a trait, thus religion could be subsumed here, too). Life domains structure peoples lives, in terms of opportunities as well as disposition of time. Some domains are organized or institutionalized, others only partially, and others not at all. They thus constitute a meso-level linking the micro with the macro-level.¹² Education, work, family, neighborhood, and participation in social nets, groups, organizations, or associations are considered life domains. Different degrees of participation and of access to these domains produce a social inequality order and in some cases are strongly legitimized by cultural rituals (political culture of voting, for example). The inequality order becomes

⁹ For example type of labor market, gender segregation, educational requirements, etc.

¹⁰ For example differences in distribution and access of social, educational and other services, etc.

¹¹ Participation on various levels, for example in the political or in the social domain.

¹² From a socio-structural point of view the meso-level contains sub-systems (Levy et al 1997), from a cultural point of view subcultures (Appadurai 1998, Pries 1998, Robertson 1998). Although we focus on the micro-level qualities of the data, meso-data are generated at the same time, which is the reason why we briefly discuss this level here. This meso-level on the one hand regulates access to (more structured and institutionalized) life domains as of macro-level forces. On the other hand it is the participation in various life domains or collective behavior on the other (social movements) that enables opportunities to alter such macro-level forces. Education is a good example for this, the women's movement and what it has achieved in the political or the family domain another, or the discussion about the new interpretation of religious practices – marriage of homosexuals, for example. The focus of interest of the panel is the individual and how it participates within the life domains over time. Thus the panel collects first hand individual data and does not primarily focus on meso-level information (structure of organizations or institutions, for example), with the exception of the household.

visible in resources individuals dispose of and constraints they face, such as income, social security, social class, education, use of social nets, household and family structure (the latter presenting the domains on which the panel also gathers meso-level information). These individual living conditions are fundamental for the opportunities of individuals to shape their livelihood (for Switzerland: Lévy, 1997; for Germany: Mayer, 1991).

Life events (impact on micro-level)

Life events are significant events in people's lives. Life events occur in the various life domains. They may be individually and/or socially impacting and depend upon the assessment of those people or groups of persons experiencing them. They can enhance or restrict participation and thus alter the socio-structural position considerably. The panel focuses on the social nature and consequences of life events (Gershuny 1998)

2.2 Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension is contains (i) underlying tradition, social forces and values, as well as (ii) individual attitudes, perceptions, attribution of significance and aims in life (Eisenstadt 1990; Tenbruck 1990).¹³ Rather constant social forces, such as norms and values that are in part institutionalized in larger social frameworks (for example in the legal system or in the sense of identity by nationality, religion and the like) constitute the macro-level of the cultural dimension. The micro-level of the cultural dimension focuses on the individual assessment of the cultural dimension (for example how the individual sees and positions itself as of what it conceives to be the dominant norms and values). It also refers to the assessment of life domains (for example how important family, work or politics are). Within the cultural dimension perceptions, attitudes and aims are produced and combined. Cultural norms and values as well as individual attitudes, perceptions, attribution of significance and aims influence and explain behavioral dispositions. The cultural dimen-

¹³ Eisenstadt (1990, 15) remarks that culture was an important pillar in constructing social order and points in the impacting work of Max Weber. Tenbruck argues that social sciences made use of the term culture on the individual (micro) as well as social, aggregate (macro) level: "Sie (die Sozialwissenschaften, not in original text) profitierten dabei von den beiden Hauptleistungen, die der Kulturbegriff ihnen zur Verfügung stellt, indem er (1) die Eigenart des menschlichen, also auch des sozialen Handelns und des menschlichen Wirklichkeitsverständnisses klarstellt und (2) auf die Eigenart und Bedeutung der (repräsentativen) Kultur als gesellschaftlicher Erscheinung aufmerksam macht" (Tenbruck 1990, 49).

sion contains customized strategies to evaluate living conditions, moral or normative issues, and events on the one hand, and individual perceptions, attitudes and strategies of the situation on the other.

Cultural norms and values (macro-level)

The underlying body of cultural knowledge constituting powerful, social forces (Haferkamp 1990, Bergman 1998) is what we refer to in the element cultural norms and values in graph 1. Such forces stem for example from religious norms and values but also from the legal system regulating social behavior. The macro level of the cultural dimension also contains customs and cultural habits.

Attitudes, perceptions, significance, and aims (micro-level)

Attitudes, perceptions, attribution of significance and aims refer to the individual evaluations and choices, within a given broader legitimized framework of institutionalized norms and values and customized strategies. Although a broad array of combinations of distinct attitudes, perceptions and aims are possible, albeit not all tolerated. Tolerance of such combinations varies according to the specific situation in time, space and social context (Giesen and Schmid 1990, 112). As mentioned above, personal evaluations, attitudes, perceptions, significance and aims are directed towards the situation in life domains or to underlying cultural norms and values.

2.3 Behavior

Through behavior people produce and reproduce culture and structure. "... human societies are made up of individual and collective actors, acting in and upon cultures and structures" (Therborn 1995, 7). Ways of life refers to individual behavior and life styles to collective (Abel 1998, Novak 1996). Environment, life chances, living conditions, and life events combined with the underlying norms and values and the individual evaluation as well as perspectives or opportunities are important for understanding and explaining behavior (Gershuny 1998). On the one hand macro-social changes, become visible on the micro-social level in the behavior of individuals, households or social groups. On the other hand this behavior is not necessarily uniform, because it also gets shaped according to individual perception of or reactions to its socio-structural position and life events, and its specific preferences and perspectives. The behavioral dimension is thus captured by what we consider the

result of the dynamics the socio-structural and the cultural dimension. Individuals act or behave and produce their individual way of life. On a macro-level, collective behavior may be defined as life style. As Gershuny (1998) argues, not only do the socio-structural and cultural dimension impinge on behavior, but behavior in turn influences the cultural and socio-structural dimensions. Apart from the socio-structural position and cultural background, time, space, and life cycle are crucial for understanding the individual molding of perception, attitudes, and attribution of significance and meaning.

The elements of the panel architecture in graph 1 described above enable a dynamic perspective of the micro-level within and between the cultural and socio-structural dimension. The described elements also provide opportunities for questions of causality, as events (causes) on one level affect events on the other (Leisering and Walker 1998b, 25). The elements appear to be clearly distinguishable one from the other. In reality, of course, this is not the case and they are determined by and determine each other. It is the specific approach that defines in which way they are associated and what content would belong to each element. The broad and open panel framework aims at offering opportunities for various approaches.

3 Household-Panels

Household panels generate a rich set of data specifically apt for studying social change, individual life courses, and household, family (Duncan1992), and gender dynamics over time within given spacial context.

3.1 Panels

As various authors state, one important trait of modern societies is their dynamics (Leisering and Walker, 1998; Giesen and Schmid, 1990; Therborn 1995). Impacts on the individual and the collective level produce more insecurity thus calling for deeper insights in how individuals, groups and society as a whole confront this situation over time and what on what mechanisms or patterns individual and collective behavior are based. One means of tackling such a task for individuals and households is through panel data (Kasprzyk et al. 1989, Duncan and Kalton 1987; Duncan and Hill 1985; Leisering and Walker 1998c; Gershuny 1998).

The strength of panels is that not only can a status quo be described, but, by including time, a dynamic perspective becomes possible (Duncan and Kalton, 1987, list what types of information panel data can provide). The development and the strategies of individuals and households can be observed over time, and nature and causes of changes can be understood. Linking individuals to society makes social change visible.¹⁴ As Leisering and Walker (1998a, 7) argue, “Modernity implies the institutionalization of the *‘individual’*, the *‘self’* and the *‘life course’* as new social entities” (italic in original text).¹⁵ Having said this, it is the household (household type as well as the resources that households have) that is strongly interrelated with and distinctly impinges upon its individual members, their self and their life course.

3.2 Households

In a panel, households are difficult units of analysis because their composition can change dramatically over time. On the other hand, households are fairly simple units of measurement (Duncan and Hill 1985). Households take in an intermediate position between society and individual. They are residential, social and economic units and draw upon socio-structural and cultural resources of its members and their social network (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Warner

¹⁴ “The emergence of large structures and global processes does not mean that the individual has become a *quantité négligable* (italic in original text). On the contrary, the unfolding of societal dynamics that we are currently experiencing relies on the specific dynamics of individual lives. As Giddens notes (1991, p 32), ‘for the first time in human history, <self> and <society> are interrelated in a global milieu” (Leisering and Walker, 1998a, 4).

¹⁵ “...the ‘life course’, denotes a temporal order of life shaped by institutions and public policies and propelled by continual biographical decisions made by the individual” (Leisering and Walker 1998a, 9).

1998).¹⁶ In Switzerland, households with more than one person are usually based on family ties, on consanguinity or affiliation through marriage (or cohabitation). Family refers to a system of kinship ties that usually extends over household boundaries, whereas the household in general departs from the notion of a residential unit. This appears to be the basic criteria, in particular where households are by far more complex (for example in developing countries) than in Switzerland (Chant 1998, González de la Rocha 1994). Households socialize behavior and structure social relationships, in terms of kinship and social networks as well as of social organization of production and consumption within the household. As such households are constituted by resources and constraints of their individual members. Households in turn redistribute resources in different manners to their members, entailing distinct impact on the opportunities and constraints for them.

Thus, households containing more than one person become important as organizing, economic and social units for production, reproduction, and consumption. For a panel of interest are not only changes in household structure and composition but also changes in patterns of organizational, economic and social criteria as well as shifts in productive, reproductive and consumption activities. Income generation, time-allocation, consumption, social networking, domestic production of services (household chores), access to household resources and the evaluation of the household situation by the different household members shed light on power relationships between gender and/or generations.

Changes within households suggest potentially further and deeper reaching changes in society as a whole not last because resources of household members may change dramatically (for example through marriage or divorce or through the death of a household member). Changes become visible in shifts of prevalence or emergence of types of households (divorce or cohabitation for example) (Folbre 1991) or in new patterns of social relationships (combi-

¹⁶ "Wirtschaftseinheit, Wohneinheit, Familie und Netzwerk erschliessen unterschiedliche Perspektiven der Untersuchung. Die Beobachtungseinheiten unterscheiden sich in ihrer Struktur, in ihrer Zusammensetzung, in ihrer Funktion und Leistung, in ihrem Verhalten, in ihrer Stabilität und Dynamik und in ihren sozialen Beziehungen untereinander. Schwierigkeiten der Beobachtung ergeben sich zusätzlich dadurch, dass neben einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Abgrenzung der Untersuchungseinheit, ökonomische Grenzziehung (Konsumgemeinschaft, Einkommensgemeinschaft), legale Setzungen (Bedarfsgemeinschaft im Sinne eines Sozialhilfegesetzes, Steuerpflicht im Sinne eines Einkommenssteuergesetzes), räumliche Bestimmungen (Wohnung) und gemeinsam geteilte Interessen der Mitglieder (z.B. Wohngemeinschaft) bestehen" (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Warner, 1998, 51).

nation of roles, gender relationship, size of household). Intra-household changes may posit new demands on the organization of the labor market (job-sharing, part-time work), on the necessity of new institutional arrangements (childcare) or of time organization (school schedule)(Höpflinger et al. 1991). Although information on the individual-level is necessary to single out positions within the household, the household is an important component influencing behavior, way of life and life style and as such triggering social change (Chant 1998).

4 Social Reporting¹⁷

As mentioned above, one aim of the panel is to provide data for social reporting. Social reporting does not necessarily rely on panel data, although panel data enrich it. Social reporting is the socio-political and informative use of monitoring social change. It has various targets: a description of social change, a monitoring of (desirable or undesirable) developments of society (level of welfare) or an evaluation of social change with reference to the socio-political measures (Noll, 1998, gives a survey of the history of social indicators, social reporting and its perspective). Noll (ibid) outlines two distinct approaches to social reporting: the level-of-living approach that is based on objective indicators and the quality-of-life approach, that considers the subjective evaluation of the conditions experienced. Where as objective health measures, in particular on an aggregate level (morbidity and mortality rates for example) may be adequate to assess the level of living, more subjectively-colored well-being reflects the individual outcome of the dynamics of the socio-structural and the cultural dimension.¹⁸ A third approach understands the task of social reporting in linking the status quo of the population at a given time and space to the prevailing social policy measures and their aims (Gilomen 1995, quoted in Noll 1998).

Associating level-of-living to assessments of quality-of-living allows a more complex way of social reporting. Health and well-being in this context are important overall measures of the bundle of living conditions individuals experience. Life quality is a similar term often used in social reporting. Its sense

¹⁷ For surveys on social reporting see Schäfers and Zapf (1998); for Switzerland: Habich and Noll (1994); and Flora and Noll (1998).

though is broader and more global. It refers to the general assessment of the prevailing socio-structural situation of particular interest to social welfare states (Habich and Noll, 1994).

5 Summary

In this sketch of a panel-architecture it was our aim to identify decisive elements necessary to capture social change. We distinguish between the socio-structural, the cultural and the behavioral dimension, as well as the macro and micro-level of the data. Among the socio-structural dimension the elements found to be important were environment and life chances on the macro-level and living conditions and life events on the micro. On the cultural dimension the macro-level contains the deeper lying cultural norms and values whereas the micro-level contains the individual perceptions, aims, and expectations. Behavior is where the dynamics between the socio-structural and cultural dimension becomes visible. Behavior is produced by these dynamics but in turn reproduces and alters social structure and culture. Behavior becomes manifest in ways of life and life styles.

Household panels are an adequate mean for gathering data for social change on a micro-level. Such data in particular enable tracing individual life courses and relating them to living conditions, decisions made to or reactions following life events. The link between individuals and society becomes better transparent on the background of households with particular resources and constraints and strategies as responses or deliberate choices to the socio-structural and cultural environment. Panel data offer the opportunities of going beyond the description of status quo, to assess the dynamics between the socio-structural and the cultural dimension and to relate this to behavior.

Choosing households as units of measurements opens rare opportunities of looking into the so far still existing 'black box' of household dynamics, the constraints or privileges of unequal access to societal resources over time (division of labor, unequal access to household resources, etc.). Household dynamics shed light on gender and generation relationships and their possible consequences.

¹⁸ "Wohlbefinden ist eine Interpretation von Wohlfahrt, die das Individuum, seine Wahrnehmungen, Situationsdefinitionen, kognitiven Bewertungen und Gefühlszustände, also das subjektive Element in den Vordergrund stellt" (Noll 1997, 434).

Household panel data further offer complementary information to cross-sectional surveys for social reporting, being able to trace individual and household strategies to changes occurring within society. This holds true in particular if subjective and objective measures are linked.

Given the rather broad panel-architecture, made to serve many interests, we hope to make various directions of analysis possible.

The more technically oriented paper – Description of Life Domains and Indicators of the Swiss Household Panel - presents indicators of the life domains planned to become part of the panel questionnaire. General questions relating to perceptions, attitudes, aims and significance of these domains for the individuals consider the cultural dimension.

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