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REPORT

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From Global Solidarity to Individualism
A 23 year comparative perspective on certain changes in Swedish value preferences
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Abstract

It has been suggested that as societies develop, so does its value system – towards ‘post-material’ values, for example towards increased stress on wisdom as opposed to material comfort. Our 23-year-long longitudinal study, however, tells another story. The proportion of Swedes who put ‘wisdom’ before ‘comfort’ has dropped from 55 to 41 percent during the 23-year period. Also, the proportion of Swedes who put the ‘post-material’ value of a world at peace before friendship has dropped from 58 to 44 percent, at the same time as the value of believing in one’s own capacity before the humble value of not feeling superior to others has increased from 40 to 66 percent. Our data show that a change towards increased stress on individualization and self-expansion has occurred, rather than towards increased stress on other ‘post-material’ values, such as wisdom and global solidarity. The analysis furthermore suggests that these changes cannot primarily be interpreted as a process in which new generations come with new values, which they then keep during life, or as a life-course development. These are, instead, changes that have affected everyone, regardless of generation and/or position in the life cycle.

Key words: Values, Post-Materialism, Global solidarity, Individualism
The empirical study of values and our value preference instrument

The study of values has a long tradition, and the early works of Milton Rokeach (1968, 1973, 1979) and Ronald Inglehart (1977) come to mind when approaching this field. Inglehart has moved on to develop the well-known World Values Survey, with its hundreds of items on various value-related topics (see, e.g., Inglehart, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005). Inglehart also predicted (and found some evidence for his prediction) that as societies mature and prosper, material values are replaced with post-material values that are focused, for example, on wisdom rather than material comfort, which has already been achieved by the younger generations replacing the older ones. The idea is that the new values come with the new generations. This idea, however, has been questioned by others (e.g., Gundelach and Riis, 1992) who believe that the differences in values held by different age groups constitute a developmental change during the individual life course rather than generational replacement.

In our 23-year comparison study, we will look at whether and how certain values have changed and at whether such changes in values are a question of generational replacement or something else.

However, it was Rokeach (1968, 1973), with his more theoretical approach, who in 1982 prompted us to include some measurements of basic values in our otherwise basically gerontological studies. Rokeach argued that our values, as distinct from attitudes, are relatively few, relatively stable, and possible to measure:

1. the total number of values that a person possesses is relatively small; (2) all men everywhere possess the same values to different degrees; (3) values are organized into value systems; (4) the antecedents of human values can be traced to culture, society and its institutions, and personality; (5) the consequences of human values will be manifested in virtually all phenomena that social scientists might consider worth investigating and understanding.

(Rokeach, 1973, p. 3)

In his definition of what values are, he also stated that values can be both instrumental and terminal. They are stable beliefs that “... a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.” An example of an instrumental value is politeness, while a world at peace is a terminal value.

Empirically, using a factor analytical tool, Rokeach (1973) established that a number of instrumental and terminal values were organized according to seven fundamental value dimensions expressed as opposites. These dimensions were:

1. *Immediate vs. delayed gratification*, where, e.g., the value of a comfortable and pleasurable life is set against values of wisdom and inner harmony (e.g., Comfort vs. Wisdom).
2. **Competence vs. religious morality**, where competence values such as logic and creativity are set against the values of forgiveness and salvation (e.g., Logical vs. Forgiving).

3. **Self-constriction vs. self-expansion**, where values of, e.g., obedience and self-control are set against values of broadmindedness and capability (e.g., Obedient vs. Broadminded).

4. **Social vs. personal orientation**, where values of, e.g., a world at peace and national security are set against the values of true friendship and self-respect (e.g., World at peace vs. True friendship).

5. **Societal vs. family security**, where values of, e.g., a world of beauty and equality are set against family security (e.g., A world of beauty vs. Family security).

6. **Respect vs. love**, where values of, e.g., social recognition and mature love are set against each other (e.g., Social recognition vs. Mature love).

7. **Inner- vs. other-directedness**, where politeness is set against courage and independence (e.g., Politeness vs. Courage).

Technically, the specific values were found to be opposites or polar in that they have positive or negative factor loadings on the above-described dimensions.

Our way of borrowing from Rokeach has been to choose, within each of the above dimensions, the value with the highest positive factor loading and the value with the highest negative factor loading, and to create a condensed instrument based on these. The values with the highest positive and highest negative factor loadings are given in parentheses in the list above.

In our instrument, respondents have been instructed to choose between the two values within each dimension, together with an extra pair of values, as described below. The instruction was:

Below are 8 pairs of statements. For each pair of statements, you are to mark the statement that you think is most important to you in your life. Only one alternative in each pair may be chosen, even if you think the other alternative is also important.

- □ Living a comfortable life or
- □ Becoming a wise person
- □ Being capable of logical thinking or
- □ Being able to forgive
- □ Being obedient or
- □ Being broadminded


The last of the above pairs of values was added to capture the “Jante Law”, originating from the Norwegian novelist Sandemose (1933). In his book *A refugee crosses his tracks* (*En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, 1933), Sandemose described the oppressing and circumscribed atmosphere in the fictitious small Danish town Jante, which he elaborated using his native town, Nykøbing Mors, as a model: *Don't think you're anyone special or that you're better than us.* The content of this Jante Law would seem quite close to the above dimension of Self-constriction vs. Self-expansion, but given that the value of adhering to the Jante Law has been regarded as very typical of the Nordic countries, we decided to add an extra Jante Law item.

**The surveys in 1982 and 2005**

In 1982, a mail survey was sent to a random sample of 2,040 Swedish inhabitants in the age range 15-75 years. The net sample after deaths, emigration, etc., was 2,025 individuals, of which 1,293 returned the questionnaire. This corresponds to a response rate of 64 percent of the net sample.

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1 There were ten specific rules in the Jante Law, which any outsider coming to the village had to learn:
1. You shall not think that you are special.
2. You shall not think that you are of the same standing as us.
3. You shall not think that you are smarter than us.
4. Don't fancy yourself as being better than us.
5. You shall not think that you know more than us.
6. You shall not think that you are more important than us.
7. You shall not think that you are good at anything.
8. You shall not laugh at us.
9. You shall not think that anyone cares about you.
10. You shall not think that you can teach us anything.
In 2005, a mail survey was sent to a random sample of 2,001 Swedish inhabitants in the age range 16-85 years. The net sample after deaths, emigration, etc., was 1,918 individuals, of which 1,015 returned the questionnaire, and an additional 265 were interviewed by telephone. In all, 1,280 individuals participated, which corresponds to 67 percent of the net sample. At both points in time, the official register of the whole Swedish population constituted the population universe, from which the sample was drawn.

As a simple test of the demographic representativity of the respondent groups in each study, they have been compared with the whole Swedish population with regard to age distribution within the age span studied. In both 1982 and 2005, the age distribution of the respondent groups matched the corresponding age distribution in the Swedish population at the corresponding time, as tested by Chi\(^2\) for goodness of fit. Because the respondent groups mirror the corresponding whole Swedish population with regard to the age distribution, we know for certain that they are representative in this regard, and we can assume, by way of precaution, that they not are selective in other regards.

The questionnaires sent out in 1982 and 2005 contained exactly the same set of value statements, as described above. In addition, the questionnaires also requested information on a common set of background variables.

Whenever the results from the two surveys are directly compared, the age span is restricted to 16-75 years in both studies. Statistical differences between the two points of observation have been estimated using a simple mean difference test (M1-M2), as described by, e.g., Bohrnstedt and Knoke (1982). Within-year comparisons have been made using ANOVA.

### Comparative overview

Figure 1 provides, value pair by value pair, a summarizing comparison of the results in 1982 and 2005.

Because values are supposed to be relatively stable, only small changes would be expected in the historically and culturally relatively short period of 23 years. And, to be sure, three of the value choice patterns are, on average, statistically similar at both points of measurement. At both points in time, large and stable majorities put Family before a Beautiful world, True love before Esteem, and Loyalty to one’s own beliefs before Politeness. Regarding the remaining five value choices, however, there have been changes over the 23-year period. Most conspicuous is the change in responses to the Jante law item. In 1982, a majority of 60 percent aligned with the Jante law before Trust in one’s own capacity, but in 2005 the pattern is reversed. Now a majority of 66 percent has turned their backs on the Jante Law in favour of Trust in one’s own capacity.
In the same vein, the majority who puts broadmindedness before obedience has increased significantly from 73 to 85 percent. Also, the 1982 majority of Swedes who put a World at peace before True friendship dropped from 58 to 44 percent. And, the 55 percent majority who in 1982 put the value of Wisdom before Comfort dropped to a 41 percent minority in 2005.

Figure 1. Value choices 1982 and 2005
One way of getting an overall idea of the value structure and how it has changed is to take a look at the value rank orders, as in Table 1. It should be observed, however, that the rank orders in Table 1 are not true rank orders, as all the 16 values in Table 1 have not been compared against each other – only in pairs within each dimension.

Table 1. Value rank orders in 1982 and 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1982</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Loyalty to one’s own beliefs before Politeness (81%)</td>
<td>1. Broadmindedness before Obedience (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. True love before Esteem (77%)</td>
<td>2. Loyalty to one’s own beliefs before Politeness (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Broadmindedness before Obedience (73%)</td>
<td>3. True love before Esteem (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family before A beautiful world (69%)</td>
<td>4. Family before A beautiful world (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Forgiveness before Logical thinking (66%)</td>
<td>5. Trust in one’s own capacity before Jante Law (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jante law before Trust in one’s own capacity (60%)</td>
<td>6. Forgiveness before Logical thinking (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wisdom before Comfort (55%)</td>
<td>7. Comfort before Wisdom (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. World peace before True Friendship (58%)</td>
<td>8. True friendship before World at peace (56%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presented as in Table 1, the comparison between the results from 1982 and 2005 highlights some basic similarity. In both years, the top four value choices are the same, even if their positions within this top-four category have changed. Although 23 years apart, it is the values of Loyalty to one’s own beliefs, True love, Broadmindedness and Family that are put before their respective alternative values. However, the importance of broadmindedness has moved from third to first place in importance relative to its alternative value. In other words, the value of Obedience has dwindled to the lowest of all preferences (15%) across the years.

Table 1 also shows, as already mentioned, that aligning with the Jante law, which held rank order position 6 in 1982, has changed to its alternative choice – Trust in one’s own capacity – and taken position five in the 2005 rank order.
Three basic value dimensions

To see whether the above-described eight value choices can be further reduced to an even smaller number of more basic value dimensions, we have performed varimax rotated principal component factor analyses, which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor analyses of value choice statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor loads</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-constriction vs. self-expansion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience vs. Broadmindedness</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politeness vs. Loyalty to one’s own beliefs</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jante law vs. Trust in one’s own capacity</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationality vs. Post-materialism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical thinking vs. Forgiveness</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort vs. Wisdom</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem vs. Love</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World vs. Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful world vs. Family first</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World peace vs. True friendship</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factor analyses show that the eight value pairs can be reduced to three, more basic dimensions. Analyses of the data from 1982 and 2005 produce the very same three dimensions, although the factor loads are somewhat different.

The first dimension, which includes the Jante Law item, is so close to what Rokeach termed *Self-constriction vs. self-expansion* that we have decided to use that name for this dimension. The second dimension includes items in which Logic, Comfort and Esteem are set against Forgiveness, Wisdom and Love. Our label for this dimension is *Rationality vs. Post-materialism*, as this dimension captures part of the differences Inglehart (1977) described between material and post-material values.

The third dimension incorporates items in which a Beautiful world and a World at peace are set against Family and Friendship. Our label for this dimension is *World vs. Family*.
The first of the above dimensions, *Self-constriction vs. self-expansion*, can be understood as a dimension of values that, in Rokeach’s terminology, are instrumental. They comprise different rules of behaviour, used to reach the end of being a good person. The second dimension, *Rationality vs. Post-materialism*, lies somewhere between the instrumental and the terminal values, while the third dimension, *World vs. Family*, seems closer to different terminal values, in this latter case a Beautiful world at peace or Friendship and family first.

For each of the three dimensions, we have constructed simple additive indexes such that for the first dimension, the index has a theoretical range between 3 (maximal *Self-constriction*) and 6 (maximal *Self-expansion*), with a ‘break-even’ value of 4.5. Also the second index has a range between 3 (maximal *Rationality*) and 6 (maximal *Post-materialism*) and a ‘break-even’ value of 4.5. The third index has a range between 2 (maximal *World* orientation) and 4 (maximal *Family* orientation) and a ‘break-even’ value of 3.0.

**Changes in the three value dimensions**

In addition to studying the overall stabilities and changes in value patterns over the 23-year period, we also examine what these changes and stabilities look like in various parts of the Swedish population by comparing the three dimensions over the study period within the subgroups described in Table 3. Rightmost in Table 3, we have also displayed the percentage in various groups who align with the Jante Law statement – you shall realize that you are not superior to others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-constrict. vs. Self-expansion</th>
<th>Rationality vs. Post-materialism</th>
<th>World vs. Family</th>
<th>Single Jante law item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td>4,9128</td>
<td>5,2286</td>
<td>0.3158</td>
<td>4,7585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>4,9837</td>
<td>5,4335</td>
<td><strong>0.4498</strong></td>
<td>5,1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 16-25</td>
<td>5.019</td>
<td>5.3646</td>
<td>0.3456</td>
<td>4.9537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 26-35</td>
<td>5.0525</td>
<td>5.284</td>
<td>0.4659</td>
<td>5,0752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 36-45</td>
<td>5.0087</td>
<td>5.4231</td>
<td>0.4144</td>
<td>4.9304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 46-55</td>
<td>5.053</td>
<td>5.407</td>
<td>0.3677</td>
<td>5.0111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 56-65</td>
<td>5.0087</td>
<td>5.2152</td>
<td>0.3506</td>
<td>5.0106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 66-75</td>
<td>5.0087</td>
<td>5.047</td>
<td>0.3694</td>
<td>4.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohorts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Born 1920-35</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.49259</td>
<td>0.0259</td>
<td>5.0033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Born 1936-45</td>
<td>5.0092</td>
<td>5.2118</td>
<td>0.2026</td>
<td>4.9213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Born 1946-55</td>
<td>4.9738</td>
<td>5.333</td>
<td>0.2942</td>
<td>5.0553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Born 1956-66</td>
<td>4.5568</td>
<td>5.417</td>
<td><strong>0.3602</strong></td>
<td>4.9787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower 60%</td>
<td>4.7635</td>
<td>5.1488</td>
<td>0.3853</td>
<td>4.9387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher 30%</td>
<td>5.222</td>
<td>5.6244</td>
<td>0.4024</td>
<td>5.0494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left wing</td>
<td>4.8651</td>
<td>5.1789</td>
<td>0.3138</td>
<td>4.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right wing</td>
<td>5.0211</td>
<td>5.525</td>
<td><strong>0.5039</strong></td>
<td>5,0093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4.949</td>
<td>5.3374</td>
<td>0.3884</td>
<td>5.0856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05  ** p<.01  *** p<.001
In the upper left-hand corner of the table, the gender difference in the dimension *Self-constriction vs. Self-expansion* is displayed. As also illustrated in Figure 2, it shows that both genders on average are on the Self-expansion side at both points in time. Both genders have furthermore changed towards increased Self-expansion, but women to a greater extent, which has created a statistically significant difference between the genders in 2005 (Eta = .12, P< .001). Also, at both points in time, respondents with higher education levels are significantly more inclined towards Self-expansion.

Figure 2. Self constriction vs. Self expansion among men and women

A similar difference is seen when comparing respondents with left-wing and right-wing political sympathies in the Swedish context. Both groups are on the Self-expansion side at both points in time, but the right-wing sympathizers to a greater degree, at the same time as they have also changed more towards valuing Self-expansion before Self-constriction – thus creating a substantial difference between the two groups in 2005.

Table 3 also shows that, at both points in time, the older respondents are less oriented towards Self-expansion, even if the overall pattern shows a general shift towards increased Self-expansion over the 23-year period.

It should be observed (Table 3 and Figure 3), however, that even if three of the four cohorts have changed in the same direction, the change toward increased Self-expansion has been more obvious the younger the cohort is. The youngest cohort, respondents born between 1956 and 1966, who have aged
from 16-26 to 39-49 during the period, have changed the most. The oldest cohort, respondents born between 1920 and 1935, who have aged from 47-62 to 70-85 during the period, have not changed at all. Given the assumption that each generation/cohort acquires its own values and maintains them unchanged during life (the generational replacement hypothesis), we would expect each cohort to display the same view over the years. Because this is not the case, except for in the oldest generation, the pure generational replacement hypothesis must be rejected.

Figure 3. Self constriction vs. Self expansion among different cohorts

Regarding the dimension *Rationality vs. Post-materialism*, it is worth noticing that, as mentioned earlier, the overall change over the 23-year period has been towards less value on what we have defined as Post-materialism, even if the balance at both points in time is on the Post-materialism side. Table 3 reveals that the changes over the years have created a split between respondents in the age spans between 16-35 and 36-75. The younger respondents are slightly more inclined toward Post-materialism in comparison with the older ones, which depends on the fact that the change towards Rationality has been most prominent in the age range 36-75.

An interesting finding regarding the Rationality vs. Post-materialism dimension is, as shown in Figure 4, that while the respondent category with a higher education level shows almost the same high stress
on Post-materialism, the category with a lower education level has changed considerably towards the rationality stance over the study period.

Regarding the cohorts, they have all changed towards increased Rationality. This, again, speaks against the generational replacement hypothesis, which implies that each generation/cohort maintains its view over the years.

Figure 4. Rationality vs. Post-materialism controlling for education

As already mentioned, the trend regarding the World vs. Family dimension is that even more stress has been put on the family value over the 23-year period. Table 3 reveals that two age categories in particular are responsible for this increase – the category of 26- to 35-year-olds and the category of 66- to 75-year-olds. The first category may also be described as those in the family-forming years, and the second as those in the grandparent generation. Also, when focussing on the cohorts, the youngest cohort, those born between 1956 and 1966, are the only respondents who have really changed towards increased stress on family values. The older cohorts have kept the same view over the years, thus signalling that, in this case, we may be seeing more of a generational replacement process.

Finally, regarding the single Jante Law item, Table 3 shows that, in the gender comparison, particularly women have dropped in their support of the Jante Law. In 1982, no less than 61 percent of the women supported the Jante Law, which in 2005 has dropped to 29 percent. The percentage of male
supporters has also dropped, but not as drastically. This has created a 2005 gender difference that did not exist in 1982. In 2005, more men (38%) than women (29%) support the Jante Law. Also, two adjacent age categories have dropped slightly more than others in their support of the Jante Law – the age categories 45-55 and 56-65 years. However, looking at the different cohorts, we see that they all have changed, in the same direction towards less Jante Law support. Again, given the assumption that each generation/cohort acquires its own values and maintains them unchanged during life (the generational replacement hypothesis), we would expect each cohort to display the same view over the years. Because this is not the case, the pure generational replacement hypothesis must be refuted with regard to the decrease in support of the Jante Law.

Discussion

Given the globalization process and our increased awareness of the situation around the world, owing to media coverage, we might expect that the importance of the value of a World at peace would have increased during the 23-year study period. But, on the contrary, the proportion of respondents who put a World at peace before True friendship has dropped from 58 to 44 percent. In 2005, a majority of 56 percent put True friendship before a World at peace. Together with the strong and stable emphasis on Family first, before a Beautiful world, we have an indication that the change towards more individualization has been a more powerful process than the process of global solidarity. Our index on the World vs. Family dimension also reveals a statistically significant change away from ‘world values’ towards ‘individual and family values’, particularly among the youngest cohort and in the family-building age category.

Our conclusion that the move towards individualization has been a significant process during the 23 years between 1982 and 2005 is strengthened by the fact that the change in the dimension Self-constriction vs. Self-expansion also implies a greater focus on freedom for the individual and less restrictions in the form of adherence to norms and rules. As shown by our data, in particular women, the youngest cohort, and right-wing sympathizers have moved towards individual freedom, signalling who the early adopters and pioneers in this process of change are – a process from global solidarity and norm obedience to an individual, family-focused and self-expansive stance.

According to both Sorokin (1937) and Inglehart (1977), we should also expect that our entrance into the post-modern, post-materialistic era would imply decreased stress on material values such as comfort and increased stress on values such as wisdom, as predicted by Inglehart (op. cit.) in his book *The Silent Revolution*, and as indicated by the New Age movement. The fact is that a number of
studies seem to support Inglehart’s thesis that values change towards post-materialism as societies develop and prosper. Inglehart (1977) himself compared countries with varying degrees of prosperity and concluded that the more developed and prosperous countries placed more emphasis on post-material values. Other studies (e.g., Sandberg, 2002) have also shown that young people in modern society (who have never experienced material deficiencies) have more post-material values in comparison with their parents. These studies are all cross-sectional, and it may well be that even if the above-described difference between age groups is found at each point in time, the real change over time is actually in the other direction. Thus, drawing longitudinal conclusions based on cross-sectional data may lead to inaccurate conclusions.

And, to be sure, our time comparison data, covering changes over a 23-year period, do show a development that is opposite in direction to what is found when using cross-sectional data. The proportion of respondents who, for example, put the materialistic value of comfort before wisdom has increased significantly from 45 to 59 percent over the years. Also, the whole dimension Rationality vs. Post-materialism shows the same change towards increased rationality, even if the cross-sectional differences in 2005 show that the younger respondents have more post-material values than do the older respondents.

Thus, we have registered changes that contradict both the assumption of increased global solidarity and predictions of the emergence of certain new, post-material values such as global solidarity. Instead, we have found changes in the value preferences away from global Solidarity towards more Family focus, Self-expansion and Materialism.

Regarding the question of whether each generation/cohort acquires its values and maintains them over the years, our data basically refute this idea. The cohorts/generations mostly modify their values in the same direction, with the exception of the World vs. Family dimension, where this holds for the youngest generation only. However, the fact that the cohorts/generations modify their values as they age is no proof that this change is due to any developmental life-course change. It can just as likely be interpreted as a period effect, which is defined as something that affects everyone in society at a certain period in time. Values in society undergo changes that more or less affect each and everyone of us, regardless of generation and/or position in the life cycle. This is, with a simplification, the story our 23-year comparison study tells us.
References


