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The Future of Motherhood in Western Societies: Late Fertility and its Consequences

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Most people value to have children still highly. But what is the optimal moment to have the first? The decision on having children or not and if yes on the timing of the first is one of the most difficult ones to make, also because it more or less coincides with various other heavy decisions on shaping the life course (like on union formation, labour market career, housing accommodation, etc.). People realise that having children will fundamentally change their life and in order to fit this unknown and irreversible adventure perfectly into their life course postponement of the first birth is an easy way out as long as doubts continue and partners try to make up their mind. Modern methods of birth control are of course a very effective help in that period. What is the best moment to have the first child? And to what moment is postponement justified? There are no easy answers to these questions. Best solutions vary per person as they depend on personal circumstances and considerations (the partner may have conflicting ideas; housing accommodation; job; income; free time activities). Existing parental leave and child care arrangements are weighted as well. Unfortunately the biological clock ticks further. And, also unfortunately, assisted reproductive technology (IVF etc.) is unable to guarantee a successful outcome. Several couples end up without children involuntarily and that may lead to sorrow and grief. This interdisciplinary book overviews the process of postponement and its backgrounds in modern Western societies holistically, both at the personal and the societal level. Contributions come from reproductive, evolutionary biological and neurological sciences, as well as from demography, economy, sociology and psychology. It holds not only at women but also at men becoming first time fathers. The discussion boils down to a new policy approach for motherhood and emancipation on how to shape work and family life? It is argued that a public window where one can compose a ‘cafeteria’-like set of supportive arrangements according to personal preferences could lead to a break in the rising age at first motherhood.

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