

Thematic Field C: Changing Lives in Changing Socio-Cultural Contexts

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BIGSSS' Thematic Field C examines the changing dynamics of individual lives against a backdrop of political and social integration, looking at the interplay of individual attitudes, capabilities, and behavior, with changing demographics, social structures, cultures, and institutions. The aim is to describe and explain how and why way of life, biographical status, and patterns of stability at different ages are being transformed and to determine the potential for individual variation, or "plasticity," in these transformations. Changes in gender relations, family dynamics, work, education, migration, and values will be considered.

Research questions in Field C include:

1. How does globalization and the attendant increase in migration and contact between cultures impact individual lives and their cultural contexts? How are interactions between individuals affected? Culture plays an important role in determining an individual's self-concept, attitudes, behaviors, and values—all of which shape interactions between individuals. Likewise, culture is continuously produced and reproduced by the dynamic interaction between individuals acting within and between social and natural environments. Cognitive styles, identity (re)formation, deviant behavior, new forms of media, and religious systems all play a role here.
2. How do the demographic trends of increasing life expectancy and low birth rates, changing labor markets, and changing social welfare regimes in modern societies affect individuals' educational and work biographies? Do changes in the structure of the labor market and work force create new opportunities for large sectors of the population? How are individuals dealing with longer lives? How is the last phase of life shaped by these demographic changes?
3. Families are a fundamental building block of human collectives. How have families in modern societies changed? How are men and women adapting their unions and family formation strategies to the demands and opportunities in changing modern societies, with their multifarious cultural settings and institutional conditions? What are the consequences for the stability of family relationships? How does the transformation of family relationships affect, and how are they affected by changes in attitudes, gender related values, life priorities, and life plans?