

# **WOMEN'S POSITION AND FERTILITY LEVELS IN THE PENINSULAR BASQUE COUNTRY**

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1975etik Euskadik aldaketa nabaria izan du jokaera demografikoari dagokionez, ezkontza eta ugalkortasun handiak, gero eta adin goiztarragoetan burutuak, aurkezten zituen hedapen-eredu batetik, murriztapen demografikoaren eredu batera, non ezkontza gutxi eta ugalkortasun kopuru apala, gero eta adin berandukoagoi dagokienera, lehenesten den. Aldaketa prozesu honen ondorio zuzena ezkontza eta jaiotza kopuruaren beherapena da, %40tan eta %50etan, hurrenez hurren, 1975-90 bitartean. Garai horretan berean, Ugalkortasun Indize Sintetiko 2,5etik 0,94ra jaitsi da, eta biztanleriaren bolumen osoa 2,1 milioitan gelditu da 1980 urtetik.

Ugalkortasunaren eta ezkontzen beherazko joera horren arrazoia aurkitzerakoan, ez dirudi 70. urteetako erdialdetik gure Herria jotzen duen krisi ekonomikoaren gogortasunak soilki eragina denik. Izan ere, 1955etik aurrera jaiotako belaunaldiek, hau da, hezkuntza sistemaren hobekuntzak iritsi zituztenek, irizpide berriak ekarri dituzte familia, ugalketa eta bikote-harremanei dagokienez. Jokabide aldaketa horien artean jeneroen rola atzemateko era berriak daude, familian eta gizartearen emakumeak duen statusaren ikusmolde berdinzaleagoa, gure gizartearen modernizazio eta sekularizazio prozesuari loturik daudenak.

Emakumeen esku hartze ekonomikoaren eragina izan da ugalkortasunaren beherazko joera horren azalpen tradizionala, baina horretan alokairua jasotzen duten, emakumeen partehartzearen garrantzi erreala ez da esan den bezain handia gertatu, eta horrek, egungo ugalketa-jokabideari gagozkiola, aukera kultural berrek jokatu duten papera lausotu du.

Desde 1975, Euskadi ha experimentado un cambio de comportamiento demográfico, pasando de un modelo de expansión basado en nupcialidad y fecundidad altas y a edades cada vez más jóvenes, a un modelo de restricción demográfica en el que prima la baja nupcialidad y fecundidad y a edades cada vez más tardías. La consecuencia directa de este proceso de cambio se ha reflejado en la disminución del número de matrimonios y el de nacimientos en un 40% y un 50% respectivamente entre 1975-90. En las mismas fechas el índice Sintético de Fecundidad disminuyó de 2,5a 0,94, y el volumen total de población se ha estabilizado en 2.1 millones desde 1980.

Esta tendencia a la baja de la fecundidad y de la nupcialidad no parece haber sido exclusivamente debida a la intensidad de la crisis económica que ha sufrido nuestro País desde mediados los años 70. Las generaciones nacidas posterior a 1955, es decir, aquellas generaciones que tuvieron acceso a las mejoras del sistema educativo han introducido nuevas apreciaciones sobre la familia, la reproducción y las relaciones de pareja. Entre estos cambios actitudinales se encuentra una nueva apreciación de los roles de género, una visión más igualitaria del status de las mujeres en la familia y en la sociedad, que están ligadas a su vez al proceso de modernización y secularización de nuestra sociedad.

La tradicional explicación de este proceso en base al impacto de la participación económica de las mujeres en la tendencia a la baja de la fecundidad ha participado de la sobreestimación de la importancia real de la participación asalariada femenina, oscureciendo el papel que han jugado nuevas alternativas culturales en el actual comportamiento reproductivo.

Between 1975 and 1990 the Basque Country<sup>1</sup> has experienced the rapid adaptation of a demographic model highly influenced by two decades of fast economic growth (declining ages at marriage, generalized nuptiality and above replacement level fertility) into its opposite (restricted marriage and at older ages, and below replacement fertility). In this period the number of marriages declined by 40 percent and the number of births by 60 percent; TFR fell from 2.5 to 0.94, there is a stable negative migration flow and total population oscillates around 2,1 million people since 1980.

However, this declining fertility and nuptiality trends down to the present low levels cannot be considered exclusively as the result of the intense economic crisis which has swept the area for the last fifteen years. The cohorts born after 1955, this is, the cohorts with generalized access to better and higher educational standards, have introduced as well new behavioural patterns with regards union formation and family building.

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1. The present analysis is limited to the three Peninsular Basque provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa due to lack of access to similar data for Nafarroa. However, the graphs 1 to 4 shown on pages 11-12 refer to Census data for the four territories.

*This new process implies the changing appreciation of traditional gender roles, a more egalitarian position with regards the status of women within the family and in society and appears directly linked to a parallel secularization trend. The direct impact of women's economic participation on the process of fertility decline has been overestimated, obscuring the role played by new ideologies of marriage and family building in the promotion, not only of a smaller family size, but also of a wider calendar of reproduction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1975 the Basque Country has experienced a systematic decline of fertility and nuptiality after two decades of continuous economic and demographic expansion. This trend has not only implied the deceleration of the pace of demographic behaviour but also affected the calendar and structure of demographic events. Below replacement fertility was reached in 1978 and has continued declining since. Fertility decline together with a net migratory outflow has generated a process of demographic stagnation in the Basque Country. The growing presence of alternative models of union and family formation since 1975 have contributed to this process.

Demographic behaviour is also perceived, at present, as provoked by the current economic situation. The consequence of the intense economic crisis which has affected the Basque Country since the mid 1970s has been a very high level of unemployment, particularly for the younger generations entering the labour market. These cohorts, have adopted a low fertility model based on late marriage and delayed family formation, alongside permissive attitudes towards alternative sexual unions.

This presentation attempts to clarify these interrelated aspects of social and fertility behaviour. The following analysis centers on the role played by the level of women's economic participation and the new union and fertility preferences of the younger generations as the main factors for the stabilization of fertility behaviour at such low levels.

Census and Vital Registration data complemented by information drawn from the 1986 Fertility Survey<sup>2</sup> and the 1990 Family Survey<sup>3</sup> will be used in this paper.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND: FROM BABY BOOM TO BABY BUST

### 2.1. Demographic trends before 1975

The expanding economic system of the 1950s and 1960s in Spain concentrated around the traditional industrial areas of Madrid, Barcelona and the Basque Country paving the way for a massive population movement from the rural or less industrialized areas into the gro-

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2. 'Demografiako eta balidazioko inkesta 1986 Encuesta demográfica y de validación', EUSTAT, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1989. Marriage and Fertility Survey attached to the 1986 municipal enumeration providing information on the demographic history of women aged over 15 in fifteen thousand households.

3. Survey on 'Women, Family and Domestic sphere' to 1300 women and 425 men aged 16-70, sponsored by the Women's Institute of the Basque Country, EMAKUNDE, in 1990.

wing industrial centers, reestablishing the migratory patterns of late 19th and early 20th century. The intensity of this process led to the depopulation of vast areas in central Spain in only one generation (Tezanos, 1985).

The industrial areas of the Basque Country became again a pole of attraction for a population who flowed continuously from the early 1950s until the mid 1970s. The net input of immigration was to account for half of the intercensal population gains between 1950 and 1970 and for 35 percent of the gains between 1970 and 1975<sup>4</sup>. As a result the younger generations increased to the extent that some cohorts almost doubled their initial numbers in twenty years<sup>5</sup>), especially in the 1960s. The age structure became, thus heavily overrepresented by men and women in their reproductive years, which helped to accelerate the number of marriages and births during that period.

The secular trend towards fertility decline experienced since the beginning of the century<sup>6</sup> came to a halt. By 1960 period indicators showed a return to a high fertility model centered on younger age intervals of the reproductive span, process which continued well into the 1970s. Similarly to other European countries, but with a decade of delay, the Basque Country experienced its 'baby boom'. The overrepresented younger generations not only introduced a more dynamic pattern of marriages and births, but they also introduced a new structure and calendar of nuptiality and fertility.

The traditional nuptiality model based on high levels of celibacy and of late age at marriage gave way to a higher frequency of marriage and at younger ages. The age at first and higher order births declined, promoting a significant increase of period fertility. Extra marital fertility stayed at very moderate levels (under 2 percent of all births), maintaining the close relationship between marriage and fertility common to Southern Europe. This new pattern of period fertility behaviour fits the trends experienced in Western Europe in the previous decade: age specific fertility increased in all age intervals, but mainly at ages under 30 (see Table 1).

From the mid 1950s onwards the fertility of women over 30 declined, specially of women over 40, in contrast with the increasing fertility of women under 25 (particularly of those under 20 which became a characteristic feature of the period). The traditional model of late and widespread childbearing gave way to a new system which inaugurated a pattern of fertility behaviour highly concentrated on the youngest age groups. Marriage at age 25-29 age continued to be the most frequent age for marriage but frequency of marriage at younger ages (20-24) increased at the expense of nuptiality at ages over 30, thus lowering the mean age at marriage (see Table 2). Besides, the age difference between spouses declined by one year during the 1960-75 period.

## 2.2. Demographic trends after 1975

However, this new trend did not last long. By 1975 period fertility was declining in all age groups but the youngest, decline which was to become particularly intense by the end of the

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4. The four census since 1970 indicate that 30 to 35 percent of the Basque population has been born elsewhere.

5. As it happened for the group aged 5-14 in 1950 which continued to receive population in the 1970s.

6. The onset of the demographic transition for the Peninsular Basque area was in the 1920s (Coale & Watkins, 1986).

Table 1.

**EVOLUTION OF COHORT FERTILITY**

(births per ten thousand women)

Cohort	Fan. Size	1990-1986	1985-1981	1980-1976	1975-1971	1970-1966	1965-1961	1960-1956	1955-1951	(%) EMF	(%) PMP
1975-71	0.01	1.4									
1970-66	0.09	15.5	2.5	0.1						30.5	43.0
1965-61	0.41	54.4	24.9	3.6						15.7	41.6
1960-56	1.18	86.7	91.7	53.2	4.2					6.1	23.8
1955-51	1.76	42.0	101.4	141.0	62.1	5.0	0.4			5.0	18.5
1950-46	2.20	11.4	52.1	137.3	185.4	51.1	2.6			4.8	14.8
1945-41	2.40	1.7	19.6	71.9	159.1	180.1	46.1	2.1		4.3	12.3
1940-36	2.66	0.1	3.5	31.9	93.4	176.7	180.1	43.8	3.0	5.7	11.4
1935-31	2.67		0.4	7.2	44.7	120.3	195.4	139.2	25.5	6.6	10.5
1930-26	2.57			0.5	8.7	55.0	124.9	166.8	124.9	9.0	12.2
1925-21	2.73				0.6	15.1	70.3	136.0	166.5	10.4	12.7
1920-16	2.56					1.8	18.6	65.2	123.3	12.5	9.4
1915-11	2.52						2.3	17.8	71.3	14.2	8.9
1910-06	2.69							0.8	17.9	15.0	13.6
	TFR	1.07	1.48	2.23	2.79	3.02	3.20	2.86	2.66		

EMF: Extra marital fertility (in percent of first births)

PMP: Prenuptial pregnancies (in percent of first births)

Source: Demografiako eta Balidazioko Inkesta 1986 Encuesta Demográfica y de Validación, EUSTAT, Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Table 2.

**EVOLUTION OF NUPTIALITY**

(marriages per thousand women)

Cohort	1990-1986	1985-1981	1980-1976	1975-1971	1970-1966	1965-1961	1960-1956	1955-1951	Age at ** marriage
1975-71	1.2								17.8
1970-66	19.7	2.4							20.4
1965-61	54.6	28.9	6.0						22.3
1960-56	26.1	56.9	63.7	6.6					23.1
1955-51	5.9	17.6	75.0	72.8	6.1				24.0
1950-46	1.9	3.5	22.1	96.8	56.9	5.1			24.4
1945-41	1.0	2.0	6.7	25.5	92.5	55.9	4.1		25.0
1940-36	0.6	0.7	1.8	6.7	31.6	93.3	52.9	3.9	26.3
1935-31		0.6	1.8	4.0	10.3	42.0	96.0	30.5	26.4
1930-26			0.6	1.0	5.1	15.4	45.7	80.4	26.8
1924-21				1.0	2.3	5.3	17.6	42.8	28.3
1920-16					1.8	2.2	5.1	14.7	27.5
1915-11						1.6	3.2	10.4	26.7
1910-06							2.7	1.7	
SMAMs *	27.8	25.6	23.5	23.1	23.7	-	24.9	-	

\* referred to the last year of the period. Source: as above.

\* Standardized men age at marriage (SMAM, Hajnal 1956) during the period shown in the first line.

\* \* Mean age of people marrying during the period shown in the first column.

decade and affecting women of all ages. This declining trend has persisted into the present without showing any signs of change. Replacement level was reached for the first time in 1978 and the decline has continued ever since reaching a current minimum of 0.94, less than a third of what it was two decades previously.

This new trend has affected fertility at all ages, although with different intensity depending on calendar. What started as a process of concentrating fertility at younger groups of women has turned into the opposite in the 1980s, becoming an experience increasingly related to women in the medium interval of the reproductive span (30 to 40 years of age). In the last five years, and for the first time since the early sixties, the fertility of women aged 30 to 34 is the highest of all groups, with the fertility of the 35-39 age group approaching that of the 20-24s. During the last decade declining fertility has affected older age groups less than women under 30, suggesting that the main bulk of fertility is geared to complete the family size rather than to initiate it. Currently, the fertility at age 20-24 is a third of what used to be a decade ago, and that at age 25-29 has declined by more than half (see Table 1).

The age specific nuptiality rates (number of first marriages in a cohort to the number of women in that cohort) have also declined spectacularly. Only 20 percent of the women born in 1966-70 married at the age of 20-24 in comparison with the 63 percent of the 1956-60 cohort married at the same age, or the 73 percent married of those 20-24 years old born in 1951-55. The downward fertility trend and at older ages during the 1980s is obviously linked to the declining tendency to marry at young ages. SMAMS which had lowered 2 years in women and 3 in men between 1960 and 1975, have increased 4 years since 1960 and by more than two in the last ten (see Table 2).

The 'baby bust' period of fertility decline common to most Western Europe during the 1970s and early 1980s also emphasized new developments in demographic behaviour. Marriage has ceased to be the exclusive reference for a sexual union, nor the only one for reproduction. At the same time it has ceased to be a union for life and the probability of experiencing more than one stable unions has increased. However, the role played by the increasing levels of consensual unions and of family building in this context, as well as of marital breakdown is relatively unimportant in the Basque Country. These trends have been established late and only moderately.

The extent of cohabitation was measured for the first time in the 1986 Fertility Survey. According to it the impact of cohabitation is low, with only 0,9 percent of the women in their reproductive period in this category. The majority of the consensual unions (83,5 percent) appear highly concentrated on women born after 1951 which were at most 35 at the time of the survey. In most Western countries these unions act as a waiting period to marriage and family initiation, and tend to be particularly high at ages under 24 and to decline later on (Schwarz, 1988). In the Basque case, consensual unions concentrate at ages over 25. However, in a similar pattern to late nuptiality, the low level of cohabitation is reflected by the fact that in 1986 only 3 percent of the women aged 25-34 were in this category, a low proportion in comparison to the recent behaviour of women of similar age in other West European countries (Kiernan, 1989), such as the United Kingdom (6% in 1979), France (7% in 1981), Netherlands (14% in 1982), and very far away from the experience of Denmark (34% in 1981) or Sweden (45% in 1981). Marital breakdown is also a limited occurrence in our area, since only 1,5 percent of women of reproductive age indicate that they are divorced or separated (legally or de facto).

The level of decohabitation from the parental family has declined for the generation born after 1955, reflecting the widespread youth unemployment during the 1980s and the consequent longer economic dependency on the family. This behaviour is furthermore legitimized by the tradition of staying in the family of origin till marriage takes place. The proportion of extramarital births has increased from a low 3,2 percent in 1975 to the current moderate 7,4 percent in 1990, with the age structure of single motherhood following a similar trend to that of general fertility. The proportion of extramarital births to women over 25 is growing, displacing the importance of these births to women aged under 24.

As has been mentioned before, the slow introduction of these new models of nuptiality and fertility behaviour in our society contrast with the current levels of these trends in most of Western Europe. Their impact cannot does not have a significant influence in this recent process of fertility decline. Even so, this moderate inroad in alternative demographic behaviour suggests that the continuing stability and centrality of marriage and the family as the fundamental frame of reference for union formation and reproduction is slowly being eroded.

### 3. ECONOMIC SITUATION AND FAMILY FORMATION

#### 3.1. The economic position of women

Declining fertility trends are traditionally linked both, to the economic situation and to the levels of women's participation in the labour market. Even at times of economic expansion, women's economic participation has been traditionally low in the Basque Country. In Western Europe the expansion of the Service Sector and the widespread introduction of part time work in the 1960s induced a significant increase in the labour participation of women with dependant children by allowing them a better compromise between a professional job and domestic responsibilities. This trend has been rather limited in the Basque case. Labour Social costs were fixed irrespective of time worked till very recently making part time work particularly expensive and therefore, not competitive for employers. In addition, the Basque Country has specialized in heavy industry (steel and metal manufactures) and job opportunities for women have been curtailed by the slow growth of the service sector until the 1980s.

Up to the 1970s and for three and a half decades, the labour market was characterized by a rigid structure, with a production system which combined job stability with very low salaries. The generalization of the full time working shift in most trades and the social belief that family responsibilities were the exclusive scope of married women induced an exaggeratedly picked 'L' pattern of participation in the economy for women aged 20-24 during the 1960s and 1970s. Women's economic activity was highest before marriage and dropped to insignificant levels after the first child. This trend smoothed with time and levels of education so that after 1981 dropping out of the job because of marriage or childbearing became much less common (see figures 1 to 4<sup>7</sup>).

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7. The rates shown in figures 1 to 4 refer to the four historical regions of the Peninsular Basque Country, i.e. Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa (which form the present Basque Autonomous Community) plus Navarre. No major problems of comparability arise as the sociodemographic structure is rather homogeneous in the four areas. Furthermore, Navarre represents under 20 percent of the total population.

Figure 1.

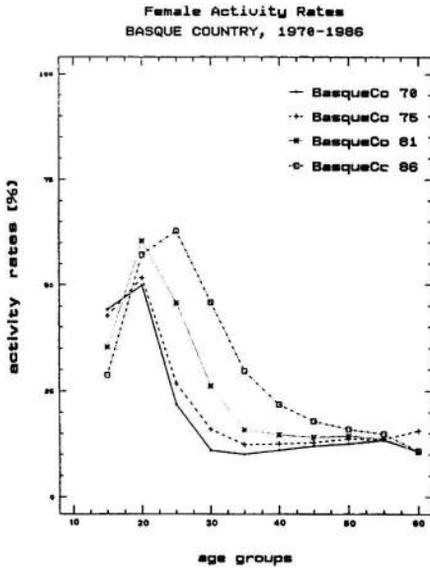


Figure 2

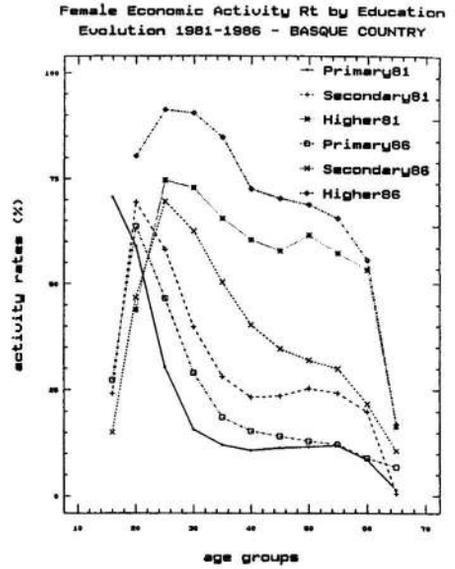


Figure 3.

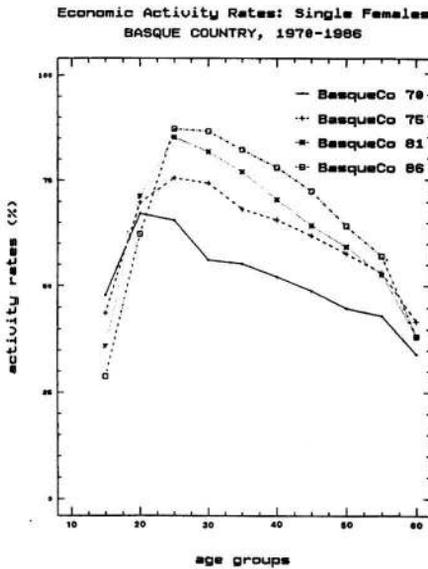
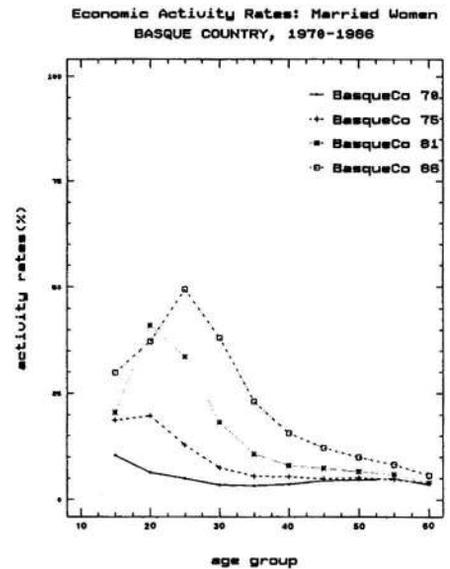


Figure 4.



In the last decades women's economic participation has experienced a positive trend, growing progressively at all ages of women irrespective of civil status and educational level; although, as expected, women's rates of economic activity remained highest in single women and in women with the highest educational level. One paradox of this situation lies in the fact that the access to higher educational levels during the 1980s has increased the offer of better educated women in the labour market at a time when the economic possibilities for employment were declining.

The generalized crisis of the mid 1970s ends the situation of virtual full employment experienced since the 1950s. At this point the fragile Spanish economic system was badly affected by the international economic crisis which together with the social turmoil of the political transition from Francoism generate a collapse of the previous accelerated growth process. As a consequence, the previous gains regarding job stability began to crumble. Since 1977 the growing intensity of selective unemployment has been a characteristic of Basque society. Unemployment has been most intense at both extremes of the age pyramid: on the youngest actives and the oldest workers. It made a full impact on the younger generations impeding their entrance into an occupation and these were cohorts of women and men ready to integrate in the labour market and to initiate themselves into family forming. On the other extreme of the age structure it witnessed the widespread introduction of early retirement schemes (down to 50 years of age in some cases) served to smooth the impact of unemployment.

Total employment which followed a growing trend since the 1950s declined sharply after 1975 losing over 10 per cent in the 1975-86 period, returning to the employment levels of 1970. Given the nature of the crisis, which affected mainly the industrial and steel related sectors, these job losses have affected mainly the male occupational market (between 1975 and 1985, a decline of 16 per cent of the male jobs) while the number of female jobs have increased by 14 per cent, although the relation of women to men in employment is still 1 to 3. The economic recovery experienced in the Basque area in 1986-89 has improved the general levels of employment increasing noticeably the number of women employed while men's economic participation declined and their number of jobs stabilized (see Table 3).

The temporary growth employment after 1985 reflects the international economic recovery and is particularly strong for the Spanish economy, partly due to the inflow of foreign capital linked with the entrance in the European Community. The Basque industry, extremely dependant on the Spanish market, reflects this upsurge of activity and grows at a pace unknown since the early 1970s. However this growing access of women to employment does not keep the pace with the trend of economic activity, and the proportion of women unemployed has increased by 42 per cent since 1980. This increase in women's economic activity has been due to the growing incorporation of women over 25 into the labour market, while the fall in men's is basically related to their earlier exit from the labour market due to the introduction of pre retirement schemes. Between 1983 and 1988, the activity rate of men over 54 decreased from 42.7 to 31.7 per cent.

Youth activity (16-25 age interval) declined during this period affecting both sexes evenly. This trend was highly influenced by the increase in the school leaving age consequence of two interrelated factors: on the one hand, the structural trend towards higher professional specialization (which in practice implies larger period of schooling) and, on the other, to the difficulties in finding employment which kept the younger population at school. These two groups, women and youth, who play a secondary position in the labour market are

Table 3.

**LABOUR PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT BY SEX**

		1970	1975	1981	1986	1989 *
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b> (Thousands)	Total	614.8	684.0	636.4	616.6	633.6
	Male	496.3	544.5	491.8	456.1	456.5
	Female	114.2	139.4	144.6	160.5	177.1
<b>PARTICIPATION RATE</b> (percent of working age population)	Total	54.2	54.3	55.5	56.5	56.0
	Male	87.9	86.2	83.4	79.8	75.2
	Female	20.2	22.4	27.4	33.1	36.7
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</b> (percent of active population)	Total	1.7	2.0	15.7	23.0	21.1
	Male	1.6	1.7	13.6	19.6	15.7
	Female	2.2	3.2	21.9	31.1	32.2

\* 1989: Censo del Mercado de Trabajo, 1989.

Source: Serie Demografiko Homogeneoak 1970-1986 Series Demográficas Homogéneas, EUSTAT, 1989.

Table 4.

**LABOUR PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT BY COHORT AND SEX**

(rates in percent)		1970		1975		1981		1986	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>PARTICIPATION RATES</b>	1969-66							31.5	28.8
	1965-61					40.5	35.5	67.0	57.2
	1960-56			51.2	42.9	68.4	61.1	95.0	62.8
	1955-51	59.1	47.6	67.1	51.6	96.1	45.4	97.8	45.8
	1950-46	73.6	50.3	95.5	26.0	98.4	25.7	98.0	29.6
	1945-41	95.1	21.2	98.2	15.2	98.3	17.2	97.2	21.8
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT RATES</b>	1969-66							74.7	78.9
	1965-61					61.0	61.3	52.0	55.2
	1960-56			6.5	7.5	33.5	30.2	23.1	27.2
	1955-51	5.7	5.4	4.0	3.3	14.8	13.3	13.1	16.6
	1950-46	3.9	2.2	1.5	1.7	8.4	8.4	9.7	12.8
	1945-41	1.8	1.3	0.9	1.6	6.7	6.4	8.6	10.8
<b>EMPLOYMENT RATES</b> *	1969-66							7.9	6.1
	1965-61					15.8	13.7	32.1	25.6
	1960-56			47.9	39.7	45.5	42.6	72.8	45.7
	1955-51	44.1	35.5	64.4	49.9	81.8	39.3	85.1	38.2
	1950-46	70.7	49.2	94.0	25.6	90.2	23.5	88.5	25.8
	1945-41	93.5	20.9	97.4	15.0	91.7	16.1	88.8	19.4

\* Persons employed over population

Source: 'Series Demográficas Homogéneas 1980-86', EUSTAT, Vitoria-Gasteiz.

more sensible to its fluctuations than the rest: this is specially applicable to women whose economic activity rates declined in the early 1980s due to 'discouragement' induced by increasing unemployment rates and increased rapidly after 1987 with the decline of the general level of unemployment. However, during this later period of economic recovery the trend of reentry into the labour market was also highly gender asymmetrical: while the unemployment rate for men declined from 21,3 to 14 per cent between 1985 and 1989, the unemployment rate for women remained stable at 30 per cent (see Table 4).

Cohort analysis of the evolution of economic participation of men and women clearly indicate the extent of the difficulties of the younger generations for entrance in the labour market and employment. As indicated before, unemployment has been highly selective of women and men at the youngest age groups, and it is precisely the economic situation of these younger cohorts which is relevant for the demographic evolution. In this sense, period fertility decline since 1975 has been fundamentally due to the fertility decline of the cohorts born after 1955-60. These are also the same generations of women and men which have been hit hardest by unemployment since 1975, since one in every four men economically active aged 26-30 and one in every two men aged 21-25 in 1986 were unemployed. The rates for women were even more discouraging.

The rates of employment of young men and women, which integrate the effects both of participation and unemployment, ratify the process described above. In 1986, two thirds of the men and three fourths of the women aged 21-25 (and over a quarter of the men and half of the women aged 26-30) had not got independent means of livelihood. The economic improvements of 1986-89 have not been enough to redress the negative economic expectations on the future. In this sense, given the subsidiary position of women in relation to employment, even if gender differences in activity and employment rates in the younger cohorts are closing up, the possibilities for union and family formation will depend, primarily, on the position of men in the labour market.

### **3.2. Fertility behaviour and economic activity**

If the evolution of women's participation in the labour market as indicated by the trend of economic activity rates is inversely related to fertility trends, demographic and economic indicators would have to reflect this relationship. Female activity rates are low in the 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the years of highest period fertility, and increase systematically in the late 1970s and early 1980s in parallel to the dramatic declines in period fertility. However, labour participation of women since 1975 has never been high enough or decisive enough to influence by themselves the trend of fertility downwards.

In this way, the influence of socioeconomic conditions on fertility varies both by marriage cohort and socioeconomic group. The oscillations found in fertility behaviour by socioeconomic condition do not help to clarify the expected relationship between fertility and economic activity in women. As expected, the fertility of never active women is systematically above the fertility of ever active women in all cohorts. However, achieved fertility in some of the economically active groups can be higher than the never actives. This is clearly seen when comparing the percent differences in fertility between groups (see Table 5).

The percent differences in the mean number of children between the two groups along time suggest the development of two different fertility trends related, more to the marriage age cohort (and therefore to age) than to economic activity. The cohorts married before 1956

show a maximum 10 per cent difference in fertility between economically actives and never active women (positive to never active women) while for the women married after 1950, the fertility differences between the two groups decline by more than half oscillating moderately between 1.7 and 4.4 per cent (see Table 6).

On the other hand, the fertility fluctuations within the ever active group by socioeconomic situations are important enough, given that the unskilled workers (who represent the largest group of economically active women) show a mean fertility closer to the never actives than to most other socioeconomic categories. Similarly, maximum fertility variations by marriage cohort are far wider within each socioeconomic group than between groups. According to this, fertility decline has been more decisive in the never active group (-18.7 percent) than in the ever active (-11.2 percent). Furthermore this fertility decline has been similar to that experienced by the skilled workers (-18.5 percent) and larger than the fertility decline of the unskilled workers (-15.2 percent).

This would suggest that extraeconomic reasons contribute significantly to the trend of declining fertility in the Basque Country. It would be expected that the improvements in the standard of education, secularization and social diffusion played as well a relevant role in intergenerational change and cultural homogenization contributing to the convergence of the fertility patterns irrespective of economic roles in women.

#### 4. SECULARIZATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Taking into account the previous economic and fertility background, the current low fertility situation appears as a logical consequence to economic depression. However, linked to this process there is also the changing attitudes towards marriage and family formation (spe-

Table 5.

#### **ACHIEVED FAMILY SIZE BY SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITION**

Marriage Cohort	Family Size	Never active	Ever active	Socioeconomic condition				
				profess	Self-employed	employees	skilled workers	unskilled workers
1970-66	2.41	2.43	2.39	2.63	2.32	2.61	2.38	2.53
1965-61	2.55	2.60	2.49	2.42	2.74	2.48	2.37	2.39
1960-56	2.65	2.67	2.62	2.90	2.66	2.48	2.56	2.69
1955-51	2.73	2.76	2.68	4.95	2.73	2.98	2.12	2.64
1950-46	2.71	2.81	2.55	...	2.82	2.64	2.31	2.46
1945-41	2.87	2.99	2.69	...	3.10	1.78	2.60	2.68
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.62</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>2.55</b>

Source: Demografiako eta Balidaziako Inkesta 1986 Encuesta Demográfica y de Validación, EUSTAT.

cially significant in the younger generations of women and men) which have paved the way for a very restrictive demographic model which in the Basque case seems to have taken place at a minimum personal cost.

In a cultural model of fertility change (Lesthaeghe, 1986) a new system of values and attitudes in relation to family forming and building is as important for the understanding of fertility decline as economic considerations are. Each cohort experiences an individualized process of socialization, the background against which demographic decisions are made. In this model, religiosity appears as the largest discriminatory aspect between cohorts by age and sex, so that secularization becomes the main ideological dimension of change between generations: highest secularization will be attached to the younger and more educated cohorts as opposed to the more traditionally religious older cohorts, each group showing a different demographic fertility behaviour.

According to this framework of reference, the generations which produced the baby boom in Western Europe had idealized values not markedly different from those of their parents. They ascribed to the older models of family formation but they did not transmit them to the younger generations which were secularized in a spirit of greater individualism and criticism of authority whether social or religious. They were also the generations who demanded better educational, social and economic opportunities for women, or the need for more reliable contraceptive methods and in this way, spread the bases of an alternative reference model on the family.

The application of this framework of analysis to the Basque case seems relevant since the impact of religious influence in the individual, family and social life has declined sharply in the last twenty years in parallel to the evolution of fertility. The 1977 and the 1985 Spanish National Fertility Surveys already indicated a large fall in women's religious practice during

Table 6.

**DIFFERENCES IN FERTILITY BY SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITION**

Marriage Cohort	Percent fertility difference by group (to ever active women)			
	Never active	Employees	Skilled workers	Unskilled workers
1970-66	1.7	-3.3	-0.4	5.9
1965-61	4.4	-0.4	-4.8	-4.0
1960-56	1.9	-5.3	-2.3	2.7
1955-51	3.0	11.2	-20.9	-1.5
1950-46	10.2	3.5	-9.4	-3.5
1945-41	11.2	-33.8	-3.3	-0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	5.3	-3.9	-5.9	0.4
<b>Maximum cohort fertility difference within groups</b>	-18.7	-22.5	-18.5	-15.2

Table 7.

**APPROVAL OF UNION AND FERTILITY BEHAVIOUR**

(percent of responses)	Total	Men		Women	
		<35	≥35	<35	≥35
<b>Sexual behaviour</b>					
Approval of the following behaviour:					
- living with a partner before marriage	58.7	82.6	45.3	80.2	41.2
- living with a partner without marrying	50.8	79.6	36.2	72.9	30.4
- living with a partner of the same sex	26.9	50.1	14.9	42.5	12.1
<b>Marriage and religion</b>					
People marry in church because:					
- it is a social custom	48.8	51.3	43.8	47.4	50.9
- of family pressure	28.1	32.9	23.8	33.4	23.6
- of religious beliefs	18.0	12.3	22.8	15.7	20.0
If I could choose now, I would:					
- celebrate a religious marriage	65.6	45.7	79.5	51.8	78.5
- celebrate a civil marriage	11.7	15.2	8.9	16.9	6.8
- not marry and live in a free union	13.7	29.1	4.3	21.2	6.1
<b>Family formation and fertility control</b>					
Couples control their family size:					
- because women work	6.5	6.1	3.4	7.1	7.1
- to ensure giving children all they need	60.1	60.2	58.3	62.5	58.7
- to ensure good living standards	14.8	18.7	14.2	16.1	12.7
- selfishness	8.8	4.5	15.6	5.0	11.1
The moment children should leave home is:					
- when they consider it right	57.5	73.2	47.4	77.5	43.3
- when they marry	25.4	8.5	33.3	8.3	40.4
- when they find a job	14.4	14.1	16.9	11.1	14.2
- Motherhood is the reason of being for women	2.8	2.0	3.3	2.3	3.3
- The aim of marriage is having a family	36.2	31.5	43.2	30.2	40.5
- The decision of having children is only women's	3.2	2.0	4.3	4.3	2.2
- It is right for a couple not to have children	53.4	69.8	41.0	74.2	40.3
- Small children should not inhibit divorce	47.9	58.0	34.7	69.5	39.5
- Abortion is just another contraceptive method	12.9	25.2	9.6	15.2	8.0
- Women alone should decide on abortion	32.0	39.4	25.2	49.7	21.9
<b>Women and employment</b>					
Jobs should be shared between men & women	89.1	91.1	84.3	93.6	89.3
Some jobs are more adequate for women (or men)	68.4	64.3	78.8	61.5	72.3
Men's unemployment is worse than women's	47.7	40.6	58.4	26.5	54.1
Unemployment is worse in single than in married women	49.0	43.2	54.0	43.2	52.2
Men should earn more than women in similar jobs	11.9	8.3	17.7	4.6	13.3

Source: Informe sobre Mujer y Familia, IKEI, 1991; Informe Social del País Vasco y Navarra 1991, IKEI, 1992.

that period (from 85 to 59 per cent), showing as well the lack of impact of religious practice on family formation and contraceptive behaviour (Arregi, 1989). According to the 1991 Family Survey the importance of religion in the individual, family and social life has continued declining, with 53 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men considering themselves practicing Catholics nowadays (the presence of other religions being practically insignificant). This diminishing impact of religion is also reflected by the growing importance of civil marriage, almost non-existent before 1975 and which has progressed to represent 2 per cent of all marriages in 1990.

This pattern of secularization and ideological change is also clear in the position of parents faced to alternative sexual unions to marriage or premarital cohabitation before marriage in their children, according to the 1991 Family Survey. Traditional ideology of the family with regard marriage rites and union formation remain strong on married people over 45 years of age (87.8 per cent of men and 81.7 per cent of women), who would not change their type of union or rite of celebration nowadays, in contrast with the election in the younger group of single people (under 30) whose preferences for religious marriage are less frequent (to 43 per cent of men and 47.7 per cent of women). At the same time the level of permissiveness in older people with the behaviour of their children in relation to alternative sexual relationship and unions is quite striking. It suggests an increasing tolerance in the older generations with regards non traditional attitudes towards family formation, even if they do not apply it to themselves. Parents sanctioned positively the new behavioural preferences of the younger generations in contrast to the rigid ideology of the Catholic Church for women and family formation, and in spite of their own more traditional values.

In this Survey (see Table 7), over eighty percent of men and women under 35 approved cohabitation before marriage in their children, and the approval would fall slightly when considering consensual unions. Permissiveness regarding homosexuality is lower, declining to under half of the sample the level of approval in both sexes. Similar evolution can be found in the opinions related to fertility control, decohabitation, union formation and women's economic position. Women and men under thirty five profess a more egalitarian position than older people in all items, and show a far stronger tolerance for decisions on childlessness or divorce. So intergenerational differences are a constant in all the statements, however, once again maximum percent differences (between 30 to 35 points) can be found in questions of behaviour related to religious practice or beliefs (i.e. celebration of religious marriage), alternative union behaviour and on the items on abortion.

Attitudes are more similar in the statements on job adequation by sex, or the importance of women's unemployment by civil status and in relation to men, but less gender egalitarian. The generalized assumption of gender differentiation by task in all ages suggests that both women and men perceive their main activities in sex exclusive spheres. Underlining this fact, the importance given in the younger groups (43 percent) to single women's unemployment situation over married women's asserts the notion that married women's position is considered subsidiary to their husband's within the family. These opinions reflect the difficulties found in an otherwise fairly tolerant society for gender equality in economic matters during periods of unemployment. The greater importance attached to men jobs arises from the daily economic reality in which men jobs are fundamental for the survival of the family group.

According to a cultural model of fertility decline, this ideological change over family building and organization would reflect the reaction of the cohorts who lived through the institutionally pronatalist and traditional family normative (enforced during thirty five years of

authoritarianism) and the determination not to socialize the younger generations in the same way even if they themselves have subscribed to the traditional model of family forming. This in fact presupposes a complete ideological and political break with the past in values, norms and attitudes.

In this sense, something should be explained in relation to the political nature of the state previous to 1976 and how it could have affected the process of socialization of the younger generations. Most of the demographic indicators used refer to the year 1975 as a sort of frontier, and this is so because the dictatorship under which Spain had been living until that moment showed a marked predilection for the protection of the most traditional values regarding women and the family. This predilection was both ideological and legal, was still present in 1975 although the social cleavages linked with the accelerated process of industrialization and urbanization of the 1960s had significantly weakened its relevance. The legal changes which have taken place have affected both the Penal Law (lifting of the status of criminal offense attached to adultery and cohabitation, and the restrictions on the sale of birth control methods, in 1978) and the Civil Code (with the approval of the Divorce Law<sup>8</sup> in 1981, and of the Abortion Law in 1986<sup>9</sup>).

In this sense it could be said that the year of 1975, marked the beginning of the end of a legally endorsed conservative tradition which stressed the role of Catholic religion and ethics in public and private life, and the role of women within the family, and her primary dedication to family forming. It meant the end of a normative behavior, already changing in the younger generations, but which had not found a generalized public expression till that moment.

However, most measurements on cohabitation, efficient contraception, voluntary interruption of pregnancies (VIP), or even marital dissolution underestimate current behaviour. For example, the official statistics on VIP leave out all those cases of abortion on demand in the private sector and abroad, (the corrected figure would enable us to understand current fertility levels in spite of low levels of efficient contraception).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The swift adaptation to a low geared demographic system in the Basque Country stands out as product of interrelated experiences of ideological, cultural and economic nature, which can be dated with precision. Several trends stand out in this process. The first is the generalized impact of secularization, indicated by the rapid fall in the levels of religious practice. The second is the ideology of low fertility and alternative union formation, paramount in those younger generations which participated directly in the process of demographic stagnation. And the third, is the full impact of the economic crisis on these generations hampering their access to employment and therefore to economic independence.

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8. Divorce is only granted after a two year waiting period of legal separation. In practice legal separations could be added up to divorces, whose impact is, at present, very small.

9. The Law on Abortion passed during the second Socialist Government is, fundamentally, a therapeutic law. It allows for a legal interruption of pregnancy (LIP) in cases of rape, damage to the physical or psychological well being of the mother, and of malformation of the foetus. In 1989 there were 1536 LIPs in the Basque Country, 70 per cent concentrated in ages 20-34.

However, would the economy recover and the employment level of these generations improve, a moderate growth first in nuptiality and later in fertility could be expected. This is suggested by the halt in the decline of the number of marriages which followed the economic recovery of the 1986-89 period. Nevertheless, the intensity and duration of the economic crisis will impede a substantial number of these generations to initiate or complete the family size they might initially have desired.

Throughout this process, and also as consequence of a highly gender differentiated labour market, women's economic position remains weak and economically dependant of either family or partner. This situation has remained so in spite of the progressive levelling of educational attainment between the sexes in the younger population.

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