CHAPTER SIX

DENMARK: SOLID OR FLUID?

Peter Gundelach

The European/World Values Study has been one of the most productive social science studies in the past 20 years. The possibility of making cross-national as well as longitudinal studies has made it a very fruitful means of research, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the project has resulted in an enormous number of publications both on a national and international scale. One of the theoretical problems of the project is to explain national differences. In the first volume, where the 1981 and 1990 EVS data were analyzed, Ester, Halman & de Moor (1993) concluded that there was no sign of convergence in values among the European countries. Ashford & Timms (1992: 112) have found that “national culture and opinion in Europe remain robustly diverse.” Even in countries that are often considered very similar, such as the Scandinavian countries, the research conclusion is that “there is no uniform pattern of values in the Scandinavian countries” (Halman, 1992: 21).

This creates a theoretical challenge for comparative research. In this volume, where individual countries are analyzed, the problem is smaller. However, even if we abandon the ideal of uniformity among the European countries, we still need theoretical tools for the study of value change. Much of the research into values and change has been guided by two theoretical approaches: theories of modernization and theories of generations. The theories of modernization can be seen as a broad characterization of a large number of different theoretical approaches, varying from rather simple ideas of the relationship between societal wealth and values, to more complicated theories of a societal transformation from a so-called modern to a post-modern society. Such a transformation takes place in all parts of society, but the pace and scope varies in different sectors. The theory of generational change argues that some sectors are much more prone to change than others. The material conditions during childhood and adolescence influence the individual’s values in a profound way, and this socialization has an impact on the individual’s values for the rest of their lives. Societal changes occur during the generational change. When young generations
with different values start to influence society, a general transformation of values in society will take place.

The EVS project has partly questioned and partly confirmed both theories on the general level. Ester, Halman & de Moor (1993) concluded that modernization theory did not adequately describe value changes. They identified four elements in modernization theory, but their analysis showed that the only component of modernization theory they could validate was a tendency to values fragmentation. Van den Broek's (1996) analysis of generation theory showed on the one hand that cohort replacement is instrumental in propelling political change, but, on the other hand, that the formation of generations was significantly different in the various European countries. These results indicate that value fragmentation and generational replacement of values are some of the more robust findings in the EVS-studies, and these two findings will be used as a guideline in this chapter.

As already mentioned, the results of the EVS studies indicate that it is difficult to make generalizations for a large number of countries because societal structural factors must be expected to influence values and value changes. The structure and culture in society have both an impact on values, and are influenced by values, in ways that are difficult to disentangle. This chapter presents trends in the development of Danish values, and, based on the research, we would expect that value changes in Denmark is infused with specific factors from within Danish society. A short presentation of Denmark may help to interpret the analysis that will follow.

Denmark is a small affluent society, characterized by a social-democratic welfare regime, and with a long tradition of cooperation between classes. It is traditionally a Protestant country, and the frequency of church going is very low. For a long time, Denmark was a very homogeneous country, and the number of immigrants is still low compared to many other European countries. The Danish transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society took place in the 1950s and 1960s. Women’s participation in the labor market increased rapidly from the 1960s, and, today, there is no difference in job frequency between men and women. The divorce rate has increased strongly, but accurate numbers are difficult to compute because only about 75% of those who say that they live in stable relationships are married.1

1 Computed from the 1999 values survey.