Preface

The goal of this handbook is to provide readers with an overview of contemporary European family sociology. A total of 41 researchers from more than 10 countries across Europe have contributed to this project. The book covers classical themes of family sociology, such as the division of housework, family forms and living arrangements, intergenerational relationships, partner choice, divorce, and fertility behaviour. It introduces the reader to contemporary theories and controversies. In addition, several emerging topics are addressed, including medically assisted reproduction, ‘digital’ family sociology, and transnational family research.

Despite our attempts to cover different themes, perspectives, and theories, such a handbook can never be complete. It is inevitable that some gaps remain, and that some topics, theories, and countries are covered in greater detail, whereas others are barely touched upon or even left out altogether. Nevertheless, we hope that the chapters assembled in this volume will give the reader a flavour of what constitutes ‘European family sociology’. By European family sociology, we mean theoretical and applied sociological research that uses state-of-the-art methods and data to examine past and present developments in family behaviour, family dynamics, family structures, and intergenerational relationships in European countries. As such, the book reflects the diversity and commonalities that we see across European countries, and the attempts by sociology to describe, understand, and theorise the patterns found. With its wide range of legal and cultural contexts, studying Europe provides researchers with opportunities to explore the interplay of contextual factors and family behaviour. It also challenges existing theories and findings by raising the question of how valid and transferable they are across contexts. Scholars who have researched European family behaviour – whether in a single country or in a cross-national context – inevitably have to contextualise their findings. They must consider the question of whether their findings are unique, and whether they can be attributed to a specific cultural, legal, and socio-political context. Moreover, differentiations based on regional and socio-economic disparities have to be made. We hope that the chapters in this handbook reflect this spirit.

A handbook is never the work of the editors alone. First and foremost, a handbook is the product of the authors. We thank them for contributing excellent pieces of work, and for being very responsive to our suggestions and comments. Keeping deadlines was not always easy, particularly for those authors who were making their final revisions when the Covid-19 crisis hit Europe. We are grateful to the authors that despite these sometimes adverse circumstances, they contributed to this volume with high-quality chapters that reflect a high level of engagement. Each of the contributions underwent a review that was written by the editors with additional support from Anna Dechant and Ralina Panova (Federal Institute for Population Research, Germany). We thank Ralina and especially Anna for their excellent review activities. Without Anna’s support during much of the work, the project would not have been completed on time. All chapters were language edited by Miriam Hils (Seattle, USA). Many thanks to Miriam for supporting this endeavour, and providing careful and professional editing of all of the chapters included in the volume. Harry Fabian was our main contact at Edgar Elgar, where he serves as a commissioning editor. Many thanks to Harry for supporting us in a number of ways, including by being very prompt in answering our countless questions about
format and style, and about the many other issues that came up during the editing process of this book. We also thank Wiebke Hamann (Federal Institute for Population Studies, Germany) for providing editing support. Finally, but no less importantly, our thanks go to Hans-Peter Blossfeld (University of Bamberg, Germany). Hans-Peter serves as the series editor of Edgar Elgar’s Research Handbooks in Sociology series, and encouraged us to undertake this project.

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