A family landscape
On the geographical distances between elderly parents and adult children in Sweden

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Acknowledgements

Just weeks before setting out on my PhD journey, I walked a section of the famous pilgrimage route El Camino. Over the years I've noticed some similarities between the two things – El Camino and a thesis. For one thing, just like the Camino, the PhD project from time to time seems to have consisted entirely of ascending hills and slippery paths. However, as you reach the top – or finally get your paper published – you realise it's the effort that makes it enjoyable!

Another similarity is the importance of your fellow travellers. Writing a thesis is – like walking the Camino – not a one-person mission, contrary to what one might think. Without my excellent supervisor Gunnar Malmberg I would surely have gotten lost or given up on this project. Thank you, Gunnar, for sharing your knowledge, energy, questions and answers – and thank you for all the fun along the way! I have so appreciated our almost daily chats and the way you allow science and research to be amusing. Thanks to you, even the uphill walks have been joyous.

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The author’s surname was changed from Pettersson to Hjälm in 2009
1. INTRODUCTION

Ebba was born in the northernmost part of Sweden in 1929. As a teenager, like many other girls of her age, she left her northern village to find work in central of Sweden. A few years later, after a time working as a hotel housemaid, she returned to the north. Visiting her sister, who had married and settled down in a village approximately 400 km from where they grew up, Ebba met a man who would soon become her husband. As newlyweds the couple shared a household with Ebba’s mother-in-law, and the intergenerational interaction was intense. As children arrived, help from the mother-in-law as well as from the close-living sister was greatly appreciated. Ebba gave birth to three daughters and the family lived in the same house until the children had left home. The daughters moved out one after the other and left the area for work and marriage in other parts of the country. After divorcing her husband, at the time an unusual occurrence, Ebba moved to the closest town and worked as a shop clerk. Two of her daughters lived in the same town for periods of time. When Ebba met a man with a house in a neighbouring town she moved, at the age of 55, and lived with him for some time. After yet another separation came a period of mobility and Ebba lived in different apartments, yet always in the same town. During this period she also rented a small house during the summer in the same village as one of her daughters, who by that time was married and had two children. In 1995 Ebba, then 66 years old, left the northern town where she had resided for more than 20 years, as well as Norrbotten, where she had lived most of her life, and moved 300 km south to the small village on the coast of Västerbotten where she had her summer house and her daughter, and stayed there permanently for 12 years. During this time Ebba and her daughter’s family lived in very close geographical proximity, as well as in extensive practical and emotional exchange – having dinner together daily and frequently sharing holidays and trips. Ebba, having no car, depended on her daughter for shopping and trips to the hospital, and the grandchildren depended on their grandmother for after-school snacks and company when their parents were working. When the grandchildren left home for work and studies in more urban areas the extended family in the village diminished, but the extensive intergenerational exchange continued. In 2007 Ebba’s health began deteriorating. Initially the help she needed could be provided by her daughter and son-in-law who lived within eyesight, but eventually she needed more assistance and left her house for an elderly home in the neighbouring hamlet 5 km away as no such support was available in the village. She continued, however, to have almost daily visits from her daughter and son-in-law. About the same time Ebba’s oldest daughter, approaching retirement age, separated from her husband and
eventually decided to move closer to her ageing mother even though it meant living further away from her own adult children. She took over Ebba’s house and thus came to live within 5 km of her mother and within eyesight of her sister, but more than 600 km from her children and grandchildren.

The story of Ebba and her family is, like stories of life tend to be, filled with unique and personal events and should be understood as such. Still, it can tell us something about intergenerational proximity and distance as well as the many events during life that shape and reshape the geographical patterns of individuals and families. It shows how, throughout the life course, sedentary and migratory behaviour of the older and younger generations leads to intergenerational proximity and distance – varying over time and affected by a number of factors. Geographical distribution of institutes of higher education and workplaces, personal preferences for where to live and adjustments concerning partners and immediate family play significant roles that affect intergenerational proximity and distance. Staying close to kin might further be connected to the need and want to interact and give support, but family ties can also be perceived as problematic and as causing restraints for both generations (Umberson 1992), and can even be the reason for migration if living close is regarded as less attractive – for example in the case of marital disruption. Ebba’s story further tells us about how contact, help and assistance flow between generations – for example from the older to the younger generation as grandchildren arrive, or from the younger to the older one as health deteriorates. Lastly, her story can serve as an illustration of some of the ways demographic processes, as well as spatial and social organisation, work on different levels – individual, family and societal. As the family can be said to be situated within the meso level, between the individual and the greater society (Faist 2000), it is undoubtedly an important aspect to comprehend when seeking to understand population geography and history. The family, if understood as part of the meso level, is bound to be affected by changes on the individual level – persons in a family are born, grow old or die, but also migrate and engage in daily mobility, which changes the situation for and within the family. Further, the family is affected by changes on the societal scale – processes of emancipation, urbanisation, sub- and counter-urbanisation, economic restructuring due to industrialisation, and the emergence of post-industrial society as well as rearrangements of the welfare state. On an individual level the ageing process can influence, for example, migration, as the individualretires and is detached from the labour market, or as health deteriorates and more extensive assistance is needed. On a family – or network – level, the composition of the nuclear and extended family is altered as the family ages, continuously rearranging itself as children grow.
up and leave the nest, as spouses separate or become widowed, or when elderly parents and adult children diverge or converge geographically, as the desire, need and possibility to be near each other vary. The family landscape is hence influenced not only by how the family members are spread out geographically, but also by the ages of its members. The family landscape, just as in the case of Ebba, is populated by kin – many or few – and the landscape alters over time. In this thesis the major focus however is on the interrelations between elderly parents and adult children, leaving other members of the landscape aside for now.

Lastly, Ebba’s story tells us something about how the existence and structure of the welfare state affect intergenerational distance in old age. In a situation in which there is little or no welfare state-based support for the elderly, as it was in historical times, living close to kin and depending on their assistance would have been a common solution. In Ebba’s case the need and desire to live in an assisted living facility, and hence take advantage of the social welfare system, required that she leave her house and the proximity to her daughter to take advantage of the assistance offered by the welfare state in the neighbouring hamlet. Still, the family and the proximity to her adult daughter continued to be an important part of Ebba’s daily life.

In this thesis the juxtaposition of intergenerational geographical distances and proximity and the ageing of the population is in focus. Interaction, support and exchange between generations can be said to be taken for granted – given that is not restricted or made impossible by situations like family disruption, time restrictions or geographical distance. We know from previous studies that geographical proximity is important for interaction and that assistance and contact between generations is sensitive to distance (Lawton et al. 1994). At the same time, a frequently painted picture of our society is that during the course of modernisation and urbanisation we have become more individualised and kinship affiliations, for example between elderly parents and adult children, have come to be less important as we live more distant from our families than in the past (Cowgill 1974, Burgess 1960). With the expansion of the welfare state and the introduction of the pension system, the elderly have become less dependent on their kin – possibly detaching both generations from assistance previously given by relatives – which might also facilitate migration and hence intergenerational geographical separation. This view, that the welfare state has substituted for the family, or even “crowded out” the family from the sphere of support, has been challenged, however, and it has been argued that the family rather takes on different tasks and acts as a complement to the service offered by the welfare state (Daatland and Lowenstein 2005). Further, the contact and support frequency stretches from daily interaction or even cohabitation to
occasional meetings or contact. All social behaviour – and the care and support between generations is no exception – takes place in a spatial context, and the role of geographical distance is important to acknowledge in this sense. Intergenerational distances are further bound to trigger mobility and migration, on a daily basis – for visits and contact – and influence more long-term decisions such as residential choice and relocation (Michelin et al. 2008). However, the geographical separation between generations could also be said to be counteracted by an opposite force – the innovations in mobility and communication technology. Increased possibilities for travelling and changes in means of communications, such as mobile phones and the Internet, give new possibilities to stay “close” even when geographically far away, and the “reach” – to use the vocabulary of Hägerstand (1978) – might in this sense be greater than before. Knowledge about intergenerational geographical distances and proximity is therefore important for a better understanding of the prerequisite for intergenerational interaction.

When a population is ageing, as is happening in the industrialised societies of today, new challenges for the family and society arise. An increasing share of the population is in their older years, and the absolute number of potentially dependent elderly is increasing. This growing group of elderly has raised concerns about the care burden and how it might be shared between the family, the welfare state and other actors (Shea et al. 2003), and further calls attention to the question of what level of disability might render support and assistance from the welfare state (Davey et al. 2007). However, the discussion of the ageing population as a potentially increasing care burden for society and the family has been challenged. On the societal level, the depiction of the ageing population as a disaster waiting to happen has been challenged and voices has been raised arguing that it is not the demographic situation per se but rather the way we speak about and construct ageing and the elderly – as dependent and in need – that poses a potential threat to society (Robertson 1997). From the family perspective, support and help between generations has been shown to flow in both directions, from the younger generation to the older, but also from the older generation to children and grandchildren (Hoff 2007). Studies have indicated that the elderly give far more than they receive in intergenerational support (Künemund et al. 2005), and as an increasing share of this group is independent and healthy they certainly have the potential to contribute to society, within the workforce or as volunteers (Einolf 2009), as well as within the family.

Yet, in an era of increasing pressure on the welfare state, as large cohorts reach retirement age and enter old age, one possible strategy for caretaking for the elderly might be to transfer a greater part of the responsibility back to
their families. This solution, however, is partly limited by a significant share of the elderly lacking family, and might also be inhibited by great geographical distances between the generations. Further, intergenerational exchange and support might be understood and experienced as both positive and negative by the actors involved. Whether the exchange is unidirectional or reciprocal it might be chosen by one or both parties, it might be the outcome of a feeling of intergenerational responsibility and solidarity or it might be forced by necessity and lack of alternatives, and be perceived as a burden or restraint (Umberson 1992).

Sweden, described as having both an extensive welfare state and heavy welfare state dependency (Esping-Andersen 1999), now faces the challenge of an increasingly ageing population. If the service to the elderly offered by the welfare state in this situation is forced to be reduced or altered, other actors will have to cover the needs of the elderly. One solution is market-based complements to the welfare services, paid for by the individual actors, while another is to transfer some of the dependency to kin. However, as mentioned previously, one factor that inhibits the ability of family and kin to serve as a complement to the welfare services is intergenerational geographical separation. Sweden has been shown to have a great degree of intergenerational geographical separation, from a European perspective (Hank 2007) – potentially challenging the intergenerational interaction and making Sweden an interesting area of study.

1.1. Aim

The family, together with the welfare state, can be said to be the pillar of contact, care and assistance in old age – and geographical proximity has proven to be an important prerequisite for intergenerational interaction. An ageing population, with a greater number of elderly and increased longevity, may place new demands on the family as caregivers and support providers. However, help between generations flows in both directions, and assistance given by the elderly might also serve as a resource for younger kin, making proximity an attractive choice. Exploring the “family landscape” and discussing the implications of patterns and changes in intergenerational distances is therefore an intriguing expedition.

With a background in the ageing of the population and the new challenges facing individuals, families and the welfare state, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the changing family landscape and the geographical distances between elderly parents and adult children by:
a) analysing the patterns of geographical separation between generations in historical and modern times, and further comparing and discussing the significance of intergenerational geographical distance in time and space b) describing the intergenerational family landscape: what individual, family and socio-economic factors influence close living and geographical separation, c) scrutinising how migration among elderly parents and adult children affects intergenerational distances, and d) seeking new understanding about intergenerational assistance and support and the meaning of living very close, from the perspective of the elderly and their interaction with their adult children.

1.2. Outline and structure

This thesis consists of an introductory section, a brief summary of the four research papers, and a discussion section. A short summary in both English and Swedish is included in the last part of the thesis. The four research papers in their entirety are included as appendices.

The intention of the introductory section is threefold: First, it introduces the subject of the thesis and the main discussions that will be brought up in the research papers. Second, it outlines the theoretical framework that has guided the thesis work, as well as the methods and data used. Third, it seeks to frame the research presented in the thesis within the larger research area and place the study results in the context of population geography and ageing.

In the summary of the four research papers, the aims and main objectives of the papers are presented, together with the general results of the different studies.

In the last section, the results and conclusions from the papers are synthesised and some main conclusions from the studies are discussed and related to the theoretical framework.

1.2.1. Research papers

Paper I. Intergenerational proximity and distance over 200 years – examples from two Swedish regions. With the starting point in an empirical study bringing together individual level population data from six time points over 200 years, this paper seeks to analyse intergenerational geographical distances in historical and contemporary times. Further, to compare and discuss the significance of this separation between generations.
Paper II. *Distance to elderly parents: Analyses of Swedish register data.* The aim of this study is to scrutinise patterns and trends in distance between elderly parents and adult children in contemporary Sweden. The study is based on individual-level population register data, the ASTRID database. Using regression models, characteristics of both generations and how they are associated with intergenerational distances are analysed.

Paper III. *Adult children and elderly parents as mobility attractions in Sweden.* This study, based on the same material as Paper II, investigates how elderly parents and adult children move in relation to each other, and how their mobility is influenced by family, socio-economic, gender and age factors.

Paper IV. *“Because we know our limits”: elderly parents’ views on intergenerational proximity and intimacy.* This paper is based on 14 interviews with elderly parents living in extreme proximity to an adult child. By focusing on the daily life and practical organisation of close-living generations this study seeks to explore some practical and emotional issues raised by the elderly.
2. AGEING, FAMILY AND GEOGRAPHY – A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The geography of the family is formed by a complex web of intertwined processes in today’s ageing society. One way to understand the processes is through differentiating between three levels of organisation: the population on an aggregated level, a family and extended-family level, and an individual level. On each level we then find simultaneous processes – the constantly ongoing demographic process of ageing, the spatial organisation process of distribution and redistribution, and the organisation of care and support. In this section the three levels are discussed first, followed by a section about the interaction between levels.

2.1. Societal level

The debate on the ageing population has largely focused on the increasing dependency rate and the expected escalating care burden on a national, or occasionally regional or even local, level. Throughout Europe, low birth rates – the overall greatest reason – along with the large baby-boom cohorts of the 1940s entering old age and increasing life expectancy have changed and continue to change the population structures. On a national level the major concerns have been associated with the challenges facing the pension systems when large cohorts reach retirement, and as the population ages the need for care and attendance is expected to increase, putting pressure on the public financing of elderly care.

Further, from an economic point of view, the ageing of the population has been linked to a downturn in long-term economic growth (Lindh & Malmberg 1999) but, on the other hand, has also been associated with a more stable and less politically volatile society (Malmberg and Sommestad 2000) with less environmental stress (Dalton et al. 2008). On a regional and local level, the demographic changes can be accentuated by in- and outmigration when the younger segments of a population leave, for example, rural or economically disadvantaged areas – further affecting the local economy. On the other hand, studies have indicated that elderly immigration can serve as a revitalising force for troubled urban areas that can draw on the relative wealth of these ageing cohorts (Kresl and Ietri 2010). On an aggregated level the family landscape changes as a result of societal changes, reconstructions and trends. Periods of intense migration and mobility, such as the urbanisation era of the mid-20th century, separated the generations living at the time, as the younger generation moved to urban areas while the
older one remained in the countryside to a greater extent (Kupiszewski et al. 2001).

The different aspects of ageing population have thus attracted a great deal of attention, within both academia and civil society, and extensive work has been deployed to analyse and forecast the coming situation on international, national and local levels (Kinsella 2000, Lutz et al. 2008). As the age distribution varies between different geographical areas, “older” regions with a greater share of their population reaching old age, may proportionally be more affected. Questions may arise as to how elderly care will be supported with staff (Lindh 2008), but also as to how areas with ageing or even decreasing populations will be able to uphold service, municipal and commercial, for their inhabitants. A lower proportion of the population being of working age means less inflow of taxes, which challenges the local public economy and might in the long run undermine the foundation for even commercial services like grocery stores and post offices – further affecting the elderly and less mobile part of the population. In the Swedish welfare model, based on universalism (Esping-Andersen 1990) and with a decentralised system in which the responsibility for elderly care is placed on the municipalities, there have also been concerns that increased pressure on the system would lead to increased disparity and growing differences between regions; However, thus far no conclusive results have been presented in this direction (Trydegård and Thorslund 2010).

2.2. Family level

Even on the family level the ageing of a population has effects. As the family size decreases, more elderly will have fewer adult children to rely on in old age, and smaller kin networks are also more sensitive to geographical separation, as fewer kin means fewer chances of having someone living close. From the perspective of the adult child, having few or no siblings might increase the burden to care for ageing parents, but can also be a potential gain as there are no siblings to compete over the elderly parents’ resources, such as time. When it comes to three- or even four-generation families, one intensely discussed issue is the notion of a “sandwich generation”. The sandwich generation is described as being caught between two needy generations – ageing parents and young, dependent children – and has been said to be a crucial point in intergenerational relations, especially for women (Nichols and Junk 1997) and potentially even more so in non-Western societies (Jiang 1995 for an example of China). In a Western setting, however, the idea of the sandwich generation has been intensely rejected and even called a “myth” (Rosenthal et al. 1996), as the intergenerational gap counteracts the increase in longevity and four-generation families become
uncommon (Lundholm and Malmberg 2010). Even when the situation of a generation “in the middle” does exist, simultaneously caring for both a younger and an older generation is rather uncommon (Künemund 2006), and yet when it occurs it has been questioned whether the situation poses any real problem (Shuey and Hardy 2003). However, even if there is only one generation within the family that needs care, the pressure can still be great on those providing the help and the “human cost of care giving” (Day 1985: 8), meaning for example emotional strain and difficulty allocating time, is a well documented issue among relatives caring for elderly dependants (Merrill 1996). Further, providing for dependent parents may be done at the expense of other potential investments, such as circumscribing the possibilities for career opportunities (Bolin et al. 2008).

In a much debated article, Luescher and Pillemer (1998) bring forward the concept of ambivalence. They argue that the traditional understanding of intergenerational contacts and responsibilities tends to start either at the end of solidarity within a family or at the end of conflict within it. The intergenerational solidarity paradigm, for example, has been frequently used to structure and analyse the interaction between generations by defining six forms of solidarity, stretching from structure and function to affect and norms (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997, Rossi and Rossi 1990, Atkinson et al. 1986). Instead, Luescher and Pillemer argue, it is fruitful to start with the understanding that relations within the family are characterised by ambivalence – that intergenerational relationships can be described by feelings of both solidarity and conflict at the same time – and that mixed feelings and conflicting norms are in this sense part of many intergenerational relations. Further, ambivalence could also be understood as dynamic in the sense that at any given time a relationship can be characterised by simultaneously more and less ambivalence (Lowenstein 2007). Connidis and McMullin (2002) tried to expand Luescher and Pillemer’s concept by including a structural part, suggesting that ambivalence occurs when structural demands like gender roles clash with individual needs and wishes.

2.2.1. Gender, care and support

Whether or not ambivalence occurs, men and women may be influenced differently when a population is ageing. On the network level, a potential shift to placing a larger share of responsibility for dependent family members on the family can be expected to have different impacts on the sexes. Women of all ages take on a larger part of the burden for caring for frail and dependent elderly within the family, especially as spouses caring for a partner (Szebehely 2005). An increased responsibility for the elderly
placed on the family may therefore put extra pressure on elderly women (Attias-Donfut 2001). Further, as women still generally live longer than men – even if the discrepancy has been decreasing lately (Schön and Parker 2008) – and are more likely than men to marry an older partner, they suffer a larger risk of being left behind when their partner dies. This gives women more years of prospective loneliness, and potentially more dependence on other resources for help and assistance. Among the younger generation, caring for ageing parents or parents-in-law is something that might potentially influence partaking in working life (Attias-Donfut 2001, Rossi and Rossi 1990). The opposite effect might also be seen – as elderly parents, detached from the labour market, might serve as caregivers to grandchildren, thereby facilitating a greater labour market participation for adult children, especially women, with young children of their own (Hank and Buber 2008). The linkage between lives and timing of life course events in the generations thus deserves extra attention.

2.2.2. Linked lives and family landscape

Already in the 1970s, the Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand (1975, 1978) drew attention to the importance of intertwined life trajectories; how the individual life course through time-space is restrained and shaped by activities, projects and (im-)mobility patterns of, for instance, family members. And, obviously, the potential for help between generations might at least partly be affected by the timing of events in the life course of the individuals – having a retired but still healthy elderly parent taking care of grandchildren depends partly on the timing of childbearing in both generations, for example. In the 19th century high mortality rates meant that grandparents rarely lived long enough to know their grandchildren (Tabah 1980), while in contemporary Sweden delayed childbearing has resulted in fewer 55-year-olds having grandchildren in 2005 than in 1990 (Lundholm and Malmberg 2010). Additionally, smaller sibling groups means fewer horizontal links, making children likely to have more grandparents than siblings (Hagestad and Uhlenberg 2007). The interdependence between lives is thus an interesting part of the family level, and the principle of linked lives (Elder 1994) – whereby the individual’s life is seen as embedded in a web of social relations of not only kin but also friends, co-workers, etc. – can be helpful in understanding how interconnectedness between generations is not only affected by the number of family members in each generation but also by their actions and timing of life course events. Even further, according to the idea of linked lives, the individuals are connected not only to each other but also to the changes that occur in the society around them. Changes are reflected within people’s networks and how they interrelate to each other – the individual is affected by societal changes through the family and
network, and even regarding the timing of life course events the understanding is that historical time and its restraints and prospects, as well as social control such as the opinions of the people within the network, affect individual choices (Elder 1998).

From a geographical perspective the course of events and processes described here should also be understood as taking place. With the concept of “reach” (Hägerstrand 1978) we seek to understand and analyse the web of interactions with which a human being is integrated. To be able to interact with each other we need to be spatially reachable, but this is not enough. Economic, time or emotional restrictions can make it impossible to reach each other, as can the timing of life events of other actors with whom we want to interact. Further, as stated by Hägerstrand (1970), as most of our daily activities are dependent on coordination with other people, places and material, coupling constraints set limitation on our activities. From the perspective of the elderly, this might mean that even though retirement to some extent might release coupling constraints – as the individual no longer has to adjust to the time and place demands of working life – dependence on other family members for assistance, given or received, might impose new coupling constraints. From the perspective of the adult child, working life, a family project of their own, daily activities of other family members and unsuited travelling means might cause coupling constraints that inhibit their interaction with elderly parents even if they live geographically close. An individual’s localisation in time and space, and the projects he or she needs to coordinate with others, thus form her possibilities and limit her choices (Hägerstrand 2009). So, not only the way lives link to each other but also the way they are linked to historical time must be considered when seeking to understand intergenerational interaction.

Further, even more geographically, the location of family in space plays a significant role in the interaction between generations. The distribution of family members, the family landscape, is constructed and reconstructed over time, as a result of family transformation. As members of a family are born, leave the nest, marry or die, the pattern of residential location is often affected and hence so is the intergenerational proximity. According to the lifecycle theory (Rossi 1955), the underlying idea is that over the lifecycle migration is affected by changes in ties to people and projects, such as family building. This hypothesis has later been supplemented by theory and research that further acknowledge the many different paths individuals can take through life, and emphasises individual differences rather than a common lifecycle, the so-called life-course approach. The life-course theory argues that both historical time and individual time, such as ageing, are important for the individual (Marshall 2009) and, in connection to
migration, that both the migration frequency and destination choice of the individual are interconnected to and embedded in things like age, life transitions and social constraints such as the need to coordinate with other family members, and are set in geography and history (Geist and McManus 2008, Warnes 1992, Plane and Jurjevich 2009, Boyle et al. 1998). Migration thus plays an important role, since intergenerational distances are shaped and reshaped by the migration of both generations over the life course. The young migrate more frequently than older people; In Sweden, for example, the most frequent migration occurs during the years just under 20 to just over 30 (Lundholm 2007), and hence the migration during these years greatly effects intergenerational distances. However, migration and mobility continue over the life course and are of importance for later life proximity. As the baby boom cohorts can be expected to be more mobile than preceding cohorts due to better health and stronger economic resources, it has been suggested that migration among retired persons will become even more of an immediate interest in the future (Marr and Millerd 2004).

Even though proximity is not a prerequisite for contact, when it comes to intergenerational interaction distance does matter, and living close is a strong predictor for exchange and assistance (Crimmins and Ingegneri 1990, Lawton et al. 1994). That co-residence between adult generations has decreased over time in Western societies is clear, however living in close proximity to each other is still somewhat common (Kohli et al. 2005) and the meaning of distance may simultaneously have changed. Increased accessibility due to developments in ICT and modes of mobility further challenges any straightforward interpretation of the decline in co-residence. Thus the family landscape is an important ingredient when seeking to understand the interface between geography and an ageing population.

2.3. Individual level

As the individual ages, life circumstances change. The personal experience of ageing is a multidimensional phenomenon that may include experiences of physical decline and detachment from previously important social domains (work life, amongst others), but also feelings of personal development and wisdom (Steverink et al. 2001). Becoming detached from the labour market might be a relief for some but a frightful experience for others, additionally complicated by a change in personal economic situation as a result of the end of working life. The need for support and assistance is also likely to increase as one grows old and frail, something that might ultimately lead to dependence – these are just a few examples. But definitions of the ageing process, and the view on who is ageing, or elderly, are not uncomplicated.
It may be easy to agree with the truth stated already in the 1920s, that “Old age is not a function of time but a physical state” (Lyman Fisk 1929: 200). However, in order to grasp aggregated patterns within and between groups of elderly, age as a function of time is a helpful tool. Still, by opening our previous “box before death” understanding of ageing and the elderly as a relatively homogenous group, we may reach an increased understanding of the multiple “ages of old age” (Baltes and Smith 2003). In the 1970s, Neugarten suggested that a differentiation be made between young-old and old-old to add to the knowledge about what was actually happening within the group called “elderly” (Neugarten 1974). Since then, within both academia and society, the elderly have been considered a heterogeneous group to a greater extent. In studies on family, kin and non-kin networks (Fiori et al. 2007) and migration (Litwak and Longino 1987, Rogers 1988) as well as within social policy, ageing and the elderly are more often being described as a differentiated group. The first distinction is most often related to retirement age and withdrawal from the labour market, since this marks a move into a different phase of the lifecycle and often a change in practical circumstances. The limit for who is old is arbitrary, however, and in more recent studies even 55 or 53 years of age has been used as the starting point for being elderly, referred to in these cases as the young-old (Bradley et al. 2008). More common is to make a distinction between the young-old and old-old at either 75 (Neugarten 1974) or 80 years (Socialstyrelsen 2004). Even though the distinction between young-old and old-old is a blunt tool, the theoretical understanding behind the division is clear and can be helpful. The young-old group is understood as independent and active – they are detached from the labour market due to retirement, economically independent, healthy and active, and take part in social, political and family life (Laslett 1996, Komp et al. 2009). The group defined as old-old can be characterised as receivers rather than givers – in need of help and assistance, and less active (Litwin et al. 2008). However, it is still important to acknowledge the within-group variations that might be concealed by the young-old/old-old divide. Cohort, ethnicity, class and previous life experience, among other things, interact with age and might reinforce differences between individuals more than age itself.

The acknowledgement of the within-group variation among the elderly is helpful in many senses, but cannot be understood as stable over time even with a constant meaning. First, prolonged life years and postponed morbidity might call for a need to either revise the breaking point between the groups or even call for more extensive use of more groups, such as the “oldest old” (Suzman and White Riley 1985). More complicated, then, is the constantly ongoing revision of the meaning of being elderly. The connotations connected to being “old” or being “elderly” change over time,
and may also be subject to prejudices and ageism, making the process of distinguishing between different groups within the group of elderly sensitive to both the aim of the distinction and the actor making the division. Others have argued that within-group variations among the elderly do not gain from being further emphasised, since this rather contributes to ageism and prejudices against the elderly. Uhlenberg (1992) addresses what he sees as a mismatch between the resources held by the elderly in the cohorts now reaching retirement age, for example being well educated and healthier than preceding cohorts, and the social role they are expected to fill. Through an affirmation of the resources of the elderly and encouraging more of an overlap between different periods in life by, for example, encouraging lifelong learning and actively working against ageism, the resources of the elderly might come to better use, within both family and society. Following this thinking, the idea would be to eliminate or at least diffuse the difference between ages rather than distinguish between them. Chronological age is hence not the ultimate tool when seeking to understand within-group variation among the elderly. It is, however, the most straightforward way to scrutinise large amounts of population data and has been utilised in the quantitative parts of this thesis, with the awareness that distinction by age is both a blunt tool and a harsh way to group potentially very disparate people into the same population.

In today’s debate about ageing, the individual’s responsibility is often highlighted. Being healthy and maintaining a positive attitude towards life even at an advanced age (Torres and Hammarström 2009) are seen as important aspects of ageing successfully, and correct investment in individual retirement plans is crucial to economic well-being. From a geographical perspective, even the possibility to be mobile influences the well-being of the elderly. Maintaining mobility, for example by keeping one’s car and driver’s licence, has been proven important for later life health (Metz 2000). In this sense, regional differences might be of importance – mobility and the possibility to access social life and services might be extra challenging for elderly people in sparsely populated areas. As the individual grows older he or she may face different forms of age-related restrictions on mobility, deteriorating health or economic restraints, as well as affects of the place of living on the possibilities to maintain a mobile lifestyle – in sparsely populated areas, for example, public transport may be scarce and the alternatives to drive your own car few. For the young-old this may not be a great problem, but as frailty sets in the old-old group may be more affected by mobility limitations. The possibilities and restrictions of mobility in time and space and how this may affect individuals differently as they age is hence important in an ageing society. As overcoming distance is likely to become more challenging in old age (and we know that distance is of importance
when it comes to intergenerational interaction), one factor might amplify the other. Intergenerational distances hence present an increasingly more important area of study in an ageing society.

To sum up the levels and processes presented in this chapter it can be presented in a matrix like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ageing</th>
<th>Spatial organisation</th>
<th>Organisation of care and support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Societal level</strong></td>
<td>Ageing population on an aggregated level</td>
<td>Spatial distribution of support/care burden</td>
<td>Public involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family level</strong></td>
<td>Family age composition</td>
<td>Family network and family landscape</td>
<td>Family care and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual level</strong></td>
<td>Individual ageing</td>
<td>Individual time-space mobility</td>
<td>Individual solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1 Matrix of levels and processes*

### 2.4. Interaction between levels – where the most interesting things happen

The matrix above serves as a starting point for structure and analysis, however the different levels and processes in the columns are inexorably interlinked and the interaction between the levels deserves further attention.

#### 2.4.1. Modernisation theory and ageing

Starting out wearing the glasses of modernisation theory, we would expect the importance of family, especially family outside the nucleus, to become less and less important over time, as society becomes more modern and hence more individualistic. As modernisation theory argues as its core point the linear and undisputable development of society (Cowgill 1974), from a lower level of modernity to a higher one, from undeveloped to developed,
from collective and authority-controlled to individualised and self-centred, we can expect less focus on family and more on the individual. We can expect the welfare state, built and strengthened as a part of the development of society, to take over some of the responsibilities that previously lay on the family. In cases where the family continues to be important, for example within special groups in the society, this might be exposed to criticism – as it follows the theory that the non-linear, the less developed and the still collective are seen as retrogression or decline. If what comes further down the line of history is not in line with what preceded it, the development is failing and the society is deteriorating (von Wright 1993). Others have seen the development differently, and argued that it is the market that has taken over the functions that previously lay on the family level, deteriorating the bonds between kin by implying that all kinds of bonds that are not completely voluntary are irrational and tie the individual down (Bounds 1997). Yet again, the argument has been voiced that the era of modernity with its grand narratives of linear development is over, or at least coming to an end, at that what we see now is a paradigmatic shift – from a welfare society to society in which the welfare state withdraws from its commitments to its citizens – and that what we see is an “individualization of the social” (Ferge 1997). As we turn to an individualisation of the social, a greater proportion of responsibilities that previously lay on the welfare state are expected to be handled by the individual or the immediate family. This outcome has been described as a breakdown of modernity and one of its central projects – the welfare state – and as a shift to what might be described as late- or post-modernity (Walker 2009).

Pluralism and freedom of choice are important characteristics of the post-modern world view, and shifting the responsibility from a standardised state provision of welfare to an individual-based solution – whether market- or family-based – is believed to guarantee the individual’s independence and freedom of choice (Ferge 1997). However, as freedom of choice expands, the responsibility of the individual becomes more pronounced – for a choice you have made, you may also be held responsible. One somewhat problematic connection between the value of independence and the ageing of the population goes through the concept of successful ageing. Successful ageing, a buzz-word in early 21st-century ageing and gerontology research, still holds a strong position within the field and continues to be used, even though it has recently been exposed to massive criticism (see, for example, Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). One of the core points of the concept of successful ageing, as argued by Angus and Reeve (2006), is that it systematically puts the responsibility for ageing well on the individual – hence unsuccessful ageing (illness, social exclusion, etc.) becomes a shortcoming of the individual. Or, as articulated even more strongly by Holstein and Minkler (2003: 793),
Ironically, we are successfully old when we conform to society’s need; placing responsibility in the individual mitigates demands on social resources across our lives.” For the individual the division of responsibility between state, market, family and individual may become most relevant. The elderly might feel responsible for their own ageing and, as they are just as much a part of the individualised society as younger generations, might refute the idea of being dependent on family members (Kemp and Denton 2003). Polanyi, one of the more influential thinkers, argued in the early 1940s that the market would never be able to meet all the needs in a society, and even more strongly that a market economy cannot survive without other forms of allocation systems. According to Polanyi, reciprocity and redistribution, social systems that predated the Industrial Revolution and its social dislocations, must always supplement the market – otherwise, society risks falling into social disruption (Polanyi 1989 [1944]). Following Polanyi’s line of thought, market solutions to elderly care can only partially substitute for other forms of support – whether they are based in the redistributive welfare model or in a reciprocal network-based system.

**2.4.2. “Crowding” or accumulation – support from more than one actor**

From a somewhat more practical perspective, the interconnection between the three levels – societal, family and individual – has allowed for the examination of how expansions or contractions at one level affect the others. As the population ages it is possible that the welfare state might be challenged by a higher elderly dependency rate, for example depending on how retirement age is set, and reforms within the welfare system may be seen as necessary. With the ageing of the population and in times of scarce resources, a society may then need to allocate more resources to maintain support for the elderly, an allocation that may be in competition with other domains such as child- or health care (Treas and Logue 1986). In a society like the Swedish one, characterised by a long tradition of a strong welfare state, a restructuring of the welfare system may put more and even new forms of pressure on other providers of support, such as market solutions and the family (Sundström et al. 2002). In the family/ageing literature the debate has been reflected in analyses taking their starting point in the crowding out/crowding in hypothesis. According to the first hypothesis, a (too) strong welfare state risks “crowding out” help and support between generations, based on solidarity and reciprocity, by taking over the responsibility that previously lay on the family (Wolfe 1989). The underlying assumption here is that the family will allocate more resources to the elderly if the government allocates fewer. The second hypothesis states somewhat the opposite, that a strong welfare state rather allows and encourages the
family to take further responsibility for dependent members of the family, for example ageing parents (Janowitz 1976, Küinemund and Rein 1999, Attias-Donfut, 2001). More recently, the discussion has turned in another direction and the family is once more in the spotlight as an important factor for the well-being of the elderly, even though the function of the family might be changing (Bengtson 2001), and the description of the relationship between the welfare state and the family as mutually exclusive is now being replaced with task-sensitive descriptions of the situation, whereby the family and welfare state are described as responding to different needs of the elderly and thus as being complementary to each other (Brandt et al. 2009). This system of “mixed responsibility”, in which help from a strong welfare state concurs with help from the family, has been proven to lead to an accumulation of help and support for the elderly, especially among the oldest old. For the young-old, or less fragile, the family is more likely to be the giver of assistance, while for those in need of more extensive help the main provider is the welfare state (Motel-Klingebiel et al. 2005).

The task-specific theory of organisational effectiveness (Litwak et al. 2003) presents an intricate elaboration on the interrelation between the family and a formal organisation of elderly support. According to the task-specific theory, the primary group and formal organisation (or the family and welfare state) not only respond to different needs of the individual, but are also considered the optimal providers of specific tasks, respectively. This, according to Litwak and colleagues, is why, even though formal organisation has taken over many of the tasks that previously lay on the family, the extended family continues to play an important role in the well-being of nuclear families with limited adult resources. Furthermore, even though geographical separation between individuals might be more common today, increased possibilities to interact even over great distances contribute to upholding a strong primary group even if its members are geographically separated. The extended kin hence seems to continue to play an important role in the family and will continue to exist side by side with the formal organisation. Following this line of thought is possible to argue that the grand narrative of modernisation falls short of explaining the undulations of reciprocity and interdependence within the family, and it thus seems helpful to turn to the thinking of Tilly and colleagues (McAdam et al. 2001), even though their underlying questions concern social movements rather than families. Their understanding is that there are no grand narratives that can explain the path society takes through history, and that changes that start out in the same way can take completely different turns. Still, society is not altogether relative and particular; There are indeed regularities to be uncovered, but these are to be found on the mechanical level rather than on the level of grand narratives (Collins 2010).
2.4.3. Independence and reciprocity

Whether the need is extensive and demands expert care provided by medical personnel, for example, or is limited and practical and can be relieved by just about anyone, assistance must still be given by some actor. As individualism becomes more important in a modernising society so does independence, and independence for the younger generation tends to diminish the status of the elderly (Ishii-Kuntz and Lee 1987). Yet, the individualisation of society is not only affecting the younger generation but also the older one, and self-reliance becomes an important issue for the notion of successful ageing. In this sense the elderly can be regarded as disadvantaged – their resources and possibilities to contribute, whether to the family or to society, diminish as frailty sets in and needs increase. In relation to family and kin, the possibility to give and receive services as part of a system of reciprocity, in which giving and receiving flow in both directions even if this occurs with a time lag, is one important way of maintaining some independence – something that has been shown to be of utmost importance for the well-being of the elderly (Breheny and Stephens 2009, Ikkink et al. 1999). Outside the family level the elderly, if affected by ageism and a stereotypical picture in which being old equals being dependent, economic resources and the possibility to pay for desired services might become important for the feeling of self-reliance (Wilson 1993). Economic security and a strong welfare net have been shown to affect the individual’s self-development and personal growth (Lesthaeghe and Meekers 1986), and can hence not be disregarded as concerns the well-being of the elderly.

Independence and freedom of choice can also have a spatial dimension. Welfare-based assistance to the elderly might facilitate geographical separations between generations as the need to be near in order to assist might diminish. For the younger generation, welfare-based childcare institutions might make the dependency on close-living elderly parents less acute. Further, the introduction of the pension system meant that the elderly became less economically dependent on their kin, resulting in increased possibilities to make choices independent of other generations (Reil-Held 2006). Yet again, even the migration of the elderly is connected to the welfare state and the system of elderly care. As stated by Speare (1992), if elderly care is primarily the responsibility of the family then place of residence and spells of migration can be expected to be connected to those of younger kin, while in societies with more developed pension systems and welfare systems the elderly have the potential to become more independent, also affecting migration patterns as spatial independence also increases.
If more responsibility for help and support falls on the family level, intergenerational proximity may be less a choice and more a necessary practical solution, possibly limiting the geographical mobility of both generations. Following the thinking of Polanyi (1989 [1944]), the redistributive system – in this case the welfare state – contributes to facilitating the mobility of population that the market society demands. Even though geographical proximity between family members has been described as a form of structural solidarity (Lawton et al. 1994), implying a positive side that does not only focus on practical issues but also notes the social functions (Boden and Molotch 1994), proximity may also be experienced as a burden or restraint on both generations (Umberson 1992). And, even if the feeling of “togetherness” (Kohli et al. 2005) is important, the wish to maintain geographical independence – to be intimate but at a distance (Rosenmayr 1968) – cannot be overlooked.
3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The ageing of the population in Western societies is not a new phenomenon, and has long interested researchers (see, for example, the early works of Sauvy 1948). As the population ages and the role and responsibility of the state become more unclear or even challenged, family and kin play a potentially important role in care for the elderly (Künemund 2008). Knowledge about how families and kin live in relation to each other, together with an understanding of how people relocate in relation to each other, is therefore of great importance for public policy. As mentioned in the initial part of this text, much of the social science research on the ageing population has focused on the effects on the public welfare system and the changes in care burden as the population ages. Less attention has been paid to ageing from a family or network perspective.

In this section of the text, attention is given to some empirical issues raised in the juxtaposition of intergenerational geographical distance and proximity with the ageing of the population, with a special focus on the family.

The intergenerational geographical distance is naturally influenced by many factors on the individual, family and societal levels. As a guide for scrutinising the extensive research done in different parts of the field, the focus here is on the proximity between elderly parents and adult children. Surrounding this central subject, four main areas will be covered in this section: migration, mobility and ICT, care and support, and the changing role of the welfare state. The intention in this chapter is to introduce some of the many aspects raised in the debate about the ageing population, with special attention given to the spatial and social aspects of intergenerational interaction.

3.1. Proximity and distance – living close or being separated

In countries with a strong welfare state, where care for the elderly is seen as primarily a responsibility of the state, the geographical distance between generations might be considered to be of less importance. However, when attention is directed towards the family and towards intergenerational exchange in its many forms, it becomes obvious that proximity is important for help and support between generations, and spatial separation might inhibit extensive interaction. The geographical distance between generations is therefore of great concern, and as regards proximity and separation, both migratory and sedentary behaviour must be considered (Warnes 1986).
Additionally, even the proximity may be further scrutinised, and different forms of geographically close living may have different effects on the parties involved.

Starting from the point of separation, the age of nest-leaving is of interest. In Sweden, nest-leaving is highly concentrated to the years around 20, with the median ages for leaving home for children born in the mid-1980s 20.7 years for women and 21.6 for men. Compared to cohorts born in the mid-60s, the age for nest-leaving has increased somewhat for women and decreased slightly for men (Statistics Sweden 2008a). In a European comparison this is a somewhat young age for nest-leaving. In 2003 in Italy, 61% of all men 18-34 years old were living with a parent, without a partner or child of their own. The corresponding number for Sweden was 10%, and the EU-15 average 33% (Newman and Aptekar 2007 p. 209). The timing of nest-leaving affects the intergenerational separation in a direct way, but also indirectly as more years living separately increase the spells of migration of both parties, contributing to the risk of ending up living further apart. Whether never separated or once separated and later re-converging and living together, intergenerational co-residence is fairly uncommon in Sweden. According to the Living Condition Survey (ULF) about 2% of women co-reside with adult children, while the corresponding figure for men is about 1% (Statistics Sweden 2006). Results from the SHARE-2004 survey reveal a 15% rate of co-residence (Spain being the extreme with a 52% co-residence rate, while most European countries have a rate of 20-27%), but this figure also includes all children and data for all parents over 50 years of age. For the older age groups the rates are much lower, and co-residence for parents over 80 stands at 1% (compared once again to Spain with 34%) (Kohli et al. 2005). However, upon further examination the meaning of the low numbers of intergenerational co-residence has been proven to be somewhat mixed. Ogg and Renaut (2006), in a study of persons aged 75 years and older in ten European countries, found that even though co-residence between generations was much more common in southern than northern Europe, the proportion of adult children providing help for their elderly parents was higher in the north than in the south. Similar results by Bonsang (2006) highlight that even though adult children in the Mediterranean area spend more time helping their elderly parents, the proportion of adult children giving any assistance to their parents is higher in the north. Bonsang relates this to the concentration of the care burden to the closest living/co-residing child in the south, whereas in northern Europe the burden is more often shared among siblings.

Even though intergenerational co-residence is becoming a somewhat rare phenomenon, and there is a qualitative difference between living close by
and actually sharing a household, living in extreme geographical proximity can to some extent serve in similar manner as sharing pots and pans. As concerns the exchange between generations based on needs, Smith et al. (2010) assume that extreme proximity, which they call “quasi co-residence”, does not support a pooling of resources in the same way as actually sharing a household does. However, others have understood the extreme proximity differently – already in 1968 Rosenmayr observed that elderly persons seemed to prefer living close to their kin, but without necessarily living in the same household, and termed this notion “intimacy at a distance”. According to this understanding, even though the amount of intergenerational co-residence may have diminished over time the extension of togetherness – that is the notion of being close even though separated by a (short) geographical distance – may still be strong (Kohli et al. 2005).

3.2. Migration

Dispersal of kin occurs over time within a family, but on an aggregated level is also affected by periods of intense restructuring and migration within society. This section addresses the issue of migration and how it can come to concern the intergenerational family.

Geographical separation between generations begins with migration. As a society’s population ages, the mobility and migration patterns in the society change since the patterns of migration differ between age groups. Migration frequency peaks in early adulthood, and migration among the elderly might therefore be seen as a minor phenomenon compared to the mobility of the younger age groups. Still, it is a topic that has attracted a great deal of attention. One reason for this attention is that the group of people defined as elderly is making up an increasing share of the population, at least in developed countries, and the first cohorts of the baby-boom generation are now reaching retirement age (Haas and Serow 2002). Further, as the elderly are expected to have a stronger economic position in the future, they are also expected to have greater opportunities for migration, a situation that has been shown to already be in progress (Håkansson 2004, Marr and Millerd 2004).

As concerns the elderly and residential relocation and migration, a seminal article by Litwak and Longino (1987) cast new light on life in connection to and after retirement, through their introduction of the three-stage model for migration among elderly. This model focuses on changing life conditions such as detachment from the labour market and deteriorating health later as reasons for migration and residential relocation among the elderly. Following Litwak and Longino, later research has distinguished between
different age groups among those previously simply referred to as “elderly”, and migration in anticipation of retirement is one of the areas that has received a great deal of attention (Bures 1997). Even the distance of the moves may differ among the different age groups among the elderly. Rogers (1988) showed, based on international material, that long-distance moves are more common in the years around retirement, while short distance moves are more frequent among the oldest age groups. The interconnectedness between old age and migration has covered many themes, including moves to amenities such as better climate (Gustafson 2002), moves to family (Silverstein and Angelelli 1998, van Diepen and Mulder 2009) and, in Sweden, moves to good living conditions such as coastal municipalities (Magnusson and Turner 2003). Here the literature on migration and seasonal/temporal migration associated with second homes forms a growing body of literature (Bjelde and Sanders 2010, McHugh and Mings 1996). Furthermore, new studies concerning elderly and migration have been concerned with the elderly as “stayers” or “left behinds” and with the problematic life situation that might face the elderly in situations in which the younger age groups leave the area (King and Vullnetari 2006).

Even though migration among the elderly is a somewhat marginal phenomenon on an aggregated level, from a family perspective it may very well be important. From a family perspective, once kin have become geographically separated a decision to live close or co-reside once again is associated with the migration of at least one of the parties. Migration among the elderly may be of great importance as it may bring previously separated kin closer together or, in cases in which the elderly undertake an interregional or intergenerational migration, much more separate than before (Gustafson 2002). Though migration to proximity may be associated with a variety of factors, and ending up close to each other might rather be a coincidence than an active choice, social motives, family and kin have been shown to still be of great importance in migration decisions, especially among the elderly (Rogerson et al. 1997, Lundholm et al. 2004). The family’s influence on migration might of course go in both directions – attachment to kin might inhibit migration or, as seen in marital disruptions, lead to an increased propensity to sell one’s house (Feijten 2005). Similarly, moving close to kin might rather be a “coincidence”, linked to shared networks and information channels, or related to population distribution whereby, for example, moving to a location with better welfare service for the elderly is associated with moving to a more densely populated area where one is more likely to have a relative.

1 Interestingly enough a change might be seen over time here since, in an early study on the matter, Burgess et al. (1955) found that among retired men relatives were of much less importance for migration than, for example, an attractive climate.
Yet another aspect of intergenerational proximity and distance is the effect large-scale societal restructuring can have on generational separation. Migration among the old, as well as the young, can lead to geographical age segregation and potentially cause policy concerns in areas with heavy in- or outmigration of singular age groups (Amcoff 2003, Ducombe et al. 2001). For example, in Sweden the 60s were characterised by a strong geographical concentration and urbanisation whereby the larger cities attracted a great number of immigrants from both the countryside and the regional centres (Håkansson 2000, Amcoff 2003). This period coincided with the large cohorts of the 40s reaching early adulthood and thus their most migratory-prone period of life (Borgegård et al. 1995). One effect of these simultaneous forces was that the countryside became “old” as the youngsters left, and the urban areas became “young” since few elderly relocated, and the geographical separation between generations was a fact. This “geographical age separation” was not a new feature, however. During the late 19th-century urbanisation era in Sweden, high mortality rates and a great influx of people vouch for young population structures in the rapidly urbanising towns such as Stockholm, where people over the age of 65 were a rare sight (Högman 1999, Edvinsson 1992).

In more recent years studies have shown the similar tendencies of geographical age separation, but in the reverse direction – the countryside, and most obviously areas with great amenities, attract the elderly of pre-retirement and retirement ages. In some areas, for example rural England and the tropical part of the US, this has led to areas being dominated by older age groups (Stockdale 2006). In Sweden today the sparsely populated municipalities have the highest proportion of persons 65 years of age and older, in the northern inland region between 22 and 30% of all inhabitants are elderly (Statistics Sweden 2010). The policy implications for this kind of age-group distribution over space are many, as a concentration of elderly may have different needs than an age-mixed group. Areas receiving a great deal of elderly in their “just-around-retirement” years may face both economic and practical challenges when the group becomes old and frail. However, according to the theory of Litwak and Longino presented earlier, one expected outcome might be that the elderly, as they reach advanced age and becomes less self-dependent, will move once more and possibly seek other, better suited locations with better welfare and/or commercial service, such as more densely populated areas. The need to migrate to get assistance may, however, also be associated with negative emotional effects on the elderly, as ageing in place has been shown to be preferred by many elderly (Joseph and Chalmers 1996).
3.3. Mobility and ICT

Connected to the migration and urbanisation patterns are also the geographically shorter trips, the daily mobility. Geographical separation triggers mobility, and the maintained possibility to be mobile has been proven to be an important factor for well-being and quality of life even among the elderly (Banister and Bowling 2004). Retaining a mobile lifestyle may also be important for intergenerational interaction, as it might reduce the negative impact of geographical separation. Among the elderly in Sweden’s population the mobility has increased, following increased health in old age and greater possibilities to continue having a mobile lifestyle after retirement, for example continuing to drive a car into higher ages (Hjorthol et al. 2010). Yet another aspect of mobility among the elderly is associated with travelling. Visiting friends and relatives, known as VFR tourism, is a common reason for travelling, and visiting and hosting friends and relatives have been shown to be an important way to maintain qualitative contact although geographically separated (Larsen et al. 2007).

But contact is not restricted to face-to-face interaction. With the boom of information and communication technology, overcoming distances has been made easier and the increased potential for interaction over distance also influences the elderly’s possibilities to receive help and support. Within the health sector, telemedicine and ICT-based support systems for home-based elderly care have been introduced, increasing the possibilities to provide assistance from a distance (Soar and Seo 2007). Also, from a family perspective, improved means of communication may affect the possibility to help, especially as not all sorts of help demand spatial proximity. Telephones, mobile phones, the Internet and webcam tools like Skype now facilitate interaction even when people live far apart, and help with tasks in the IADL sector like bank errands. The mediation of contact with welfare-based services can also be performed from a distance with the help of ICT just as well as through direct contact. The elderly in this setting, sometimes described as “silver surfers”, are also expected to take part in the digital regeneration, as inclusion in the digital world is seen as an aspect of successful ageing (Peacock and Künemund 2007). However, research has shown that the ability to use and access a computer is not evenly distributed among the elderly, and that both age and socio-economic factors influence usage rates (Selwyn et al. 2003). The silver surfers have further been proven to be more socially integrated than their non-user counterparts, indicating that those already socially active are those who to a greater extent engage in ICT use (Helsper 2009). Additionally, even ICT has been proven to be sensitive to geographical distances, and telephone contact between friends and relatives has been shown to decrease with greater geographical distances.
(Mok et al. 2007). It thus seems that, just like in face-to-face context, individuals with a great amount of social capital tend to gain more from ICT than those whose resources are already scarce (Eriksson 2003). Further, even though ICT may have increased the possibilities to interact and help from a distance, it is important to remember that some sorts of care and support are more sensitive to geographical separation than others, and that spatial proximity between generations has thus far been a strong predictor of interaction (Lawton et al. 1994).

3.4. Care, support and assistance

Throughout the thesis the discussion of the concepts of care, support, help and assistance between generations has been treated as being intimately connected and inseparable, as the distinction between these concepts has been of little importance in the research questions at hand. There is, however, a need to scrutinise the concepts a bit further. First, there is the discussion about the underlying motives for care or support given by family. It has often been understood that the family compensates for shortcomings, so that if the elderly person loses abilities the family compensates by offering assistance (Levine et al. 2003). But providing support has also been explained as being based in altruism, grounded in reciprocity (Breheny and Stephens 2009) or as part of a strategic exchange over time (Silverstein et al. 2002). Another way is to make a distinction in the rationale behind giving care and giving support or assistance. Care can be understood as following needs – that is, care is given as a response to an urgent necessity (Brandt et al. 2009). Help, support and assistance, on the other hand, might be understood as not being initiated by a need in the same way, but rather by the provider's opportunity to offer help (Künemund and Rein 1999). Giving and receiving care, help and support have also been thoroughly analysed and classified into different types, and a number of classification systems have been described and used in empirical studies (for example, the Barthel Index by Mahoney and Barthel 1965). The 60s saw the introduction of definitions of what came to be understood as help with ADL (activities of daily living) and IADL (instrumental activities of daily living), a distinction still widely used today (Kempen and Suurmeijer 1990, Bolin et al. 2008). Later, other types of family care-giving have included a distinction between financial help, direct help and assistance in getting help from another source (Archbold 1983), and functioning as a “mediator” or co-ordinator between the elderly and all sorts of formal and informal carers (Brody 2004).

Connected to the discussion about help, and especially care, is also the matter of health among the elderly, an issue that will only be touched upon here because it stretches into a very different field of research. However, in
an era of increased life expectancy and more people than ever living to see their 90\textsuperscript{th} birthday, the debate about health trends among the old is extensive (Myers et al. 2003). Whether health among the elderly, and especially among the oldest old, is getting better, with a postponed onset of morbidity and more healthy life years, or the increased life expectancy actually leads to more years of ill health with a need of assistance, does not seem to have a conclusive answer as the health problems among the elderly seem to increase while disabilities and difficulties in managing daily life seem to decrease (Parker and Thorslund 2007). Christensen et al. (2009), after reviewing the findings in the literature about the associations between increased life expectancy and postponement of the onset of disabilities, found that among the young-old the trend seemed to be a postponement of disabilities and limitations in daily life. The health status among the elderly and its practical effects does call for further attention, and in the future will affect not only the ageing individual and the welfare state, but likely also the family as a giver and receiver of support and care.

3.5. Help between generations – a two-way street

As concerns help, support and assistance between generations, it is important to remember that the aid flows both ways – from the younger to the older generation, but also from the older to the younger one. Among the elderly, improvements in health status (definitions and interpretations of health and health status are complex and multidimensional; See Christensen et al. 2009 for an overview), coupled with an increased economic independence, have contributed to the downward flow of help and assistance (Albertini et al. 2007). The introduction of retirement pension in society has given the elderly sufficient monetary resources without their having to depend on kin, and has contributed to ageing individuals having more free time than before (Attias-Donfut 2001). An effect of this system is that economic help between generations has recently been shown to a larger extent to flow downstream, from older generations to younger ones, rather than upstream to the elderly (Reil-Held 2006). Also, time transfer – for example, tending to grandchildren – has been shown to be a common help given to the younger generation (Lye 1996). At the same time, increased labour force participation for parents with young children in many Western countries (Jacobs and Gerson 2004) has been shown to increase stress for parents, especially women, with school-aged children (Mattingly and Sayer 2006), contributing to a possibly increased need among those in the younger generation. And, quite rightly, grandchildren deserve some extra attention. Interaction and contact between three generations has been proven important for both the young (Kemp 2005) and the old (Silverstein and Marenco 2001), and grandchildren seem to have a positive effect on the
contact between generations (Rogerson et al. 1993, Lawton et al. 1994, however Rossi and Rossi, 1990, found a negative relationship between number of grandchildren and elderly parent-adult child contact). But further, within the system of intergenerational exchange, reciprocity has been shown to be of utmost importance. Reciprocity, understood as the exchange of help and support over time, is a way for the elderly to be able to maintain their identity as independent – since being part of an exchange system makes receiving help when in need much less of a dependency act (Breheny and Stephens 2009). Contact and assistance with grandchildren seem to hold a special position in the intergenerational exchange, as this is described as a way to play a reciprocal role in the exchange with adult children (Bowling et al. 2003).

However, whether the exchange is directed upwards or downwards in the intergenerational web, the extent to which the help and support are given seem to have limitations and affects on different groups differently. Female carers, compared to male ones, have been shown to continue to give help and care even when the intergenerational geographical distance is great, which might potentially put more strain on them (Joseph and Hallman 1998). Geographical separation further seems to have a more negative effect on downstream than upstream help (Igel et al. 2009, van der Pas et al. 2007), indicating that elderly persons may have fewer possibilities and resources to overcome distance.

3.6. The (changing) role of the welfare state

One of the rationales behind investigating the intergenerational geographical distance between generations is its interconnectedness to the welfare state. As the demographic situation is now changing, with an increased proportion of the population in their post-retirement years, the welfare state is meeting new challenges and financial constraints. In order to meet the new demands, it is necessary to know about the situation of the other main provider of assistance to the elderly – the family – and its current and potential roles in elderly care and support. Conversely, in order to better understand the situation of the elderly and their kin, knowledge about the welfare state is essential.

However, the perceived threat to the welfare state, based on the development towards an ageing population in large parts of the world, is not new (Castels 2002). In the 90s, attention was called to the foreseen economic collapse of the welfare state if the demands of the ageing populations were not addressed by other means (World Bank 1994). In a situation in which the welfare state is challenged, a re-negotiation of the division of responsibility
may be one way to go. A re-negotiation, however, calls for consideration of the idea and rationale of the welfare-based elderly care system. Over time the expectations on society as well as on the individual and the family have varied. With the introduction and later improvements of the welfare state-based system of support and pension (especially in the 1930-1940s), the state sought to address the problems and challenges of the individual that had previously been managed within the family or by institutions for the poor or those needing charity (Lundmark and Åmark 2001). Later, the introduction of the pension system abolished, or at least reduced, the economic dependency between ageing parents and their adult children (Reil-Held 2006). Still, even in societies with an extensive welfare state the family has been shown to have a continued important function, even if this function is changing (Sundström et al. 2002). However, the welfare state policies have often focused on the individual and the independence between family members, and have included the role of kin in the equation only to a lesser extent (Rothstein 2003, Trädgärdh 1997).

For the elderly, the support they receive from the welfare state influences the options available to them if and when they are faced with a situation when assistance is needed (Daly and Rake 2003). The welfare state may hence enhance the possibility to remain independent even when faced with increasing care needs. For the family, the welfare state might ease the potential burden and restraints connected to being the sole provider of assistance to dependent elderly, and may even improve the quality of intergenerational relations when a greater amount of independence between the actors can be maintained (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 1998). However, the welfare state can also create constraints for the individuals in society, not least through financial cutbacks or investments. In a situation in which a greater part of elderly care is to be solved by the individual and the family rather than by the welfare system, the changes will likely influence women and men differently. Overall, women give more assistance to kin than men do – causing them to potentially be more affected by cutbacks in the welfare state provision of elderly care.

For the family, welfare state support for the elderly may also affect migration and sedentary behaviour. Children are likely to have made their residential choice long before the need for care of their ageing parents arises, and if faced with a situation in which extensive assistance from kin is needed migration to proximity might be a solution. The need for migration may be limited by elderly care being provided by the welfare state, however, since this offers an alternative solution for the dependent elderly. From the younger generation’s perspective, not only welfare-based assistance to elderly parents but also public childcare may facilitate geographical
separation since intergenerational assistance may be less indispensable when the welfare state can offer public solutions. Conversely, geographically challenged families may be dependent on welfare-based assistance, and in a situation in which kin is expected to carry a greater part of the burden of care for the elderly they might be unable to do so – potentially negatively affecting the situation for the elderly.

In a situation in which intergenerational exchange is expected to cover a greater part of a family’s care needs, whether for young grandchildren or frail elderly, a risk of overburden does exist and the assistance given may turn into a duty (Ungerson 1983). Following the line of thought presented earlier in this thesis concerning task-specific responsibilities, even for grandparents strong institutional welfare services seem to increase the amount of time spent with grandchildren, indicating that even though caring for grandchildren may be considered a joyous task, accepting full responsibility for them may seem less of an attractive choice (Igel et al. 2009).

Further, the spatial organisation of the welfare support system – at least indirectly – affects the family. The division of fiscal responsibilities between the state and the local or regional level affects the way the burden of the ageing of the population is carried (Kresl and Ietri 2009) but has also, at least for periods of time, led to discrepancies in the service and assistance offered by different municipalities (Trydegård and Thorslund 2010). For the family, the geographical variations in the organisation of care for the elderly might then raise different questions and needs. The geographical organisation of the welfare state further potentially contributes to intergenerational geographical separation, as the older generation has to migrate when in need of adjusted living.

3.7. The Swedish context

The issue of an ageing population and organisation of the care for the elderly is by no means a new one in Sweden. The Swedish welfare state-based universal pension system introduced in 1913 was, at least according to Edebalk (2000), imposed as a response to the changing demographic situation in the country at the turn of the last century. An increasing proportion of elderly in the population attracted attention to economic solutions that did not, as had been the case until then, depend on poor relief or adult children. The poor law that previously supported needy elderly with no family to depend on was hence exchanged for a system in which the main idea was a loss-of-income principle – persons unavailable to work were to be supported by the state.
The question of care for the elderly also has a long history in Sweden. From the perspective of demography, in the 30s the famous Myrdals called attention to what they described as “Kris i befolkningsfrågan” [Crisis in the population issue] and urged for more children in society (Myrdal and Myrdal 1934). Some years later, the influential writer and public debater Ivar Lo Johansson stirred a debate concerning the faulty institutionalised care for the elderly in Sweden (Lo-Johansson 1952) and a modernisation of elderly care in the 50s followed. A new model for elderly care was introduced: home-based assistance to the elderly funded by the welfare state (Szebehely 1995).

The number of elderly receiving care, either through home-help service or in institutions, increased beginning in the 60s, but the trend turned downward in the 80s and continued in that direction into the 90s (Larsson and Szebehely 2006). Then in the early 90s, a reorganisation of eldercare shifted the responsibility for assessing the needs and organising the appropriate support for the elderly from the county council to the municipality. This transfer of responsibility the municipalities brought about a somewhat changed view on what was to be included in the service to the elderly. According to Batljan and Lagergren (2000), the changes were due partly, but far from exclusively, to increased health among the elderly. Ten years later, a state commission reported that fewer elderly than before were receiving help (SOU 2001: 79) and that those in need of more practical assistance (e.g. grocery shopping, housecleaning) had either turned to private actors or gotten support from relatives (Larsson and Szebehely 2006).

Now Sweden is faced with a change in demography – an increasing proportion of the population is in old age. The proportion of elderly (> 64 years) is expected to rise from 18% in 2008 to 21% in 2020 (elaborated from Statistics Sweden www.scb.se) – which raises new concerns about the future structure of support for the elderly. Related to the changes in the welfare state-based elderly care is also the concept of independence and autonomy for the elderly, an issue that has been at the centre of the debated welfare state and care for the elderly ever since the changes to the law in the 50s. The changes aimed at discharging adult children from their previous obligation to support their elderly parents and instead placing this responsibility on the welfare state (SOU 1956:1). At the same time, the regulations made the elderly somewhat less dependent on their adult children (Thullberg 1990). During the reconstruction of the welfare-based assistance to the elderly in the 90s, Sweden saw an increased participation of family members in the care for the elderly, a trend that was even stronger among those elderly who had close-living adult children (Johansson et al 2003). Whether one understands this trend as positive, marking a return to family values, or as negative, as an

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2 ÄDEL-reformen 1992
example of the downturn of the welfare state, it may challenge the perceived independence of the elderly when more of the responsibilities fall on kin.

If a strained welfare budget puts the elderly in a position in which alternative means of assistance have to be found, a return to a stronger dependency on family may be an alternative. But, as seen previously in this paper, intergenerational assistance is highly dependent on geographical proximity, thus family is only a real alternative when they live reasonably close. And the intergenerational distance is naturally entangled with migration by both parties.

As proximity and distance are shaped by lifelong mobility, the specific situation for migration over the life course in Sweden is important. In Sweden, leaving home is highly age-concentrated – more than 40% of all women born in 1975 left home at an age of 19-20 years (approximately 30% of men left home at an age of 20-21 years) (Statistics Sweden 2008a). The age-specific migration pattern in Sweden has further shown that after the age of 35 sedentary behaviour is very strong and that 92% of all persons stay in the same region over a ten-year period (Fischer and Malmberg 2001). As moves made after the age of 30 are not only fewer but also shorter, only 11% of all moves made by persons aged 30 and older cross a county border (Statistics Sweden 2008c), intergenerational proximity or distance is largely shaped by migration among the young. As previously mentioned, hypothesis has stated that migration among the elderly might be affected by changing life circumstances and, for example, an increased need for help and support, but as concerns the Swedish elderly, previous research has found no support for the theory that the elderly would move in order to receive more support from relatives (Ekström and Danemark 1993). But since we know that family motives are important for migration, questions arise as to whether the elderly who do migrate do so in order to get closer to adult children and any grandchildren they may have – possible to give or receive help or assistance – or whether the older generation attracts the younger, more migratory age groups to move closer to elderly parents.

On an aggregated level, geographical distance is not the only factor of importance for interaction; The demographic pattern in the country also plays an important role. First of all, the friction of distance, once connected to insurmountable economic expenses or lack of transportation opportunities, might be different today, but most daily life is still performed in a highly localised context (Ellegard and Vilhelmson 2004). While society as a whole remains sedentary, with the migration rate actually even falling within Swedish society (Garvill et al. 2000), daily mobility has increased in recent years. Geographically expanding labour markets have contributed to a
substantial increase in commuting over the past decades (Green et al. 1999), normalising the thought of daily medium-distance mobility, which might also affect how intergenerational geographical distance is looked upon. At the same time, the geographical patterns of the population affect the number of people possible to reach within a given distance. As society becomes more urbanised, the average number of people a person can reach within the same time or distance frame increases (Håkansson 2000). We know that migration is and has always been a part of all human societies. Still, it is easy for us to imagine that we migrate more these days than in previous times, that our own time period is very different than those of the past. In fact, Swedes migrate approximately ten times in their lifetime, most of the moves over very short distances, and the proportion migrating over a parish border has been shown to have stayed steady at around 8% over the past 100 years (Malmberg 2010). Regionally, however, moves and migration have varied over the years. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries industrialisation and urbanisation triggered migration, and later periods of intense concentration of the population have been interspersed with spells of decentralisation, such as the “gröna vägen” phenomenon (mass exodus from the cities) during the 70s (Öberg and Springfeldt 1991). Today Sweden’s average population density is 23 persons per square kilometre, but the variation among the different areas is great. In the most densely populated counties (Stockholm, Skåne and Västra Götaland) the density is 304, 110 and 65, respectively, while the northern parts, Västerbotten and Norrbotten, have numbers as low as 5 and 3 persons per square kilometre (Statistics Sweden 2008b). The regional differences in population density further challenge the welfare state’s provision of care for the elderly, but may also have an effect on the family level if kin live more separated in the more sparsely populated areas.
4. METHODS AND DATA

"What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning" – Heisenberg, 1958

As the ageing of the population potentially challenges the welfare state, a great deal of consideration has been given to ageing on an aggregated level. The family, one of the cornerstones in care and support for the frail elderly, however, has attracted less attention. In this thesis the focus is therefore on elderly parents and their adult children, and the family landscape they form and have formed in historical time. A tenacious notion about the nexus of intergenerational geographical proximity and assistance is that previously, in historical time, we lived closer and exchanged more support, while in today’s urbanised and individualised society generations have become geographically separated and the contact and support between them has declined – a notion that has however been refuted (Brody 1978, Aboderin 2004). Nevertheless, this calls for further attention to the situation in previous times, and the dissertation therefore includes a paper on intergenerational proximity in the 19th century compared to today. Since we know that geographical proximity is important for intergenerational interaction (Lawton et al. 1994, Crimmins and Ingegneri 1990), questions arise about the family landscape in the present, but also regarding how it has changed since the 19th century.

4.1. More than one method might tell us - more

In my quest to understand my field of study and write a thesis I have come to agree with Ritchie and Lewis (2008:41), who argue that “It is often the case that there is a need to examine both the number and nature of the same phenomena”. Based on this understanding, three different sets of data have been utilised. As most of the data is quantitative, the understanding and rationale behind including a study based on entirely qualitative material should be clarified. One powerful way of combining different kinds of studies is to follow up results from a quantitative study with those from a qualitative one. Through the combination of different kinds of empirical material, different types of knowledge can be reached and distinct forms of evidence can be found. However, the pieces of information gained from different kinds of data and through the use of different research methods should not be expected to replicate each other. Instead, the reason for combining different material is to capture more of the complexity that is inherent in the phenomena studied (Ritchie and Lewis 2008).
Here I would like to present the concept of triangulation, a concept first developed in a quantitative setting by Campbell and Fiske in 1959. First of all, there is an ongoing debate over whether triangulation is best used as a tool for validation or rather as a strategy for widening the understanding of a complex phenomenon (Ritchie and Lewis 2008). In the case of validity, the idea is that if the results from different types of studies converge when compared – i.e., methodological triangulation – then the validity of the results can be said to be strong (Wai-Chung Yeung 1997). This way of thinking about and using the concept of triangulation has also been disputed (see, for example Ma and Norwich 2007), and another way of thinking about triangulation has been introduced – as a technique to include more voices, to widen the concepts studied, with the ambition of giving a more holistic picture of the question under study (Jick 1979). Rather than letting a paradigm guide which method to use, scholars utilising triangulation seek to focus on the research question and take advantage of the different strengths of different methods when seeking an answer (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005). As family studies have often been described as inherently multidisciplinary (O’Brien 2005), making use of different methods through what might be described as triangulation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) is a helpful way to gain knowledge.

4.2. Methods – large data sets and interview material

In order to compare and discuss intergenerational geographical proximity in both modern and historical time, a unique combination of data material was used. The historical data used in Paper I is based on an individual-level data set covering the population in two regions in Sweden at four cross-section years in the 19th century, and is based on historical parish registers. These registers have been kept by the local clergy since the 17th century, and at the Demographic Database (DDB) at Umeå University some of these registers, covering the time period 1749-1859, have been made available through digitalisation. The material includes demographic information such as date of birth, marriages and death, as well as family links and specifications of place of residence and spells of migration. Further, a set of modern individual-level population register material from 1992 and 2002 (see next paragraph for an elaboration on the setup of the modern database ASTRID) covering the corresponding area was utilised. The empirical part of Paper I is mainly descriptive statistics.

With the aim of describing the present-day family landscape, an individual-level population register covering the full population of Sweden was used. The register, called ASTRID, is constructed by Statistics Sweden and made disposable by the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Umeå.
University. ASTRID is based on the register LISA and the multi-generational register – the latter allows one to link elderly parents with adult children. LISA includes high-resolution geographical information for each individual, making it possible to pinpoint his or her home within a 100* 100 m grid. Extensive socio-economic information was accessed from the same register for every individual and year in order to analyse factors influencing proximity and distance between generations.

In order to scrutinise the effects migration has on intergenerational proximity and distance, information about migration among both the older and the younger generations had to be obtained. Data covering the years 2001 and 2002 from the database ASTRID was used. Based on the detailed geographical information and intergenerational links, it was possible to identify migration between the years in both generations in relation to each other, and the data further allowed for an analysis of the extent to which socio-economic factors influenced migration.

The methods used in Papers II and III are similar. The most fundamental part is the descriptive information on intergenerational distances and mobility among elderly parents and their adult children. The descriptive statistics are then followed by logistic regressions to further analyse the relationship between demographic, socio-economic and geographic variables and intergenerational proximity and mobility.

Derived from the second study, new questions arose that could not be answered by quantitative material, such as issues concerning the meaning and organisation of interaction with close-living adult children. Therefore, interviews were carried out in order to seek new understanding about the meaning of living close. The empirical material in Paper III is hence qualitative, based on 14 interviews with elderly parents living very close to an adult child. For a more detailed description of methods for selecting respondents and analysing interview material, see Paper IV. The qualitative work followed a directed content analysis method, as described by Hsieh and Shannon 2005 and Ritchie and Lewis 2003, for example. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way with mainly open-ended questions, and to assure that all vital information was included a set of direct questions concerning age, marital status, family situation and geographical description was also included. Through an iterative process the material from the interviews was related to the theoretical context based on previous research and literature, with the main purpose of capturing the substantial meaning within the material.
4.3. Data sources

*Paper I.* In this article two large data sets, historical material from the Demographic Database (DDB) and modern material from the population database ASTRID, are combined. Both data sets are individual-level population data including links between generations and detailed geographical data, providing a unique possibility to compare intergenerational geographical proximity and distance in historical and modern time. From the DDB material four cross-section years from the 19th century (1820/1850/1870/1890) are used, and from the modern material the data stems from the years 1992 and 2002. The historical data covers the two regions of Sundsvall and Skellefteå, and the modern data is constructed to correspond to the same areas.

*Papers II and III.* The empirical data for the two studies was derived from the longitudinal population database ASTRID at the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Umeå University. The database is constructed by Statistics Sweden and covers the total population of Sweden on an individual level. The data includes extensive information on socio-economic and demographic variables, as well as links between generations. For these studies the geographical information in the database, place of residence in a 100 m grid, was invaluable. In Papers II and III, descriptions are given of how the data setup was done for both studies.

The two studies complement each other by showing both the existing pattern of intergenerational proximity and insights into what factors contribute to the creation of the pattern. By necessity the background of both articles is somewhat similar, however the empirical findings highlight different aspects of intergenerational proximity and draw on different theoretical frameworks for the analyses.

*Paper IV.* The fourth article uses the new understandings gained in the quantitative studies to ask questions that can be raised – but never answered – by register data. For Paper IV, 14 interviews were conducted with elderly parents in the municipality of Umeå. The informants were selected based on their sharing the same experience of living very close to an adult child, and the material was derived from the semi-structured interviews together with field notes.

4.4. Delimitations

There are obviously a number of great limitations to this work, and some will be addressed here. Since the aim of this thesis is to analyse the situation for
elderly parents in Sweden, the studies as well as the introduction chapter focus predominantly on the older generation. However, in Studies II and III, characteristics of both the elderly and the adult children are included in the analyses as locational nearness is of interest, and this nearness is affected by characteristics of both generations. For the study based on interview material, the limitation to only one generation rests against a theoretical background. In 1971, Bengtson and Kuypers presented the “developmental stake hypothesis” – showing a systematic overstatement of solidarity and emotional closeness on behalf of parents as compared to their children, and argued that this difference was connected to the individual; Ageing persons want and need to preserve and benefit from good relations with younger relatives. Further discussions have moved to an “intergenerational stake hypothesis” (Giarrusso et al. 1995) whereby the position in the lineage chain rather than the age of the elderly per se is understood as important for the interpretation of the intergenerational relationship. Yet another comment on this issue, posed by Winkeler et al. in 2000, is the “leniency hypothesis” whereby the systematic overstatement of positive feelings and closeness among elderly parents is explained by showing that the overstatement of the positive not only concerns the intergenerational relations with adult children but also applies to many relations in old age. In this thesis, due to time limitations, only the older generation was interviewed about their notions of living close to an adult child – this is a limitation, since it is clear that the younger generation is likely to have a different view of the situation. This calls for further attention and opens up for further studies on extreme intergenerational geographical proximity.

4.4.1. Limitation to the methods

The three quantitative studies are all based on cross-sections of data. The cross-sections reveal the situation at the point studied but cannot be used to explain how, for example, the family landscape was created. As concerns the three studies using register data, a way to reach even further in the understanding of the dynamics of intergenerational geographical distance and proximity would be to conduct the studies longitudinally – that is, to follow the actors in the study over time, which the data material would partly allow for. An additional gain from a longitudinal study would likely be seen particularly concerning the issue of migration. Following actors over time, for example from the time the children leave the nest, would render information on how the pattern of intergenerational proximity and distance is affected by other family members, and how the pattern is shaped and re-shaped over the life course. Concerning the extreme proximity, a longitudinal approach would make it possible to distinguish between those generations that never separated geographically and those who have been
separated but returned, something that has recently been suggested to be important (Smith et al. 2010). This would hence be important to address in upcoming studies.

4.4.2. The childless – excluded but important

Throughout the studies in this thesis, one group has often been excluded and is little discussed – the childless elderly. Still, in reference to the ageing of the population and the role of the welfare state, this group is important. In 2002, 20% of the population 65 years of age and older had no adult child; Either they never had a child or their child was deceased or no longer lived in Sweden. The group of childless may also include some immigrants lacking registered links between generations. Since family, and more specifically adult children, is of utmost importance for contact and support in old age (Rossi and Rossi 1990), the group that lacks this kind of network might possibly be even more vulnerable to changes in the support provided by the welfare state. The childless elderly have been greatly excluded in these studies, however, and this issue calls for attention in future research.

4.4.3. Definitions of “family”

In the material used for the studies in this thesis, biological and adoptive parents and children are included and regarded as each other’s family. This is a somewhat narrow definition, however, leaving step-parents/children/siblings aside. An increase in the divorce rate and reconstituted families call for further attention to the relations between step-kin in order to grasp the true situation for today’s families – possible through what van der Pas suggests should be a “(re)conceptualization of the family” (2006:13). As it has further been shown that even intergenerational bonds are affected by marital disruption, and that divorce can also affect assistance between generations (Tomassini et al. 2007), future research should address the issue of intergenerational proximity and support within step-families.

4.4.4. Immigrants

One area that has not been covered to any greater degree in this thesis is the immigrant population and their situation as concerns intergenerational geographical distance. In Paper II, being of non-Swedish descent is included as a non-dependent variable in the analysis, and the results indicate a need for further studies. However, there are some limitations to the register material as concerns intergenerational links between persons born outside Sweden, resulting in an under-coverage of multi-generational families in this group. However, a preliminary study concerning precisely this group, those
born outside Sweden, has been conducted and is reported in the conference paper “Intergenerational distance among immigrants in Sweden” (Malmberg and Pettersson 2007). The immigrant population, and especially the situation for elderly immigrants, will be an issue of growing concern and calls for further attention in upcoming studies.
5. PAPER SUMMARIES

5.1. I. Intergenerational proximity and distance over 200 years – examples from two Swedish regions

The first article in the thesis introduces and seeks to give a background to the questions of intergenerational geographical proximity and distance. As patterns of family formation and networks of extended kin have long been of interest to researchers, the role of the extended family has been intensely debated. With the starting point in an empirical study of distance between elderly parents and adult children in two periods of time, the aim of the paper is to analyse patterns of geographical proximity, and to compare and discuss the significance of intergenerational geographical separation in time and space. The introductory part of the paper brings forward some of the issues raised concerning the situation for the intergenerational family as society changes – with special focus on the position of the elderly and their kin. As intergenerational contact and support have often been proven to be affected by the geographical distances between generations, this part is further scrutinised. In a context in which overcoming distance is related to great costs in time or money, such as a historical context, we can assume that the relationship between geographical proximity and interaction was even stronger, while in a modern situation improvements to transportation and alternative ways of communication can be assumed to widen our daily reach.

With the point of departure in an empirical study based on two unique individual-level data sets of populations in Sweden in historical and modern time, this paper seeks to analyse intergenerational distances in the past and present, and to compare and discuss the significans of intergenerational distance and proximity in different times. The starting point is Swedish regions (Sundsvall and Skellefteå in the northern part of Sweden) and digitalised historical population registers for the cross-section years 1820, 1850, 1870 and 1890. Modern material from 1992 and 2002 covering the corresponding areas is also included. The intergenerational proximity measured is generations living extremely close to or within time adjusted reach of each other, and the study further seeks to acknowledge some previously raised concerns in the field of intergenerational interaction.

The paper brings to light some interesting findings on intergenerational geographical proximity at different times. It is found that, looking at the extreme proximity (co-residing or living just around the corner from each other), a dramatic decrease has taken place over the past 200 years – from being the most common way of living for the elderly to something that is
experienced by only a fraction of them. However, looking at a longer distance (defined in the paper as within time adjusted daily reach) in the different times, the change is much less dramatic – living within reach of an adult child is now, as it was then, experienced by a majority of elderly parents.

Even though comparing information from different times is challenging and afflicted with a multitude of hard-to-solve deliberations, the results from the study indicate that outside the extreme proximity the distance between generations vary over time and between places, however no clear linear trend towards increasing intergenerational separation can be found, and one interpretation of this is that proximity to and contact with kin continues to be important for the family.

5.2. II. Distance to elderly parents: Analyses of Swedish register data

An ageing society like the Swedish one, with an increasing part of its population in old age, may face challenges to the welfare state. An increased number of elderly means more people in potential need of assistance. The family level, between the individual and society, may be looked to for assistance and support in times of welfare cutbacks. However, this would not only demand that the individual have younger kin to rely on, but the proximity to the relative is also of importance as spatial proximity and separation influence the generations’ possibilities to interact with and assist each other and also may affect daily mobility and migration. This structural part of the family situation for the elderly has been overlooked in previous research, and in this study a contribution is made to the knowledge about intergenerational geographical distances in Sweden today.

In this paper we seek to map out the family landscape of elderly parents in Sweden to better understand the geographical prerequisites for intergenerational interaction. This has been possible through the use of unique individual-level data that not only includes links between individuals of different generations, but also holds information on place of residence with great accuracy. In the study, the current-day (2001-2002) situation is compared to the situation ten years earlier, and the trend in child-parent proximity is analysed. Further, factors with potential influence on intergenerational proximity are tested using logistic regression models.

Results from the empirical study reveal that 85% of all elderly parents in Sweden have at least one adult child within a 50 km radius – which might be defined as being within daily reach, and 10% of them live very close to at least one adult child – so close that it can be described as “just around the
corner”. From the perspective of the adult children the numbers are a bit lower, as expected: 72% have a parent within 50 km and 5% live just around the corner. When this was compared to the intergenerational distance ten years earlier, the study did not reveal any indications of continuously increasing intergenerational distance over time but rather a small decrease over the ten year period. However, the study did indicate some cohort-specific difference in proximity. In 1992 a smaller proportion of those aged 40-55 lived within a 50 km radius of their parents, compared to the situation for the same group in 2002. But among the younger group, aged 20-35, the proportion living close to a parent was higher in 1992. Through logistic regression both data sets were compared, and the results indicated a cohort effect – the generations born in the 40s and early 50s were young and mobile in the 60s and early 70s, when migration rates were high due to urbanisation and economic restructuring in Sweden. Their greater distance to their parents then seems to have persisted throughout their life. To further scrutinise the influence of different factors related to the individual, family, and geographical situation logistic regression models were used. The results showed that having a high education level, being female and having been born in Sweden had a negative effect on having an elderly parent close. Further, having siblings made it less likely to live close to a parent, while having children of one’s own had a positive effect of having an elderly parent close by. From the elderly parents’ perspective, as expected, we found that having more children made it more likely to live near at least one of them. Even among the elderly we found a gender difference – elderly women were less likely than elderly men to live very close to an adult child, but were more likely to live within daily reach. Further, among the elderly, those with a low education had a child living close by to a greater extent.

Even geographical factors, such as population density, were found to influence intergenerational proximity. In sparsely populated areas, elderly parents had a child within 50 km to a lesser extent, but when looking at very close proximity it was positive to live in the countryside. For the metropolitan areas, the perspective used was vital – adult children living in metropolitan areas to lesser extent had their parents close by, while from the perspective of the elderly parents - living in a densely populated area was positive for having a child within daily reach. This pattern was expected, however, as rural areas have a higher proportion of inhabitants who move out to live in urban areas, creating long intergenerational distance between elderly parents in rural areas and their children who have moved out, whilst the children of elderly persons living in urban areas will stay in the area to a greater extent.
5.3. III. Adult Children and Elderly Parents as Mobility Attractions in Sweden

As we know, migration is a highly age-influenced action, and most frequent is migration among young adults. Still, migration among the elderly is a phenomenon that is now attracting more attention as the retired are forming a growing share of the population, but also since the cohorts now reaching retirement are expected to be more mobile than preceding cohorts due to better health and stronger economic prerequisites. Here, the family as a mobility attraction is scrutinised as we seek to determine whether it is the elderly parents who move close to their adult children or the adult children who choose to move close to their ageing parents.

In this paper, the admittedly small but nevertheless important group of migrating elderly are in focus, but also the migration of their adult children. The study, based on individual-level data on all elderly parents in Sweden and their adult children for the years 2001-2002, scrutinises the migration and relocation patterns of these two groups in relation to each other. As elderly parents and adult children migrate the intergenerational geographical distance is affected, and moving to a location close (within 50 km) or very close (within 100 m) to a relative reflects the characteristics and intensity of intergenerational relations.

The initial results show that, even though a smaller share of elderly parents migrate from one year to the next (5.2% compared to 8.6% among the adult children), when the elderly move they are more likely to end up closer to an adult child – just over 70% of the movers moved to a location closer to kin, whilst the corresponding number for the adult children was 49%.

The results from the study further revealed that having more than one relative (e.g., grandchildren and siblings) living at the destination made it more attractive to move there, for both the older and the younger generations. If the reason to move close were primarily an obligation to take care of a frail elderly parent, we would expect that a sibling already living close to the parent would diminish the need and desire to move close. Further, moving very close to an adult child was a more common feature among the young-old than the old-old migrants. One possible interpretation of this is that young-old parents move close to their children to give or receive contact, help and assistance, whereas when one becomes old-old and possibly needs more extensive assistance the motivation behind moving is to gain help from the welfare state and public institutions.
In conclusion, this study indicated that even though the younger generation makes up a larger share of generations coming closer due to migration since the younger move more frequently, when the older generation does move, they move close or very close to an adult child to a larger extent. The study further concurs with results from other migration studies showing location of relatives to be important for migration decisions of the elderly. The family landscape, shaped by earlier migration by family members and influenced by periods of societal restructuring such as intense urbanisation, continues to influence the migration patterns of today.

5.4. IV. “Because we know our limits”: elderly parents’ views on intergenerational proximity and intimacy

In a European comparison, Sweden has a very low level of intergenerational co-residence (Tomassini et al. 2004), and the average distance between generations is greater than in most other EU countries. Still, as found in Paper II, a substantial proportion of elderly parents live in very close proximity to an adult child. This raises questions not only about why and how the generations ended up so close together, but also about how the intergenerational contact and assistance is organised by those who have chosen to live so close but not to share a household.

In this forth paper, the spotlight is pointed at one of the groups of elderly identified in the second article – elderly parents living in what might be described as extreme proximity to an adult child (but not in the same household). The aim of the study is to investigate issues raised by elderly parents living very close to an adult child in order to gain new understanding about the interaction between intergenerational proximity, assistance and the meaning of being close. The paper is based on interviews with 14 elderly individuals aged 65 to 92 years, living in the municipality of Umeå, Sweden. The respondents, three men and nine women, all live independently, two in the countryside the rest in town, and share the common feature of having at least one adult child within walking distance. The focus on only the older generation, due to time constraints, can be expected to give more positive results than interviews with their younger kin would have – this calls for further studies. Through open-ended questions and a directed content analysis method, the study seeks to gain new understanding of the interplay between geographical proximity, help and support exchange and the meaning of being close.

The interaction between the generations, as explained by the interviewees, flowed in both directions – from the older to the younger and vice versa, and the exchange was extensive. Not only emotional exchange (for instance,
meeting and having coffee) but also practical exchange (such as caring for grandchildren and receiving daily help with getting undressed) are mentioned as important reasons for meeting. Nevertheless, the “geographical intimacy” seemed to be counteracted by a mutual understanding of a need for privacy and independence, and recurring themes were their own independence towards their children and their wish to show respect for their children by not intruding.

One conclusion drawn from this study is that even though the close-living generations do act as each other's backup and support, this should not be understood as their wanting or even potentially accepting more extensive help from their relatives.
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A family landscape. In the juxtaposition of population ageing with intergenerational geographical proximity and distance, this thesis has explored some of the issues that affect our family landscape. It is now time to finish the expedition. As always on an interesting journey much remains to be seen and experienced, but for now it is time to summarise and conclude.

In the first of the papers, some points are made about intergenerational proximity in Sweden over time. The main point made in the paper is that even though societal changes like industrialisation and urbanisation affect the intergenerational geographical distance, and living extremely close to kin was a more common feature in the farming society of the 19th century than today, changes in perceived distance and possibilities to overcome distance may counteract some of the geographical separation, and the tolerance for spatial separation today might therefore be higher than before. We can now overcome distance in a different way than was possible in the farming society, and it is thus possible to belong to the same “togetherness” even when more spatially separated. The second study revealed that within Swedish society a large proportion of elderly parents in Sweden have at least one adult child within daily reach. There further seems to be no linear trend of increasing distances over time, but rather cohort-specific migration rates may lead the thoughts astray – some cohorts are more affected by societal restructuring, such as urbanisation eras, and will therefore have a different intergenerational geographical pattern than those that precede and follow them. The potential for intergenerational exchange is then at least structurally quite good, and might on an aggregated level become even “better” in the coming years, as the parents of the urbanisation generations pass away. In the next study, intergenerational distance and proximity are further explored by looking at migration patterns among the elderly and their kin. What we found is that even though the younger generation makes up a larger part of intergenerational convergence, when the elderly move they move close to an adult child to a greater extent. This indicates that, even for the elderly, moving close to family is desirable, and grandchildren especially seem to add to the attraction. In the fourth study, where some representatives of the 10% of the elderly living “just around the corner” from an adult child were interviewed, we learned that in their understanding the geographical intimacy was counteracted by a firm understanding of where the limits for interaction are, and according to their description living close is characterised by concordance rather than conflict.
In discussions of the ageing of the population, the focus often falls on the individual – ageing successfully being an important issue – and on the welfare state, as the increased dependency rate and standard of welfare service is debated. When the family level is at the centre of attention this is often from a social perspective, whereby the notion of filial obligation is the main point. In this thesis it has been shown that even the structural side of the family level, here represented by geographical proximity, is important. As stated early in the thesis, close-living kin can be a resource for the ageing individual. Family, however, is just one resource upon which the elderly person might depend, and proximity to adult children is of course not important to everyone all the time. But, when family is important, being geographically close is significant.

That geographical proximity is important for intergenerational interaction has been stated many times in this thesis, however there are naturally other ways to maintain contact. By use of ICT, everyday contact can be maintained over great distances and some types of assistance, for example mediating between welfare and private actors, might be upheld even from a distance. Further, the alternative to living close might not necessarily be constant separation – frequent visits or shared second homes can serve as meeting places and even be a more qualitative way to meet. Yet another important comment to make is that geographical proximity, even though it has been shown to be important for intergenerational proximity, does not guarantee possibilities to interact. What Hägerstrand called constraints, the idea that most projects in daily life have to be carried out at a certain place and in coordination with other actors or materials, explains why being close does not warrant interaction – other constraints may hinder this. For the elderly, who have been shown to be more prone to move close to an adult child when they move, moving closer might be a strategy for reducing the coupling constraints by reducing, for example, the travel time between generations.

It is important, however, to remember that an adult child living close by can be one resource among others for elderly parents. As concerns assistance and help, a partner is the most common provider of support, but other kin as well as friends and neighbours can play important roles in the network as well. Other resources can of course include monetary means, such as savings or private pension funds.

A major characteristic of the modernisation process is urbanisation, and as concerns urbanisation the impact on the elderly share of the population has often been described as negative. In times of intense urbanisation, geographical separation between generations can become problematic – the elderly still living in the countryside while their children set off to the urban
centres. However, when the population is urbanised, in the sense that most people are already living in built-up areas, the urban per se does not seem to pose as much of a problem regarding intergenerational separation. Still, just because the geographical distance is small interacting might not be easy – living in different parts of town or areas not conveniently connected to each other might be equally great challenges as pure kilometres of separation.

In the second article in this thesis empirical results based on two, admittedly very closely spaced, cross-section years revealed a somewhat unexpected pattern. We found that the intergenerational geographical distances had decreased rather than increased over time. Through further scrutiny of the results it became clear that what was showing up were the results of a large restructuring of society in the 60s and early 70s. During this period Sweden experienced a rapid urbanisation process, leading those in their young adult years to migrate more frequently than the cohorts before and after them. The urbanisation generation also became the “geographically challenged” generation – to a greater extent than their parents’ generations, they lived far from their kin. These kinds of findings might to some extent explain the long-lived notion of family abandonment – persons born in the 40s and raised in less urban areas could likely grow up with close-living elderly kin. As they reached adulthood and joined the urbanisation flow, they left their ageing parents in the countryside. As they themselves married and had children, the geographical distance to their parents might have seemed like an abandonment of the family. However, in the following cohorts the urbanisation flow had diminished and intergenerational geographical distances became less predominant. In more recent years migration flows in other directions, such as counter- and suburbanisation, may once again increase intergenerational distance albeit, since it is still within the urban area, at shorter distances. Even though the processes of intergenerational separation are not cumulative, as every two generations start out at the same place, in the future there might be times when new forms of restructuring society will once again lead to increased intergenerational distances – one example would be increased inter-urban migration, which would likely separate generations. Increased international migration would also lead to families having transnational networks and contribute to long intergenerational distances. Further, it is important to remember that geography affects the distance between generations – in northern Sweden, leaving one’s ageing parents in one town to live in a neighbouring town might mean a 150 km intergenerational distance, while for example in the Netherlands the same type of relocation might mean a much shorter distance.
From the studies presented here it is not possible to draw the conclusion that the development is linear, that the intergenerational geographical distances are increasing – rather, what has been shown is that periods of intense societal reconstruction, such as periods of urbanisation, may render a separation of generations for periods of time. From a longer time perspective, the trends seem even more complex – for very short distances it seems that we are moving towards a more geographically separated society, however if we widen the distance referred to by “close” the separation is not as obvious.

The notion of “family abandonment” might then have a structural rather than an emotional explanation. It seems that the shortcomings of modernisation theory urge us to seek other, less macro-level focused theories to better understand the non-linear and dynamic changes of the family within society. In the case of the family, according to the modernisation theory, individualisation and geographical separation might be connected to diminishing intergenerational interaction, a notion that has been intensely challenged. Following the thinking of Tilly and colleagues as well as Collins, the regularities seen are due to “mechanical” or practical changes rather than grand narratives (Collins 2010). The rapid urbanisation of Swedish society might in this way be understood as a process that in a mechanical way shaped the intergenerational geographical distances for a period of time, rather than a grand narrative modernisation story that argues for individualisation as the background reason for geographical separation. As the cohort effect is more important than the “development” effect for separating generations, apprehensions of the “lonely elderly” or “family abandonment” may become less interesting, since there seems to be little evidence of a linear trend towards increased spatial separation.

The concept of ambivalence has followed this work as a faithful companion, and as the research has covered new areas, so has the ambivalence. In the second study we found that even though co-residing with a different generation is uncommon in Sweden, living very close is rather common. One understanding of this is that what we see is a case of geographical ambivalence – close, but not too close. Later, in the fourth study based on interviews, some interviewees stated that they could imagine receiving some types of help from their adult children, but that if more extensive help was needed they would prefer help from the welfare state. The ambivalence revealed here may be understood as being connected to what can be described as a clash between structural demands for “successful ageing” and the individual needs that might follow with increased frailty in old age. The wish to be close but to live independently, to have contact but to choose welfare-based assistance rather than being dependent on adult children, can
thus be understood as a way to solve the ambivalence that occurs when individual needs clash with structural demands.

In historical times, such as those illustrated in Paper I, the extreme spatial proximity between generations was a very common feature – at least in the areas analysed. Living in the same household, or on the same farmstead, was the most frequent organisation of life for the elderly, and an elderly person having no adult child in the same village was unusual. And since previous studies have shown that migration was a common phenomenon event in past times, the reasons for intergenerational proximity cannot be explained only by a sedentary lifestyle. In contemporary Sweden, co-residence between generations is unusual; Living very close is a situation encountered by a fraction of people, while having no child within daily reach is rather uncommon. From the second article we learnt that moving close, or even very close, to an adult child seems attractive to migrating elderly parents, and hence a conclusion that can be drawn is that it is an active choice to live extremely close. From this, even without knowing the reasons and rationales behind extreme intergenerational proximity in past and present times, we may draw the conclusion that we have gone from a situation in which living close was the norm to one in which it is instead a conscious choice.

Sweden today is a country that is ageing. Today, 1.7 million persons are 65 years of age or older, meaning that 18.5% of the population is past retirement age (Statistics Sweden 2010). At the same time, the proportion of young is decreasing. Today 23.1% of the population is 20 years of age or younger, a proportion that is expected to decline further. This situation naturally poses a great challenge to society and puts pressure on the welfare state. One solution to the greater needs that can be expected to accompany an ageing population is for family and kin to become more responsible for tending to the needs of their elderly family members. However, we know that intergenerational geographical distances are greater in Sweden than in many other European countries and we also know that, at least as concerns co-residence, we live further apart now than in historical times. Even though the pattern of health and disabilities among older people and how it is connected to increasing life expectancy are not entirely clear, the trend seems to be towards increased years of healthy life. For the intergenerational exchange, the effect of improvements in the health status of the elderly is two-old: Better health among the elderly diminishes, or postpones, the need for help and care, and being healthy might also improve the possibilities to provide assistance to the younger generation. The age difference between generations being prolonged through postponement of childbearing by the younger generation will likely mean that grandparents will to a larger extent have dependent young grandchildren when they reach retirement age. The
needs of the younger generations, for example concerning care for minor children, might therefore be greater than before – while at the other end, elderly parents may be more likely than in the past to be healthy enough to be a resource for their adult children. It is therefore possible that the trend towards even greater downstream flows of assistance between generations will be seen in the future.

In a discussion based on the theory of modernisation and individualisation, it seems important to keep in mind that it is not only the younger generations that are individualised; The elderly are now also a part of the individualisation process. This means that not only does the responsibility for successful ageing fall on the individual, as discussed earlier in this text, but the initiative also has to be acknowledged as being in the hands of the elderly to a greater extent.

As mentioned earlier in this text, ageism is something that needs to be addressed, even from the perspective of family members giving each other help and assistance. For example, that having more than one young relative in an area adds to the attraction for an elderly parent moving there questions proximity as seen as a purely strategic way of gaining access to care and support – because if so, one relative could be expected be enough to secure assistance. If we focus too much on the needs of the elderly generation, assuming that they are frail and in need of support, it is easy to forget the aspect of downstream help and assistance. As has been shown previously, the downstream help is extensive, and elderly parents tend to give more assistance than they receive. As the older generation, compared to the younger one, has been shown to be more sensitive to geographical distance when giving help, it is fair to assume that geographical proximity to elderly parents might be even more important for younger generations receiving help than for elderly parents who get assistance from their adult children.

Another aspect found in the studies relates to the distinction between the young-old and old-old. As concerns migration we found that old-old parents pose less of an attraction for adult children than young-old parents do. As previously found by Litwin and colleagues (2008), among others, old-old people tend to be net receivers of assistance, while the young-old are rather net givers. Our findings can be interpreted as being in line with these results, and one plausible interpretation of the results is that even as concerns migration the downstream, rather than upstream, transfer of assistance is what guides migration to proximity. As concerns help and assistance between generations, it is also important to bear in mind that neither the direction nor the forms of help and exchange are static; They may vary over time, but are likely to exist simultaneously.
Over the years many scholars have refuted the idea of “family abandonment” and contested the gloomy picture painted by earlier intellectuals in which the family would completely lose its role. Judging from the structural solidarity that is manifested in a widespread pattern of intergenerational geographical proximity, this study points in the same direction – we do tend to live close; so close that it must involve a desire. However, the structural possibility to lay some of the responsibility for elderly care on the family does not imply that it is necessarily desirable, for either the older or the younger generation. The reciprocity, to use the words of Polanyi, seems to be as dependent on the redistribution as the market is stated to be dependent on reciprocity and redistribution. In cases of cutbacks in the welfare state’s support of the elderly, we can expect the individual to be affected – as previous research indicates rather a crowding in than a crowding out effect – which in the next step will affect the family. Increased pressure on the family might have different impacts on different groups. For example, the primary caregivers – wives and daughters – may face further responsibilities and experience increased pressure. The macro-level outcome of this development goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but considering previous knowledge about the mixed responsibilities of the welfare state and the family, a “welfare state abandonment” of the elderly might render diminished assistance from the family side as well.

Similarly, even though in the second article grandchildren are shown to have a strong positive effect on elderly persons moving close to adult children, in the interviews we find that the elderly are not prepared to take on full responsibility for the grandchildren. Even though relatives do seem to act as each other’s backup and support, there still seems to be an ambivalence in many aspects of intergenerational interaction – both geographically and emotionally. Help and assistance are given and received, but there still seems to be a need to be independent. One of the less pronounced, but possibly important, aims of the welfare state-based elderly care may then be to answer this need.

Yet another implication of the first three studies is that elderly parents and adult children not only seem to live close, but the older generation actively seeks to move closer if previously separated, and at least from the perspective of the elderly this is often viewed as positive and voluntary. That proximity is described as voluntary, together with evidence of increased separation in the oldest years, indicates that the welfare state still offers a secure alternative for those elderly with extensive needs. If the older generation were to completely rely on the younger one for help and support in old age, we could expect less positive statements about voluntary proximity and increased proximity in the highly advanced ages, when more
help can be expected to be needed. For planners of the society, especially urban planners, this is an important insight – if the different cohorts seek to live close to each other without any “need” guiding the wish to be close, then planned housing should encourage intergenerational proximity through a mix of sizes and sorts of housing.

I would like to return once more to the story of Ebba, told at the beginning of this thesis. Ebba’s life and destiny, even if it was uncommon for her time, illustrates some of the many twists and turns life can bring, and how they can impact the spatial dimension of human life. As Ebba moved through life her family landscape was shaped and her many decisions to reside and migrate seem at least to some extent to have been intertwined with family members, but also with the structural side of society and the welfare system. Her story is an example of how the family level plays an important part as an individual ages – initially as receiver and later as provider of support. In Ebba’s case, geographical proximity in old age was an effect of her adjustment migration, but the preceding intergenerational separation had other reasons like family members leaving the area for marriage or work. The family landscape is shaped and reshaped by population dynamics on the macro and micro levels, and the conditions for intergenerational assistance and support are affected by it. Additionally, the family level is influenced by structural rearrangements in demography and society.

Many questions have arisen from the studies in this thesis, and should be researched further. Elderly immigrants in Sweden might face somewhat different challenges than the Swedish-born group, concerning both family situation and welfare state interaction, and should therefore be researched more extensively. From a migration research perspective, the group that could be defined as “stayers” might render more interest, especially in cases in which more than one successive generation displays sedentary behaviour – dyads that never separated geographically, or that have only experienced short spells of geographical separation. However, such a study would demand a longitudinal approach. Lastly, to gain a more full understanding of potential restructuring of the welfare state support for the elderly, further studies should be conducted on the spatial organisation and migration patterns of the large group of childless elderly in society.

Finally - as in all social science, this thesis only covers a small part of reality, and many aspects of the field of ageing and geography have only been touched upon slightly or have even been left out entirely. The studies presented here have nevertheless shown that demographic and societal changes do impact the possibilities for intergenerational proximity and hence also the potential for interaction. The family landscape – important
for our possibilities to socialise and interact, care for each other and give support, important for the way we live our lives – is truly an interesting landscape to explore.
7. SAMMANFATTNING


I en första delstudie analyseras geografiska avstånd mellan generationer i historisk och modern tid och betydelsen av närhet under olika tidsperioder. I en andra studie analyseras dagens familjelandskap; hur närhet mellan äldre föräldrar och vuxna barn varierar med t.ex. socioekonomiska och geografiska faktorer. Den tredje studien undersöker hur migration bland äldre föräldrar och deras vuxna barn påverkar närhet och avstånd mellan generationer, medan avhandlingens sista delstudie söker förstå betydelsen för de äldre av att bo nära och att ha tillgång till stöd och samvaro med den yngre generationen.

Avhandlingens fyra empiriska studier baseras på tre olika material. I den första studien kombineras historiska befolkningsdata från 1800-talet för två regioner i Sverige, Sundsvallsregionen och Skellefteåregionen, med moderna registerdata över befolkningen för motsvarande områden. Materialet är hämtat från två omfattande databaser vid Umeå universitet - dels från Demografiska Databasen, dels från databasen ASTRID. I artikel II och III används återigen individdatabasen ASTRID med omfattande socioekonomiska och geografiska data och information som kan länka individer till deras släktingar. I den fjärde studien lämnas registren därför och det empiriska materialet utgörs istället av 14 intervjuer med äldre föräldrar.

Den första studien ger en historisk bakgrund till diskussionen om geografisk närhet mellan generationer. I studien analyseras geografiska avstånd mellan generationer under två historiska perioder - 1800-talet och perioden runt det senaste millennieskiftet. Resultaten från de två perioderna jämförs och betydelsen av avstånd och närhet vid olika tider och på skilda platser diskuteras. Studien visar att de riktigt nära avstånden har minskat dramatiskt under de 200 åren – att bo extremt nära var den vanligaste
formen av boende för gamla under 1800-talet men mycket sällsynt bland dagens äldre. Om vi istället analyserar de något längre avstånden är skillnaden långt mindre dramatisk. De allra flesta äldre har idag, liksom för 200 år sedan, något vuxet barn inom dagligt räckhåll och med dagens kommunikationer kan tillgängligheten mellan föräldrar och vuxna barn vara väl så god även om det fysiska avståndet är större. Vi kan därför inte tala om en linjär trend mot ökande avstånd mellan föräldrar och vuxna barn.


Den tredje studien undersöker i vilken utsträckning äldre föräldrar och vuxna barn flyttar nära, eller riktigt nära, varandra. Vi finner att den yngre generationen flyttar i långt större utsträckning än den äldre, men att de äldre när de väl flyttar i större utsträckning flyttar närmare sina barn. Vidare visar studien att fler än en släktning på samma plats, till exempel ett syskon eller barn och barnbarn, ökar platsens attraktionskraft. Vi kan också visa att yngre äldre i större utsträckning än äldre äldre flyttar nära ett vuxet barn. En tolkning av detta är att migrationen påverkas av den yngre generationens behov och att de äldre föräldrarna flyttar nära för att vara en resurs för barnen. När föräldrarna sedan blir gamla och i behov av mer omfattande hjälp blir välfärdsstatens tjänster och service viktigare för dem och den geografiska närheten till barnen kan inte längre upprätthållas.

Den sista artikeln behandlar äldre personer som bor extremt nära ett vuxet barn. I 14 intervjuer med äldre föräldrar som har minst ett vuxet barn inom gångavstånd lyfts frågor om migrationshistorier, det dagliga livet, ömsesidiga utbyten och beroende och oberoende. Studien syftar till att finna ny förståelse för betydelsen av närhet, kontakter och hjälp mellan generationer. Intervjuerna visar att även om de som bor nära varandra fungerar som varandras stöd och uppackning i det dagliga livet så betyder det inte att de äldre förväntar sig, eller ens är beredda att acceptera, mer
omfattande hjälp från sina släktingar. Att ha möjligheten att välja och att få det stöd man behöver från till exempel hemtjänsten kan vara ett sätt att behålla sitt oberoende.
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With the current trends of population ageing as a background, this thesis analyses the geographical distances between elderly parents and adult children, and discusses the importance of proximity for support, care and social contacts. And although the focus here is on contemporary Sweden, the thesis includes also a comparison with historical data from the 19th century and a discussion about the significance of living close in different times.

According to analysis of contemporary Swedish register data, as many as 85% of elderly parents (over 65) have an adult child within the daily reach (50 km), and 72% of the adult children have a parent within the same distance. Women, the well educated and people who belong to the “urbanisation generation” tend to live farther afield from their parents. Comparing the 1990s with the 2000s, no trend of increasing distances was found. In an analysis of how parents and children move in relation to each other, it was found that the adult children, who move more, are more responsible for moving closer. But when moving, the adult children are more often attractions than the elderly parents.

Further, in an interview study of the elderly parents living very close to their adult children, the interviewees emphasized the positive sides of having their children close by, but also the importance of having an independent life.
A family landscape
On the geographical distances between elderly parents and adult children in Sweden

Anna Hjälm

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i hörsal D, Samhällsvetarhuset, fredagen den 28 januari, kl. 10:15
Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Clara Mulder,
University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**ABSTRACT**

With a background in the ageing of the population and the new challenges facing individuals, families and the welfare state, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the changing family landscape and the geographical distances between elderly parents and adult children.

The thesis consists of four empirical studies derived from three different sources of data: In the first paper (Paper I), historical population data is combined with modern register data for two Swedish regions. In the second and third papers, individual-level register data covering the entire Swedish population serves as the empirical starting point. The fourth paper leaves the registers aside and builds upon interviews. Paper I provides an introduction and historical background to the question of intergenerational geographical proximity and distance. The paper analyses intergenerational distances and seeks to compare and discuss the significance of the variations. It is shown that concerning extreme proximity a great decrease has occurred over 200 years, however when it comes to having kin within reach the decrease is less dramatic, and that now, just as then, a majority of elderly parents have an adult child within reach. The article concludes that even though geographical distances between generations vary over time and space, no clear linear trend towards intergenerational geographical separation can be established. In Paper II we analyse some features and trends in intergenerational distances in Sweden. We find that 10% of all elderly parents have at least one child living very close and that a majority, 85%, have an adult child within reach. The study shows no clear trend towards increasing intergenerational separation, but suggests that periods of intense societal restructuring, such urbanisation, can lead to spells of increased intergenerational separation on an aggregated level. Paper III investigates whether, and to what extent, elderly parents and adult children move close to each other. We find that even though the older generation makes up a smaller share of the moves made, when they do move they are more likely to move closer to an adult child. Further, having more than one relative at a destination adds to the attraction, and that older elderly are less likely to move close to a child than younger elderly. One interpretation is that young-old parents serve as a resource for their adult children, while older elderly are more influenced by the need for welfare state based assistance. The last paper, IV, returns to the elderly parents living very close to an adult child. In interviews with 14 elderly the aim of the paper is to gain new understanding about the interaction between intergenerational proximity, assistance and the meaning of being close. Some of the issues raised in the paper relate to migration histories, reciprocity and independence.

**Keywords:** Family, elderly parents, adult children, intergenerational, child-parent proximity, migration, distance, ageing, support, register data, Sweden

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