

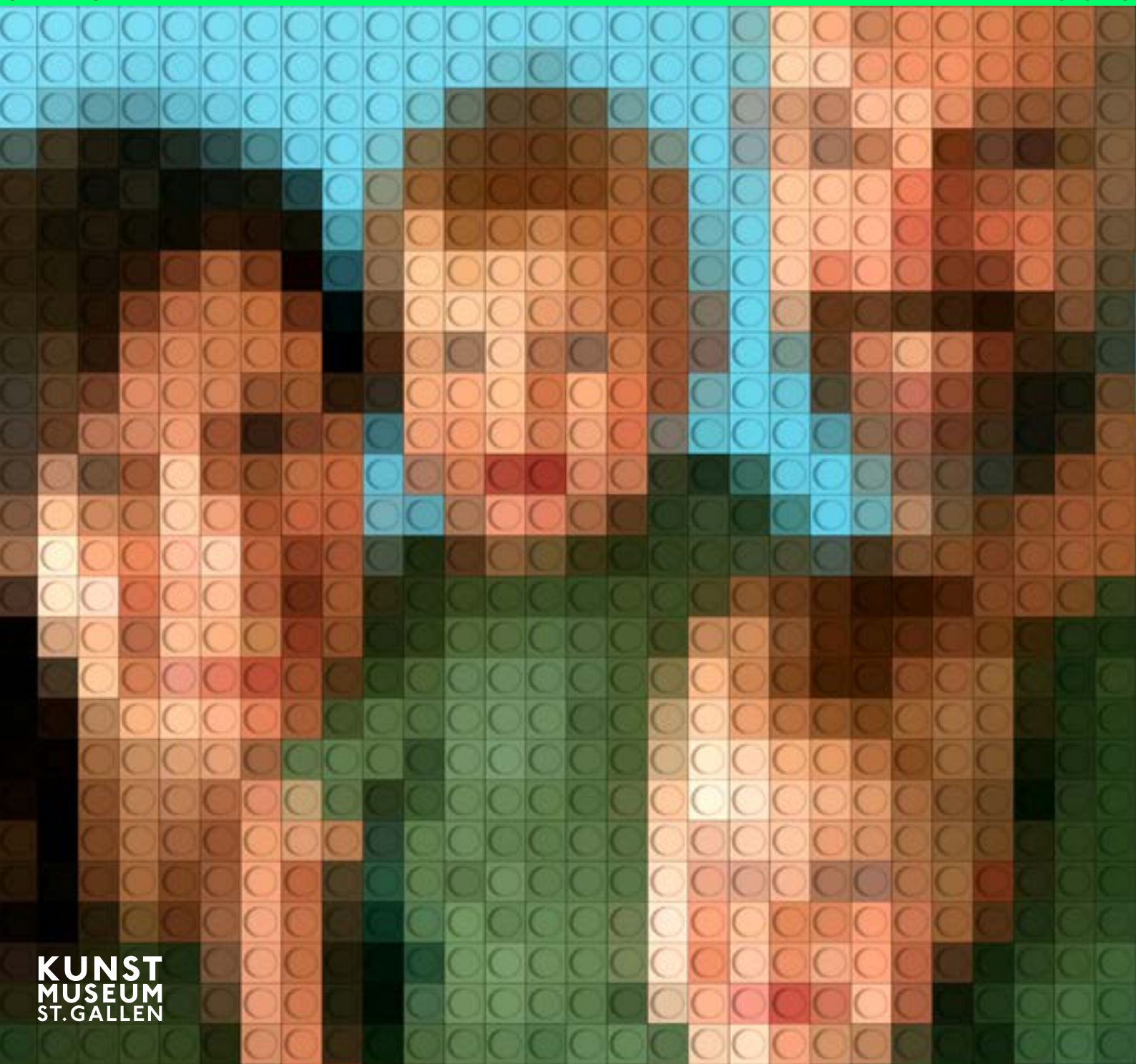
UNBUNDLING THE FAMILY

FAMILIES BETWEEN TRADITION
AND TRANSFORMATION

by Petra Tipaldi, Karin Frick and Johannes Bauer

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UNBUNDLING THE FAMILY

Families between tradition and transformation

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SUMMARY

It is clear that families will always exist in human societies. They are the smallest organisational unit in everyday life. Throughout the course of history and in all cultures, people decide to start a family when they want to have and raise children. However, the situation is changing: birth rates in industrialised countries have been falling sharply worldwide since 1950. The same applies in Switzerland: fifty years ago, women were still having 2.1 children, but nowadays the statistics show they only have 1.4 children. Does this mean the family is becoming less significant as a key social institution? Could it soon be eradicated?

Our study indicates that it will not. However, it is changing. In a representative survey of the Swiss population and in interviews with experts from various disciplines (sociology, psychology, theology, economics), our aim was to find out more. The survey focuses on the busiest time of life – a period in which parents with children living in the household are under the greatest strain and face the highest workload. What functions does the family perform today? How do its members perceive their roles? How are tasks distributed in the family? And what keeps families together in Switzerland today?

Conclusion: Swiss people are very satisfied with their family life. The majority of the Swiss population does not question the notion of the family. The model remains attractive despite rising living costs, a shortage of accommodation and the looming effects of climate change. The notion of family in Switzerland has nevertheless changed considerably as a result of economic and social transformations.

- Modern family concept and a new perception of roles: the desire for a two-child family is the prevailing ideal. However, other life goals – such as personal freedom, job satisfaction, financial independence, good friendships – have become more important to people. Women are more self-determined and financially independent, which means the traditional family model – the man as the breadwinner and the woman bearing the main responsibility for the children and household – is becoming less important. Swiss people are now starting families later, parents are often both in gainful employment and are increasingly sharing family responsibilities in a balanced way, whether it be housework or parenting. This is why improved framework conditions are increasingly important to achieve a good work-life balance.

- Diversity of family structures: there are more single parents, patchwork families and rainbow families. More and more people in Switzerland are opting for alternative life models without marriage or children. The number of single-person households is growing. Different types of family are now more socially accepted than ever before.
- Emotional and social importance of family: despite the changes in its structure and concept, the family remains the main source of emotional support and sense of belonging. The majority of respondents associate family with love, cohesion and security.
- External support and family tasks: seeking external support for family-related tasks is now widely accepted in Switzerland. However, very few people actually want to use external services themselves, especially for childcare and parenting tasks. The main responsibility for household tasks is also rarely assigned to domestic helpers. Managing key family tasks within the nuclear family is still important to Swiss people. This points to a deep-rooted idea of the family as a tight-knit, private unit. This is also supported by the fact that parents would rather spend more time with their family than earn extra money. However, younger respondents are increasingly receptive to external support. The outsourcing of family-related tasks may therefore play a greater role in future.



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