



Fig. 2. Age-specific fertility curves of the Belgian population, by birth cohort and year of occurrence, by administrative region (smoothed values)
[Source: 1991 Belgian census, 20% sample]

(completed fertility) but is also sensitive to changes in the timing of fertility, more particularly the timing of first birth. As a result, in Belgium (but definitely also in other countries) throughout the eighties much discussion was going on that the 'apparent' decline was, in fact, the result of postponement of childbearing. Hence the importance for a longitudinal analysis, as done in figures 1 and 2.

The attractiveness of the results in figure 2 was to illustrate that the 'lower' fertility level in the Flemish region as compared to the Walloon region (a TFR-value of 1.45 vs. 1.66 for the years 1986-1990) was mainly the result of arriving at different stages in the process of postponement and 'recuperation' (of 'lost' fertility after age 30). Until the availability of the 1991 census data it had been impossible to illustrate this phenomenon on the basis of a longitudinal analysis¹³.

¹³ Theoretically, the data are available in the population registers. But Belgium, as other countries, has strict laws concerning confidentiality, with the result that it is impossible to reconstruct birth histories on the basis of administrative registers.