

THE RISE OF COHABITATION AS FIRST UNION AND SOME NEGLECTED FACTORS OF RECENT DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS IN HUNGARY¹

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence, rising prevalence and acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage is without doubt one of the key elements in the profound changes in demographic behaviour in Hungary. The spread of cohabitation undermines the exclusivity of marriage as a form of partnership and questions its dominance. It also provides social context for non-marital births and fundamentally restructures the early stages of family formation. The spread of cohabitation is one of the key elements of the concept of 'second demographic transition' (van de Kaa and Lesthaege 1987).

The spread of cohabitation is not a phenomenon confined to Hungary – its emergence, diffusion, forms and demographic consequences in Western countries have been documented and interpreted extensively in a great number of works (Bachrach, et. al. 2000; Bumpass 2000; Cherlin 1992; Kiernan 2002; Thornton 1988; Smock 2000.; Wait, et. al. 2002). There are also a number of works that describe the Hungarian situation (Bukodi 2004; Carlson and Klinger 1987; Csernák 1992), and in an earlier article, we also attempted to attend to the specific features of cohabitation through comparing cohabiting people to married couples (Pongrácz and Spéder 2003). Our conclusion was that while there were hardly any differences between these groups with regard to their social and economic characteristics, there were serious divergences in their values, orientations and childbearing attitudes.

In the present study, I will focus on the new type of cohabitation (i.e. cohabitation as first union), the characteristics of its diffusion as well as its stability and the correlations – so far rather neglected – behind the changes in cohabitation.

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I stress the importance of the time period when cohabitation began to proliferate, and the time period when this proliferation gained momentum. It is also very important whether stability and meaning of cohabitation as first union have changed as a consequence of its development. At the same time we also have to see how this process changed after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989–1990.² In other words, I would like to clarify whether the change of regime had a role to play in this change of demographic behavior, and if so, what the specifics of this role were.

A further area of inquiry is the way the spread of new-type cohabitation is linked to specific social situations in a structural sense, whether it is possible to identify social groups that played a leading role in the spread of this new form of partnership.

The explanations I offer after the descriptions will not be comprehensive but I do hope to point out possible links that will later be incorporated into a comprehensive explanation.

In the first part of this paper, I will describe the fundamental tendencies of changes over time. Here first I will attempt to show the changes in the proportions of people living in cohabitation at a specific point of time, then through a cohort-specific description of the proportion of people beginning their first union by cohabitation. In the second part of the paper, I will analyze the differences according to highest level of education that will make it possible to provide answers to the question “who are the trendsetters?” In the third part of the paper, I will focus on the changes in the stability of cohabitation as first union. Finally, in the fourth part, I will highlight certain links that might be important in the spread of the new type of cohabitation.

In the analysis I use the data of project “Turning points of the life-course”. The “Turning points of the life-course” is a longitudinal representative survey of the Hungarian population aged 18–74 years in 2001. Running the first wave, at the turn of 2001 and 2002, there were 16 394 persons interviewed about social, economic, demographic, and ideational components of their life.³ In order to see changes in time I had to use other data, what was available in a given form and design and this limited the scope of the comparison in time.

² For an English-language overview of the change of regime and its consequences, see for instance: Adamaski et al. 2003; Andorka et. al. 1999; Offe 1996; Spéder 1999.

³ The project (cf. Spéder 2001; Kapitány 2003) was developed and carried out by the Demographic Research Institute Budapest under the umbrella of the “Generations and Gender Program (GGP)”, an international collaborative research project launched by PAU in Geneva (cf. UNECE/UNFPA, 2000).

SPREAD OF COHABITATION IN HUNGARY

Social analysis on Central and East European societies tend to tie the changes in demographic behaviour, more precisely in family formation, to large scale social changes and the change of the political regimes around 1990. As far as changes in fertility are concerned, vital statistics suggest that this presumption is not without some basis. A clear break and tempo change in the total fertility rate (TFR) in all former Communist countries was observable after the collapse of state socialism. With regards to partnership careers there are only vital statistics on marriages and divorces, and they also suggest a key role for the political regime change in the significant decline of the number of marriages. Unfortunately there is little data on the prevalence and dynamics of cohabitation.

As a starting point, I will describe the prevalence of cohabitation using available census data and the survey results of the “Turning points of the life-course”. The extent of the prevalence of cohabitation can be measured by identifying the proportion of cohabiting people at a specific point of time (Section 1.1), and by measuring the practice of cohabitation as first union (Section 1.2).⁴ The two measures will necessarily report different magnitudes, but should give an impression of very similar developments. Comparison with census data, as mentioned before is limited, because the 2001 data had to be adjusted to the distributions calculated earlier. The differences in the spread of cohabitation as first union will be discussed at length in the next part of the study.

Currently living in cohabitation: slight increase of importance

The proportion of cohabiting persons at a specific point in time provides a clear insight into the spread of cohabitation. The age-specific proportion of cohabiting females demonstrate a very slight, but unequivocal increase in the prevalence of cohabitation during the twenty year period before the collapse of state-socialism in 1990 (Table 1). The percentages of cohabiting women suggest a quite marginal share for cohabitants among all women, however if we could identify the percentage among all partnerships, it would be at least twice as high in the mentioned time period.⁵ A clear tempo change in growth can be identified after 1990, especially among younger females. In ten years, the proportion increased five times in the youngest female age group. Despite the increase, the proportion of those living in cohabitation has not surpassed the

⁴ If more detailed data were available, other measures could be used as well (e.g. length of cohabitation, previous occurrence of cohabitation, etc.)

⁵ The data of the two censuses (1980, 1991) in Czechoslovakia did not show an increase of the prevalence of cohabitation during Communism (Kantorová 2004:25).

ratio of those living in marriage in any of the age groups. Marriage was clearly dominant in the younger age groups as well as among all partnership relations.

Table 1
*The percentage of women living in cohabitation by different cohorts,
1970, 1984, 1990, 2001 (%)*

Age groups	Years			
	1970	1984	1990	2001
15–29 years	1.1	2.0	2.9	11.0
30–49 years	1.8	2.8	3.7	8.2
All, 15–49 years	1.5	2.5	3.4	9.5

Source: 1970, 1984, 1990 Csernák 1992:36 (using census and micro census data)
2001: own calculation based on the census of 2001, HCSO

Differences among those living in cohabitation could provide us with an insight into the changing meaning of cohabitation over time. The scope of our analysis will be restricted by the limitations of the data sets we used – however, some basic characteristics can still be compared. I was focusing on marital status, because this characteristic is available for each of the analyzed time points. Due to the changing methods of data collection only rough comparison can be made over time with regards to educational differences, urban/rural background and fertility.

The analysis by Carlson and Klinger on the characteristics of Hungarian women living in cohabitation at three specific points in time (1970, 1980, 1984) and their comparison of the Hungarian results with the situation in other European countries identified several distinctly Hungarian features at that time (Carlson and Klinger 1987). Since in Hungary, widowed and divorced women were twice as likely to live in cohabitation as never-married ones, it is clear that cohabitation occupied a later period in the life-course than it did in Western Europe. In Hungary, post-divorce cohabitation was primarily responsible for the prevalence and spread of cohabitation (Table 2 and Table 3). In 1970, around one-tenth of divorced (and widowed) women lived in cohabitation, whereas the corresponding figure for never-married women was 1.8% (Table 2).

What kind of changes can we identify since the 1970s? There were at least two phases of development previous to the large scale socio-political changes in 1990. In the first phase, prior to the mid-1980s, there was a clear increase in the proportion of divorced cohabitants; the likelihood of such partnerships rose from 12.6% to 17.2% and the proportion of divorced cohabitants jumped from 31.2% to 47.3%. In the second phase, after the mid-1980s, the role of never-married cohabitants increased, with their likelihood growing from 3.4% to

5.1% (Table 2) and their proportion among all cohabitation rose from 28.1 to 35.5% (Table 3).

After the socio-political transformation, there is a clear acceleration in the spread of cohabitation: at the time of the census 2001 the share of never-married women constituted three-fifth (61.3%) of all cohabitants. However, the likelihood of never-married women to be living in cohabitation at a specific point in time is not necessarily higher as that of divorced women (Table 2); cohabitation of divorced women ('post-marital') make up a substantial part (30.7%) of all cohabitation today in Hungary.

With regards to social differences, Carlson and Klinger noticed clear differences between Hungarian and Western figures. Hungarian cohabitants came from the lowest social (educational) strata and surprisingly exhibited higher-than-average fertility rates. Analysing social differences on the basis of the most recent Hungarian survey ("Turning points of the life-course"), we concluded that there were negligible differences between never-married women living in cohabitation and women living in marriage with regards to their socio-economic status (education, economic activity) (Pongrácz and Spéder 2003). However, their fertility behaviour showed profound differences in 2001: never-married cohabitants were practically always living without children. On the other hand, divorced and widowed cohabitants exhibited almost the same fertility patterns in 2001 as in the preceding decades.⁶

Our review of the prevalence of cohabitation as an alternative living arrangement to marriage showed that during the years of state socialism, cohabitation was indeed practiced, albeit in a limited fashion but certainly with rising prevalence. At first it was clearly a post-marital living arrangement but later, and certainly during the late 1980s, pre-marital cohabitation was on the increase. A closer look at the cohort specific features of first unions will hopefully shed more light on the changing partnership behaviour.

⁶ Of course they show differences as well, but that is not the focus of our study.

Table 2
*The proportion of cohabiting women by marital status and by different cohorts
 1970, 1984, 1990, 2001 (%)*

Marital status	Years			
	1970	1984	1990	2001
<i>Age group 15–29</i>				
Single	1.2	2.7	4.1	14.0
Married	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.5
Widowed	13.4	20.3	9.8	–
Divorced	12.2	16.8	18.1	33.6
All	1.1	2.0	2.9	11.0
<i>Age group 30–49</i>				
Single	6.7	8.0	8.8	28.2
Married	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.6
Widowed	8.9	13.2	11.7	18.8
Divorced	12.6	17.2	21.1	28.6
All	1.8	2.8	3.7	8.3
<i>Age group 15–49</i>				
Single	1.8	3.4	5.1	16.1
Married	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.6
Widowed	9.2	13.6	11.6	18.8
Divorced	12.5	17.1	20.6	28.6
All	1.5	2.5	3.4	9.5

Source: 1970, 1984, 1990 Csernák 1992:36 (using census and micro census data)
 2001: own calculation based on the census of 2001, HCSO

Table 3
*The distribution of cohabiting women by marital status,
 1970, 1984, 1990, 2001/2002 (%)*

Marital status	Years			
	1970	1984	1990	2001
Single	28.1	28.1	35.5	61.3
Married	27.7	12.0	7.5	3.2
Widowed	12.7	12.6	7.6	4.7
Divorced	31.5	47.3	49.9	30.7
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1970, 1984, 1990 Csernák 1992:38 (using census and micro census data)
 2001: own calculation based on the census of 2001, HCSO

Cohabitation as first union

Cohabitation as post-marital union has been widespread in other countries as well (Prinz 1985; Kiernan 2002). What must be regarded as a new phenomenon is that cohabitation often precedes and at times completely replaces marriage as a form of first union. Looking at cohabitation as first partnership we cannot distinguish cohabitation as “trial marriage” from cohabitation as “alternative to marriage”. This will be discussed in the Section 3.

In analysing changes of demographic behaviour we have to face an intriguing problem in the spread of cohabitation as first partnership: in which generation (cohort) and in what period did it become popular? Before looking at the ratio of cohabitation (vs. marriages) among first partnerships, let us examine whether the timing of union formation in the life course have undergone modifications.

When comparing data from people born in different periods, we have to examine specific periods of equal length within the life course. We determined the rate at which people belonging to the specific cohorts had formed unions by the ages of 20, 25 or 30. We only calculated our results for specific cohorts: we are only publishing data on women who were born after World War II.

Table 4

The ratio of women who formed a lasting partnership by the ages of 20, 25, 30 within the given birth cohorts (%)

Birth date	Had a lasting partnership by the age of		
	20	25	30
1947–1951	40.8	83.6	91.9
1952–1956	42.2	85.9	94.1
1957–1961	45.2	85.5	94.5
1962–1966	45.9	87.1	94.1
1967–1971	38.1	78.8	89.6
1972–1976	33.8	69.2	–
1977–1981	27.4	–	–

Source: 2001/2002: own calculation, Turning points in the life course, DRI.

The postponement of union formation in the life course is clearly observable in our figures. Differences among the older age birth cohorts are not significant. A noteworthy drop can be found among those born in the late 1960s and later. The figures regarding the 20-year age-cuts dropped from over 40% to under 30%: while 45.9% of the women born in the early 1960s had been living in lasting partnerships before the age of 20, the corresponding figure for those born in the late 1970s is 27.4% (Table 4). At the same time it seems that those

born later will not reach the partnership-ratios of those born earlier, even by the time they reach 30.

The decline of the proportion of those who formed a lasting partnership by a given age was first observable in the cohort of women born between 1967 and 1971 and the proportion continued to decline in all subsequent groups that could still be analysed. The members of this above-mentioned group were 20 years old between 1987 and 1991. Thus it seems that young adults started to postpone union-formation exactly when the political regime changed, perhaps a few years earlier. The trend gained strength after the change of the political regime and it still continuing till the time of the survey. Let us turn now to the investigation of cohabitation as first union.

If we look at Figure 1 or Table 5, it will be apparent that cohabitation as first union is much more widespread in all cohorts and all age groups than could have been expected on the basis of the cross-sectional data (as we have seen it in previous section). The diffusion is measurable even in the case of those born in the 1950s. 10% of the women born in the late 1950s (1957 to 1961) who were 25 years of age between 1982 and 1986 began their first union in cohabitation. The proportion of new cohabitations among those born just a few years later is twice as high and it is even higher among those born in the mid-to-late 1970s.

On the basis of our data, it is clear that some 20–25% of those who formed their first union in the period immediately preceding the change of political regime, did it in a form of cohabitation. It is then clear that the new type of partnership was present in Hungarian society even before the change of the regime.

A dramatic increase of cohabitation as first partnership at the expense of marriage seems to have started in the cohort of women born in the first half of the 1960s (1961 to 1966) and this tendency continued up till the time of the survey (Figure 1, Table 5). In this particular cohort, the ratio of women starting their first partnership in cohabitation increased two-fold as compared to the previous cohort, while the ratio of those starting their first partnership in a marriage declined.

The 'shift in dominance' between cohabitation and marriage as first unions in the adult life, occurred in the group born between 1972 and 1976, whose members became adults after the change of the political regime. In this group, more people started their partnership careers in cohabitation than in marriage before their 25th birthday. This shift in the primacy of cohabitation or eclipse of marriage as the form of the first union, happened relatively rapidly: it took 15 years that cohabitation became dominant and not an insignificant form of first partnership.

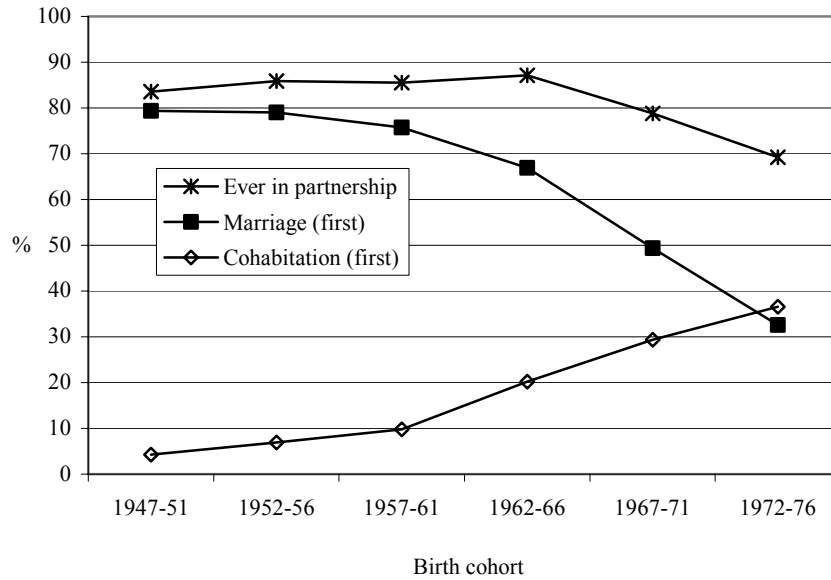


Figure 1
Marriage versus cohabitation as first partnership
Ever in partnership, first union as marriage, first union as cohabitation
by age 25 (female)

When examining historical differences, let us recall the fact that the tempo change in the increase of the ratio of cohabitation as first union can be found among those born between 1962 and 1966. These people were aged 24–28 in 1990 and a significant majority of them started their partnership careers prior to the political regime change. The diffusion of cohabitation as first union did not start after the change of the political regime but predated it: *started before the change of regime and gathered momentum subsequently*. Summing up what has been said while postponement union-formation is closely tied to the change of the political regime, it is clear that the spread of cohabitation as first union started prior to the regime change.

Table 5
The ratio of those living in cohabitation or marriage as first partnership by the age of 20, 25 and 30, in certain birth cohorts

	By 20		By 25		By 30	
	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation
1947–1951	37.9	2.8	79.4	4.3	86.6	5.4
1952–1956	37.5	4.7	79.0	6.9	85.6	8.5
1957–1961	38.7	6.6	75.7	9.8	82.5	12.1
1962–1966	34.3	11.6	66.9	20.2	71.1	22.5
1967–1971	19.6	18.4	49.4	29.4	55.5	34.1
1972–1976	14.0	19.7	32.6	36.6	–	–
1977–1981	5.0	22.3	–	–	–	–

Source: 2001/2002: own calculation, Turning points in the life course, DRI.

EDUCATIONAL DIFFERENCES: WHO WERE THE TRENDSETTERS?

The rising popularity of cohabitation raises the questions (1) whether there were specific social groups in the vanguard of this process, (2) whether there were groups that followed the patterns and (3) whether we can identify groups that for a longer or shorter time period resisted the spread of this new type of partnership. There are a great number of studies that attempted to define the structural circumstances conditioning the spread of cohabitation, while other studies focused on the social attributes of people living in cohabitation in an attempt to discover possible structural connections (Blom 1994; Bukodi 2004; Bumpass, Lu 1999; Cherlin 1992; Hoem 1992; Kantorova 2004; Kiernan 2000, 2002; Villeneuve-Gokpal 1991). There are two dominant hypotheses according to structural differences in cohabitation.

College graduates as trendsetters. Because cohabitation as first union, or pre-marital cohabitation, are new types of lifestyle, it can be assumed that they were spreading among groups with social privileges. Affluent young people could afford to live together without marriage, and they could deviate more easily from the prevailing, dominant life style. The diffusion of the new lifestyles than ‘trickled down’ from the top of the social hierarchy to the lower strata. This conception would fit in well into the paradigm of the ‘second demographic transition.’ Supporting results were found partly in France (Villeneuve-Gokpal 1991).

Working class phenomena. Many researchers, who had assumed the college graduate hypothesis, came to the conclusion that if there was an identifiable structural correlation at all, cohabitation was more frequent among working

class people and later, their children. Research in the US showed that cohabitation as first union spread not among college and university graduates but among working class women (Bumpass, Lu 1999; Cherlin 1992; Thornton et al. 1995).

Two other factors should be noted here additionally. Those studies that demonstrate the influence of religious conviction suggest that the spread of cohabitation is not determined by structural circumstances but by ideational ones. The same can be said of studies focusing on socialization influences, demonstrating the influence of the divorce of the parents and their post-divorce cohabitation. It should be noted that these findings are in line with the theory of the second demographic transition.

Because of the limitation of our data, we could carry out only a limited analysis here. In the first wave of our survey⁷ we could employ only one indicator, namely the highest level of education, to measure social differences. Although the level of education of an individual can change over the life course, this change is institutionally constituted, and in Hungary, until recent times, life-long learning has not become a widespread practice. Therefore we can assume a very high correlation rate between the level of education before the first union and the highest level of education. The level of education was always a very good proxy for social status under state-socialism, and what is more, its central role not only remained, but also gained strength during and after the socio-political transition.

If we look at the diffusion of cohabitation by completed levels of education, we will be somewhat nearer to the answers to the questions posed earlier. Let us first look at the ratio at which women of different education levels chose cohabitation as the form of their first union by the age of 25⁸. We should start with comparing the data of those born between 1957 and 1961 and those between 1962 and 1966. Since this is the time period when cohabitation as a first union started to spread.

The ratio of those opting for cohabitation exhibits a strong increase in the groups with the lowest and the highest completed education levels. The increase in the former group is 14.7% to 30.3% and in the latter, 5.7% to 18.8%. While the ratio is the highest among those with the lowest education level, the rate of increase is highest among those with a higher education. As for the next cohort, the ratio of those starting out in cohabitation grows to 49.3% among the least educated and to 24% among the most educated. In these cohorts, those

⁷ Our data is based on the first wave of a panel study, employing a limited number of retrospective questions, therefore we cannot analyse pre-event social differences and their influence on the occurrence of an event. After the second wave a more sophisticated analysis of social differentials will be possible.

⁸ We could not select age 20 as the dividing line because those who are to have higher degrees are still in school.

with a secondary school level seem to be ‘catching up’. They reached the ratio recorded among those with a higher educational level. In the youngest cohort (born between 1972–1976), the ratio seems to be growing uniformly – with the exception of those with the lowest education – and it is at around 35%.

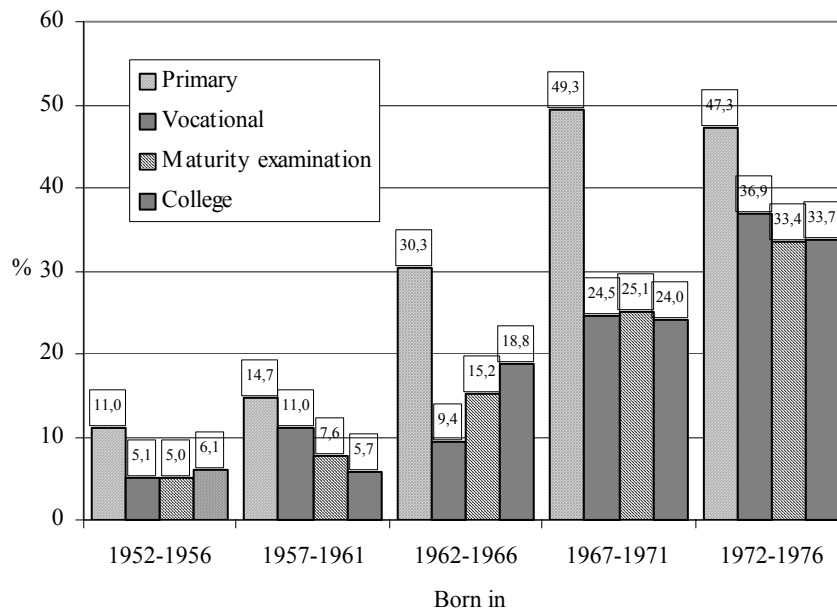


Figure 2

The ratio of women choosing cohabitation as first union at age 25, by levels of education and by different cohorts (%)

The ratios mentioned here are one possible type of the indicators describing the spread of cohabitation as first union, measuring the diffusion against the total number of women in a given cohort. It is a suitable indicator, but we should examine the spread of cohabitation by the ratio of those whose first union was marriage or cohabitation within the group of people establishing some kind of a first union at all by a given age. This measure filters out the fact that those with higher education have less, ‘not enough’ time to form unions before the age of 25 as compared to the group with a secondary school level. The ratios thus calculated will fine-tune our picture of the diffusion of cohabitation further, but will not change our former results dramatically (Figure 3). With the exception of the youngest cohort (those born between 1972 and 1976) the ratio of women starting their partnership careers in cohabitation was always highest among those with the lowest education and it was among these women

that the cohabitation as first union became dominant, exceeding 50%. We can see this first among those born between 1967 and 1971.

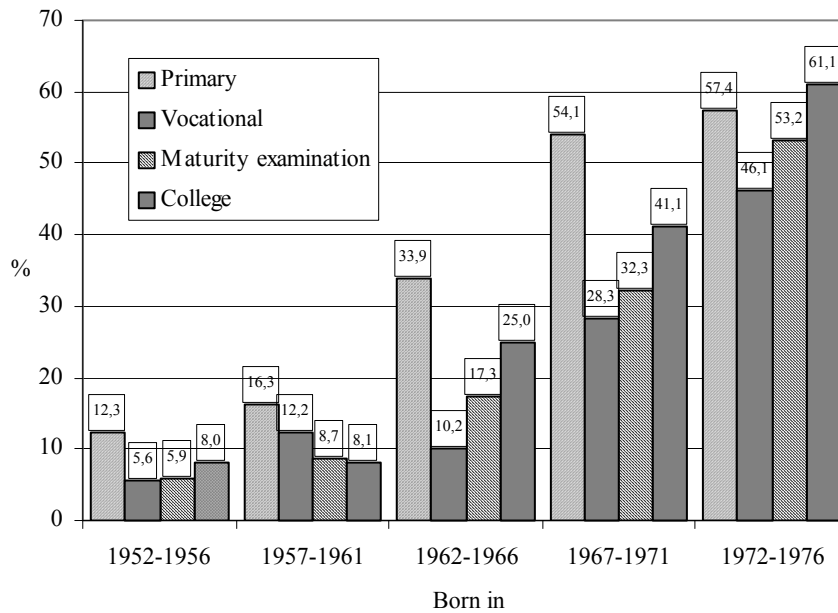


Figure 3

The ratio of woman choosing cohabitation as first union until age 25 in relation to those entering any kind of union by different cohorts (%)

At the same time, it is very clear that there is a dramatic increase among those with a higher educational level. While the ratio is 8% in the age group born between 1957–1961, the figure in the next cohort is 25% and subsequently 41.1% and 61.1%.

By way of summary, we can say that in the period and in the cohorts where union formation primarily meant tying the knot, cohabitation was chosen as the first form of union at an above-average (10%) ratio among those with the *lowest education levels*. Dynamic growth started among the lowest and highest educated simultaneously and the ratios grew significantly in the group born between 1962 and 1966. Those with a secondary education exhibited ‘follower’ behaviour during the period under examination.

Our findings seem to support the ‘working class hypothesis’, but perhaps it would be advantageous to work out an approach that incorporate both processes: the bottom-up and the top-down diffusions as well. For this we should

consider our findings with regards to the attributes of non-marital births and births in cohabitation (cf. Spéder 2004). According to our multivariate analyses (not shown), women giving birth in cohabitation are either much younger or much older than women giving birth in marriage. They definitely have low educational levels, tend not to be religious and tend to belong to the Romany population. Our final conclusion was that while it was true that cohabitation was a popular form of partnership in all social groups, especially at the two end of the social hierarchy, childbearing in cohabitation was more likely in the lower social groups. Caution must be asserted, because these analyses were not confined to first relationships, since we analysed the partnership context at the time of birth, but this allowed us to form the assumption, with regards to childbearing in first cohabitation.

On the basis of the above, we presume that divergent forces propel the spread of cohabitation. Its diffusion among those living in advantageous social circumstances is likely to be influenced by different structural circumstances and considerations than its diffusion among people in the lower social strata, in whose case it is often coupled with childbearing. While in the former case, we have diffusion patterns characteristic of fads, behind which in all probability lies the system of motives summarized in the paradigm of the second demographic transition, in the bottom-to-top pattern of diffusion behaviour pattern of a marginalized group can be seen. As for groups in the middle, they appear to be following the trends set by those of advantageous status on the one hand, while on the other hand, they might attempt to distance themselves from lifestyles popular in lower social groups by reinforcing the dominant and traditional patterns. This attitude is not consciously ranged in opposition to dominant models – rather, it finds these models neutral and/or not practicable for its own good. Finally, we should remember that there was and still is a third type of cohabitation prevalent in Hungary – post-marital cohabitation. The above considerations are in line with Kiernan's and others assumption, when she says the ambiguous social-economical connections 'alert us to the possibility that there may be different imputes behind childless and fertile cohabitation' (Kiernan 2002: 6; Villeneuve-Gokpal 1991).

STABILITY OF COHABITATION AS FIRST PARTNERSHIP

From the perspective of the change in meaning and content of cohabitation, it is a fundamental question whether the partnership careers starting with cohabitation will (1) stay that way, (2) will be converted into a marriage or (3) will be dissolved after a certain time period (Bumpass and Sweet 1989; Kiernan 2000; Toulemon 1997). Popular opinion in Hungary prefers the 'trial marriage' aspect of cohabitation, but many hold cohabitation to be an alternative to marriage.

An analysis of *change over time* clearly poses the question whether there was a change in the proportion of transformation from cohabitation as first union to other forms of living arrangements? Furthermore, it is also interesting to see how much the proliferation of cohabitation as first union results in a change in the nature (stability) of cohabitation as far as it is measured by changes in conversions. As for the role of the change of political regime that took place around 1990, we can formulate the following question: With regard to the stability of cohabitation and its conversion to marriage, what changes do we find between the first cohabitations formed after the change of the regime and the patterns dominant before?

Given that we are interested in differences of the partnership careers that started out as cohabitations in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, it seemed reasonable to change the grouping of respondents. We abandoned the grouping according to birth dates (birth cohorts) and set up partnership cohorts instead. Those who formed their cohabitation as first union in the same chronological period belong to *the same partnership cohort*. We can argue that if one specific chronological period in historical time and the system of institutional configurations and social expectations associated with that particular period have a bearing on the partnership histories, then temporal changes will be borne out most clearly by partnership cohorts thus formed⁹. We calculated transitions – ratios of staying in cohabitation, transition into marriage, divorce after transformation into marriage and separation – for 12, 24 and 60-month periods after their commencement. Table 6 shows our findings, and it is easy to detect that the developments according to the different time intervals are very similar.

Considering the developments, it is clear that the stability of cohabitation grows simultaneously with the spread of first-union cohabitations. There is a nearly twofold increase in the ratio of stable cohabitations in the analysed cohorts: in the two-year period, their ratio grows from 34.6% to 61.3% and in the five year period, from 16.9% to 32.1%. On the other hand, the proportion of couples transforming cohabitation into marriage is on the constant decline. In this particular group, the ratio of those divorcing after marriage practically evaporates, even though they constituted one-seventh of all partnership careers starting with cohabitation at the turn of the 1980s.

These ratios are not substantially different from European patterns, where the following transition rates were prevalent in the early 1990s: in Austria 53%, in the Western part of Germany 50%, in France 33% of all first cohabitations turned into marriage in the 25–39 age group (Kiernan 2000. 52).

Let us now turn to the question, whether the increase in cohabitation as first union indicated a spread of cohabitation as a trial marriage or as an alternative to marriage? A comprehensive answer can of course only be provided at the

⁹ There is a strong correlation between partnership and birth cohorts, but there is no complete overlap.

completion of the life course. It is, however, an indisputable fact that after a longer period (5 years) more people transform first cohabitations into marriages than stay in cohabitation. In other words, the majority of first cohabitations are premarital cohabitations or trial marriages. At the same time, time-sequence analysis shows that cohabitations turn into marriages at an increasingly later point in time. There are signs of cohabitation becoming an independent, lasting and alternative form of union, but about the possible diffusion of this kind of partnership it is difficult to make even rough estimates.

Let us finally address the question whether the change of political regime had brought about a radical change in the dissolubility of first cohabitations and in their transition rates. We have seen earlier that there was an increase in the stability of cohabitations but this seemed to be a direct continuation of trends begun in the 1980s. The radical increase in first cohabitations thus did not go hand-in-hand with radical changes in the features of these relationships, so it is our conclusion that the regime change had not substantially altered the ongoing tendencies.

Table 6
*Transitions from first partnership as cohabitation:
12,24,60 months after, by partnership-cohorts (%)*

Type of transitions during a given time after the start of cohabitation	Year entering cohabitation as first partnership				
	1977–1981	1982–1986	1987–1991	1992–1996	1997–1999*
<i>After 1 year (12 months)*</i>					
Permanent cohabitation	57.1	65.1	70.0	75.0	81.1
Cohabitation then marriage	28.2	19.7	18.4	15.6	14.6
Cohab.-Marriage-Divorce	10.2	11.2	7.0	3.7	0.2
Separation	4.5	3.9	4.7	5.7	4.1
<hr/>					
<i>After 2 years (24 months)</i>					
Permanent cohabitation	34.6	44.7	50.2	57.4	61.3
Cohabitation then marriage	41.9	34.2	33.9	28.4	32.7
Cohab.-Marriage-Divorce	16.8	13.5	9.2	5.1	0.5
Separation	6.7	7.6	6.7	9.0	5.5
<hr/>					
<i>After 5 years (60 months)</i>					
Permanent cohabitation	16.9	20.4	26.7	32.1	
Cohabitation then marriage	55.1	52.6	51.8	50.4	
Cohab.-Marriage-Divorce	16.9	15.1	7.8	3.2	
Separation	11.2	11.8	13.7	14.4	

* The last time period regarding the establishment of first partnership for 12 months transitions is 1997–2000.

COMMENTS ON THE EMERGENCE AND SPREAD OF COHABITATION
AS FIRST PARTNERSHIP: SOME NEGLECTED MECHANISMS AT
WORK

As we have seen, cohabitation became the dominant form as first union after the start of the socio-political transformation in 1990. Several factors (could have) played significant roles in this process: the expansion of the educational system and the longer education of adults in higher proportion, the emergence of oversupply in the labour market, the growing difficulties of gaining a position in the labour market and the instability of the early labour market careers, increasing difficulties in access to housing, the growing insecurity and instability and so on. But the spread of cohabitation as first partnership clearly started before the change of the regime, therefore there is a need to search for factors at work in the state-socialist, centrally organized society.

NiBrochlain in her synthesis of a conference held at the beginning of the 1990s summarized and categorized a great number of factors that created and reinforced the model of mass and early marriages in the state-socialist countries (NiBrochlain 1993). She specified three groups of factors: (1) factors influencing availability of partners, (2) factors influencing feasibility of marriage, (3) factors influencing desirability of marriage. NiBrochlain, as well as others, among other factors, placed a great emphasis on the influence of family and population policy measures, the conditioning role of the political system and the consequent significance of the 'family as source of authenticity and individual fulfilment.' Our task here is the opposite: we need to find correlations and conditions which facilitated the proliferation of a new type of partnership, replacing or preceding marriage. We do not aim at a comprehensive overview but would like to reveal the possible motivations behind this marginal phenomena.

The abrupt increase of divorce in the early phase of state-socialism

Following and adopting Lesthaeghe's view (Lesthaeghe 1996), we believe that the early and abrupt diffusion of divorce played a crucial role in questioning and undermining the institution of marriage. Divorces influenced the proliferation of cohabitation in a number of different ways.

First, the increasing number of marriages ending in divorce eroded and demolished the idea that 'marriage is for life'. Hungary and the other state-socialist countries were ranked among the first countries in Europe with regard to the Total Divorce Rate (TDR) after the 1960s. The figures from 1970 clearly exemplify this situation: while in France the TDR was 0.12 and in the Netherlands 0.11, in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia the figures were 0.25 and 0.26 respectively. Although the TDR was always high in Sweden and Denmark

(0.23 and 0.25 in 1970) the Russian figures were higher at the same time (0.34).¹⁰ The high rankings by TDR figures of the state-socialist countries relative to other European countries were maintained with some minor modification until the socio-political transformation.

Secondly, the increasing divorce rate played a role not only through eroding the idea of 'marriage for life', but it also opened the possibility for post-divorce living arrangements. The centuries-old practice of remarriage after widowhood could make it self-evident that remarriage is a possible stage in post-divorce partnership carriers. However, besides post-divorce remarriage and singlehood, unmarried cohabitation also spread in Hungary in the 1970s as Carlson and Klinger showed (Carlson and Klinger 1987). We do not have a clear explanation¹¹ why in Hungary those establishing new partnerships gradually favoured cohabitation – 'partners in life' as Carlson and Klinger put it – at the expense of remarriage. Whatever the reason is, the gradual increase in post-divorce cohabitation clearly indicates that tolerance towards unmarried cohabitation was growing. Furthermore, post-divorce cohabitation could have paved the way for cohabitation as first partnership.

Thirdly, the generational transmission of behaviour patterns could have also contributed to the emergence and spread of cohabitation as first partnership. It is well known that children of divorced parents are more likely to begin their first union in cohabitation. (Cherlin, et al. 1995; Thornton 1991; Villeneuve-Gokpal 1991). Furthermore, children of parents who established their post-divorce partnership as cohabitation have a more positive attitude toward cohabitation and are more likely to begin their first union as cohabitation. This mechanism works in the same way in Hungary as well.¹² In the light of the increase in divorces at the very start of the 1960s, it seems obvious that in the 1980s, many of the children whose parents were in the first cohort to get divorced en masse chose unorthodox forms of partnership when they reached the appropriate age. Therefore it is not very surprising that some of these children preferred (pre-marital) cohabitation as first partnership by way of precaution or for other reasons.

The structural features of post-divorce cohabitation and the proliferation of cohabitation as first partnership may confirm the phenomenon described above. As Carlson and Klinger showed, those who lived in unmarried cohabitation in

¹⁰ Data are from the Recent demographic Trends in Europe, 2001. p. 66.

¹¹ Perhaps there were unfavourable institutional configurations for some social strata after remarriage, perhaps divorcing parties blamed not only each other, but the institution of marriage as well.

¹² The data for 2001 show us: among the age group 30–39 49.5% commenced their first union as cohabitation if parent were divorced, and 32.9 if not. Among women in younger age group the ratios are 80% and 63.1% respectively. An extensive analysis of this question can be found in Bukodi (2004) using other data.

Hungary came from the most disadvantaged social strata (Carlson and Klinger 1987, 94). This distinguished the Hungarian 'partners in life' from Western Europeans living in cohabitation. We showed earlier in this paper that the spread of cohabitation as first union started in the group with the lowest educational level, who were clearly the trendsetters in the 1980s, and still have the highest likelihood to start their partnership-career with cohabitation today. Therefore it can be ascertained that both post-divorce cohabitation and cohabitation as first partnership were practiced at the bottom end of the social hierarchy, perhaps as accepted living arrangements of very similar 'social milieus'.

Value orientations in the 80s: 'one-sided individualization' and consumerism

Several socio-integrative mechanisms of the centrally organized state-socialist system served to strengthen the family and contributed to the emergence of unified pattern in family formation. Studies giving a full account of the role of the family under state-socialism rightly described it as a 'place of refuge', an 'asylum', the 'realm of freedom', the 'source of authenticity and individual fulfilment' (Andorka 1997; Csernák 1992; Mozny 1991, 1997; Somlai 1997). However, there were other mechanisms, such as the atomisation of society, the development of the consumer markets, which factors worked in a different and sometimes opposite way – and here we are concerned with the ones that undermined the relative importance of the family.

The complete destruction of all formerly existing organisations, (all sorts of religious and civic organizations, youth and sport associations, etc.) was a prerequisite for running the centrally organized social system. Religious authority and communal control were destroyed. Furthermore, the hindering of all kind of community formation, especially horizontal organizations, was part of the immanent logic of a centrally organized society. Ultimately, social integration was centrally organized and had to be formally legitimised. Ideologically and practically, the ideal member of the society was not embedded in communities, but was participating only in the centrally organized social hierarchy. A system of this kind of integration *atomised* the society, forced and caused a '*one-sided individualization*' (Hankiss et al. 1978). The one-sidedness constituted in liberation from the traditional ties of authorities and communities, without horizontal integration.¹³

¹³ Not only the functioning of the political system, but the "forced industrialisation" (Kornai 1968), and the subsequent forced regional and social mobility contributed to the liberation from old community ties. It is not our task to judge the consequences of social and regional mobility, but it is important to stress, that it was unusually intensive in the very early phase of state-socialism. Furthermore its contribution to deterioration of all kind of community was clear.

From the point of view of the system, a kind of 'success' could be confirmed by the above mentioned research project on values at the beginning of the 1980s. Hankiss and his colleagues used the Rokeach-test and different multivariate methods to explore and understand the value orientation of people in Hungarian society (Hankiss et al. 1978). They compared the Hungarian figures with American ones. The results were surprising and rather shocking: the value orientation of the Hungarian and American societies was much more similar than it was expected and a high level of individualization could be found in both societies. A crucial difference was traceable in the unembeddedness of the individuals in communities, in horizontal organizations. That is why this system of values was named as 'one-sided individualisation' in Hungary.

Why is it so important to stress the 'one-sided individualisation' and underscore the 'forced deterioration/dissolution' of communities? Because marriage is not only a private institution but a public one as well (Lesthaeghe 1996; Thornton et al. 2005). Marriage incorporates additional social characteristics and binds ties not only between two individuals, but also between relatives and members of the wider social and religious community. Upon marriage, the partners acknowledge and accept rules of the appropriate community and pledge their 'eternal' alliance to each other before the community. Consequently the process of 'one-sided individualisation' going in hand with the dissolution of the communities indicated the undermining of marriage as a public institution.

The consideration of some specific features of the Hungarian economic model, within the state socialist economic system (Kornai 1992) is also relevant, especially the factors influencing partnerships. After the anti-Soviet revolution in 1956, Hungarian economic policy turned towards individual *consumer-orientation*. The post-revolution political regime strived to gain more popularity by offering the people higher standards of living. It was no accident that Hankiss in his comparison stated that Hungarians were more *hedonistic* than Americans. The public debates about fertility decline in the early 1960s in Hungary carried a clear mark of the prevailing consumerism and its possible influence on the family, summarized in the slogan 'baby or car'¹⁴. We know from the economic theory of childbearing that consumption and childbearing often constitute one-or-the-other type of alternatives (Easterlin 1987; Crimmins et al. 1991), and there are indications that consumerist and family orientations could clash with each other (NiBrochlain 1993; Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000). Naturally a more exact specification of consumer orientations and family val-

¹⁴ The Hungarian phrase, nicely alliterating, was 'kicsi vagy kocsí'.

ues is needed, but it is important to stress the early 'roots' of consumerism in the Hungarian¹⁵ economic and social system.

It is well known that the development of the state socialist economic system had a great demand for female employment quite early and this demand was gradually met from the 1950s onward. The increase of female employment is an essential part in explaining changes of family relations, the decrease in the propensity for marriage and childbearing. But what role did full employment of women play in the transformation of family relationships in state-socialist countries? It played an undeniably significant part in the increase of divorces, since economic independence of women is a prerequisite for divorces. It is also certain that mass employment called forth new forms of identities for women (as well as role conflicts) and presumably opened up new perspectives for them. In spite of all of this, earlier studies demonstrated that Hungarian women tend to have a very conservative mindset concerning family, marriage and childbearing (Ponrácz and S. Molnár 1994). At the same time, while the new forms of partnership may not have been among their ideas about their own future, there are signs that they were tolerant toward these forms. We cannot then rule out the possibility that the individualization grounded in employment contained the seeds of lifestyles that pointed beyond the traditionally dominant family formations.

Needless to say, we cannot attempt a complete and comprehensive description of the value orientations of the population in the late period of state socialism. Furthermore, it is clear that state-socialist social integration, with its insatiable appetite for total integration, had the intended or unintended effect of strengthening the value of the family. (Mozny 1991; NiBrochlain 1991; Somlai 1994). Notwithstanding all this, we wanted to point out in the foregoing that other mechanisms, directly or indirectly, may have also eroded the value of marriage.

The strength of family- and population related institutions and policy measures

Family and population policy measures became instruments of social policies in state-socialist countries quite early, since as early as the 1960s, the problem of low fertility rates appeared in Hungary and also because the mass female employment would not have been possible without the creation of childcare institutions (Kamarás 1995; Klinger 1994; Tárkányi 1998). The social policy system thus created had a very serious role to play in the emergence and universal spread of the system of early marriages, high marriage rates and early

¹⁵ Valuch, a Hungarian researcher specialising in the social history of consumption, stresses that consumerism was used in all of the late Soviet-type regimes as legitimating the political system (Valuch 2004).

childbearing (Andorka and Vukovich 1985; Frejka 1980; NiBrochlain 1991; Monier and Rychterikova 1991; Macura and MacDonald 2003; Tomka 2002). Deviation from this pattern usually resulted in serious disadvantages and financial losses through ineligibility to welfare benefits and grants, such as child care fee (GYED), child care allowance (GYES), family allowance, housing distribution and subsidies, loans for the newly married and so on. Until the early 1990s, family and population policy measures were more and more advantageous to the people. The institution of childcare fee – which was tied to wages and was designed to compensate for loss of income due to childbirth – was introduced in 1985. Family policy initiatives clearly aimed at strengthening family formation.

However, certain changes had the opposite effect. On the one hand, family and childcare allowances were gradually tied to the children and their upbringing due to the spread of single parent families headed mainly by the mother. On the other hand, the 1980s saw a significant change in the access to new housing. During the years of state socialism, housing in Hungary always relied on different types of resources, with a varying degree of state involvement. Housing construction financed by the state suffered a serious decline in the 1980s – while in 1980, the state built 18,097 housing units (apartments) this figure dropped by 85% to 2,776 in 1989¹⁶. Simultaneously with this, the weight of private housing construction increased – even if not in sheer numbers. Being married and having at least one child was a prerequisite of applying for state housing. In private housing construction, which became the dominant form by the 1980s, a number of advantages still existed for married couples with children, but possession of own resources became an essential component. (Farkas and Vajda 1990). These ‘own resources’ were easier to produce if the two families of the couple pooled. Summing these processes: on the one hand, access to state housing was reduced to a minimum over time, on the other hand, private housing became possible for people possessing adequate own resources. In other words, the chances of non-married couples for securing housing was less and less adversely effected by the housing situation of the 1980s.

In this section such kind of features and processes could be seen, which could contribute to the rise and spread of cohabitation; these were, the proliferation of divorce, value changes under state-socialism, and changes in the social political setting (housing) related to family formation.

¹⁶ We find a decline of the similar order if we look at housing construction entirely financed by the state. *Source*: HCSO, Housing statistics, 2003.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have described and interpreted the emergence of cohabitation in Hungary, its proliferation and changes in its form. I argued that cohabitation first appeared and spread in Hungary as a form of union following a divorce ('old type') and only later did cohabitation proliferate as a first union preceding or replacing marriage ('new type'). Correlating the two types of partnership, we pointed out that the old type contributed in a number of ways to the proliferation of the new one: it presented an alternative to marriage as the exclusive form of partnership, it may have diminished social prejudices and contributed to the toleration of a new living arrangement.

With regard to the history of partnership, it was essential to ascertain how strongly the spread of cohabitation was tied to the change of political regime, how much it could be regarded as its consequence. The analysis showed that the new type of partnership, cohabitation as first union, gained considerable grounds even prior to 1989–1990¹⁷. The proliferation continued after the change of the regime and the indicators signalled tempo change in the process. This seems to suggest that the spread of cohabitation was not triggered exclusively by the change of the political regime. In other words, the transformation of family formation, the shift of the demographic paradigm in Hungary cannot exclusively be attributed to the regime change¹⁸.

The above analysis have attributed a key role to the emergence and spread of divorces, since it undermined the ideal of the 'marriage for life' and contributed to the emergence and spread of cohabitation as first union through some transmission mechanisms down the generations. Examining the system of values, we highlighted the phenomena associated with the working of the system which, through the dissolution of communities, created 'one-sided individualization' and contributed to the proliferation of a consumerist orientation. All these changes played their roles in the erosion of marriage as the ultimate life goal. Finally, I have pointed out changes in social policy – such as a decline of state housing construction or the granting of child care subsidies to the parent actually raising the child – that less and less penalized patterns of 'deviant' behaviour.

The analysis also attempted to identify pattern-setting social groups. It became clear that cohabitation spread from groups at the lower end of the social scale. This was true for both post-marital cohabitation and cohabitation as first

¹⁷ Studies from Czechoslovakia seem to corroborate this. Mozny and Rabusic documented the existence of premarital cohabitation in the mid-1980s, in a big Czech city, Brno (Mozny and Rabusic 1992).

¹⁸ At the same time, changes in fertility (fertility decline, postponement and non-marital births) can, in our opinion, be attributed to a significant degree to the regime change (Spéder 2004).

union. In the later phases of proliferation, groups with social privileges also came to assume an active role. Thus different mechanisms are to be seen behind the diffusion of cohabitation.

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