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**THE EFFECT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION AND
CULTURAL CONTEXT ON THE FORMATION OF
PARTNERSHIPS**

PHD THESIS ABSTRACT

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In recent decades, in many European countries, including the Central and Eastern European region, there have been significant changes in the demographic behaviour of the population in terms of relationship behaviour and relationship formation. The usual standard course of life – completion of studies, employment in the labour market, marriage, birth of children – is in transformation. However, marriage remains the most common family form in Romania and among Hungarians in Transylvania, the proportion of young adults choosing cohabitation/consensual union as their first long-term relationship has increased (Mureşan, 2008; Mureşan, Hărăguş, Hărăguş, & Schröder, 2008). Previous studies, such as those on single-parent families and transnational families, have highlighted the emerging diversity of family and relationship forms. (Potârcă, Mills, & Lesnard, 2013, Hossu, 2019).

Changes in family life and the pluralization of relationships, which have an important impact on demographic processes, are often explained by the Second Demographic Transition theory (SDT), whose main claim is that the change in demographic behaviour of the population since the 1960s is due to the reorganization of ideas, values and culture (Kaa, 1987; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). The theory emphasizes the role of the individual, the primacy of individual aspirations and the importance of self-actualization in career and family plans.

The central idea of the thesis, based on two large quantitative sociological survey studies, is to provide a comprehensive picture of the changes in relationships after the millennium.

The research questions focus on the sociological differentiation of married couples and couples choosing cohabitation (consensual union) in contemporary Transylvanian society, as well as on the factors influencing the formation of these two types of relationships, the changes in the prevalence of partnerships between 2001 and 2020 and their manifestation in family formation. We examine the relationship behaviour of young adults in relation to socio-economic changes, labour market status, educational status and value orientation. We investigate factors influencing changes in relationship forms (marriage and cohabitation): what are the main factors that influences the different forms of partnerships, how social and structural conditions, economic and financial status of individuals influence the formation of partner relationships.

Therefore, to what extent do the so-called "hard" socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age and social status (education, labour market situation, financial situation), and "soft" variables, such as value orientations, influence the formation of partnership types?

Examining relational changes is important to understand the factors that determine certain demographic behaviours, the resulting trends and patterns of relationships that shape the future of the population, the persistence of some forms of cohabitation and the spread of other new types of family in society, even at macro-regional level or in ethno cultural context.

With the exception of analyses based on Romanian census data and some family sociology research (Veres, 2015; Kiss T. , 2010; Spéder, 2009; Mureşan, 2008), there are few works that have dealt with the issue of partnership formation with a broad theoretical basis, or even by testing the validity and relevance of theories on both national and regional data, by tracing trends over a longer term. The aim of the paper is to examine trends in relationship formation, prevalence, patterns and the role of partnerships over the life course; the population examined being young adults of Hungarian nationality in Transylvania. The other aim is to present the differences between generations based on the surveys conducted among young people in the last fifteen – twenty years. We also give an overview about the results of a family sociology survey conducted among 18 – 49 years old in 2018. The author of the thesis participated as a young researcher in the mentioned examinations and was the leader of the research project in 2018.

The structure of the thesis is generous, the dissertation being made up of five main chapters, the first two being theoretical, chapter three dedicated to methodology and description of data resources, and the last two containing the sociological analysis, results, conclusions and reflection on the hypotheses presented. Finally, the paper concludes with an appendix and a bibliography.

The theoretical chapter of the paper aimed to describe the fundamental social and economic changes from the perspective of family sociology in the postmodern period, also presenting the most important theories of the demographic transition.

The de-standardisation of life paths and the pluralisation of family forms means that family forms that were previously viewed negatively by the public or considered acceptable only to people with certain family situations or life circumstances are becoming more widespread and accepted. These

include cohabitation or consensual unions, which have been legitimised and also accepted primarily among widows and divorcees.

After the change of the communist regime and during the transition period, cohabitation was more prevalent in lower social strata, and cohabitation outside of marriage was generally considered deviant behavior (Tóth & Dupcsik, 2007). This perception has changed significantly in recent decades, and the prevalence of non-traditional and non-standardized relationships has been influenced not only by structural factors but also by the increasing permissiveness of public attitudes towards them. However, due to the role of the church and religiosity in Romanian society, marriage-based family remains predominant. Regarding familism, surveys regularly show that family relationships are considered more important than any other things in people's individual values. However, there does not always seem to be a congruence between demographic behaviour and family-related values or attitudes. While marriage rates and population fertility are declining, in line with European trends, family forms are diversifying, but traditional family perceptions still dominate. This seemingly incompatible situation is explained by the concept of familism (Dupcsik & Tóth, 2008). In addition to its ideological meaning, familism also has an interpretation that refers to the social condition, typical of societies where trust levels are low, interpersonal relationships between individuals are rare, and people usually rely "solely" on family relationships (Pérez, 2003; Dupcsik & Tóth, 2008). Post-communist countries usually fall into this category due to the centralized control of the state in the past.

Pronatalist policies implemented during the socialist era and state control had a detrimental effect on the transformations leading to the de-standardization of life stages and the delayed maturity and formation of families. The demographic transition model in Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by its diversity, influenced by the legacy of communism. In Romania, several common features can be identified:

- The late emergence of behavioral and attitudinal changes associated with the transition, particularly in relation to alternative forms of partnership, mainly due to strict abortion policies and economic insecurity marked by high inflation and growing inequalities that surrounded the regime change.

- Rapid demographic behavioral changes occurred after 1990, most notably a decline in fertility rates, while the shift in cohabitation patterns progressed at a slower pace, starting in the 2000s.
- Structural and economic factors played a prominent role, particularly in the early stages of the transition.
- Disadvantaged social groups played a significant role in the adoption of new demographic behaviors, such as non-marital births and cohabitation.

The changes in family life behavior and the pluralization of relationships, which have an impact on demographic processes, are often explained through the theory of the second demographic transition. This theory suggests that the changes in population's demographic behavior since the 1960s are due to cultural, ideological, and value changes (Kaa, 1987; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). The theory emphasizes the increasingly valued role of the individual, the primacy of individual aspirations, and the importance of self-fulfillment in career and family plans. With the development of science and technology, such as the widespread use of modern contraception or artificial insemination, family planning and birth control have become a matter of individual choice, and the formation of a family and the decisions associated with it can evolve based on individual needs and desires. The rise of individualization is reflected in many aspects of family life, affecting the dynamics and forms of relationships: divorce is more common and, as such, primarily a legal procedure, the stigma associated with divorce is reduced, remarriage is more frequent, and other forms of relationships, such as cohabitation, are also prevalent (Kaa, 1987).

Chapter 2.4 provides a detailed overview of the national and international bibliography on cohabitation, the most common types, and the functionality of consensual unions. In addition to cohabitation, the dissertation also addresses the changes within the institution of marriage, presenting the ideal types of marriage in contemporary European society (e.g., alliance marriage and contingent alliance) based on Camarero's work (2014). Although there have been numerous attempts to establish ideal types of cohabitation, the prevailing opinion suggests that cohabitation can be 1) a temporary form of relationship before marriage, or 2) a new alternative way of living together (and even forming a family). Heuveline and Timberlake (2004) distinguish six subtypes considering whether the relationship decisions are focused 1) to live together, 2) to have children together, or 3) to stay together. According to this model, consensual unions in Romania are mostly

of the second type, where cohabitation is a premarital form of relationship, and couples do not intend to have children and/or live together outside of marriage for an extended period. There is also another type of cohabitation, where partners see cohabitation as a stage in the marriage process, living together for a longer period but without children. Based on our analysis, it is not very common for older individuals, divorced or widowed individuals to live in a cohabiting relationship as an alternative to marriage. In such cases, the term "blended family" is often used in the literature to describe the situation (Vörös & Kovács, 2011).

Chapter 2.5 describes the theory of gender roles and the consequences of emancipation in family formation and fertility. According to the theory instability (relationship breakdowns, increasing divorce rates) and low fertility rates, the rising number of individuals without children and the decline in desired number of children are reactions to the dissolution of the previous normative order based on the model of a single-income family, where the man was primarily the breadwinner and the woman was the homemaker. The condition for stability and balance lies in rethinking and reorganizing gender roles and division of labor, a gradual process that started with the feminist movement, in which men have not significantly participated in recent decades, as they have been less attracted to areas associated with feminine qualities, such as reproductive work.

Chapter III describes the technical elements of the research methodology, as well as the databases used: the Mozaik 2001 survey and the Hungarian Youth Survey (2016, 2020) involved interviews with 1950 and 2000 young people aged 15-29, respectively, while the Family Survey 2018 (NPKI) included 1300 individuals from the 18-49 age group. This chapter also includes the formulation of the six hypotheses.

In the descriptive analysis section, we first examined marital status by age and gender. Among the respondents, significant differences between married women and men were found in the younger cohorts, younger generations being much less likely to be in a married relationship in general. The data show that a significant change in relationship patterns can be observed among young people starting around the age of twenty. From the second half of the 1970s, a different behavioral pattern appears in the sample of individuals aged 18-49. Although both sexes delay the start of a long-term relationship and the timing of marriage, women, on average, marry around the age of 28, while men in this cohort, who are more likely to remain single for a longer period, postpone marriage to around the age of 31.

In the sequence of young people's life events, marriage is preceded by several other significant events, including completing studies and achieving the first professional qualification, which have been consistently delayed in the past two decades. Regarding relationship formation, first cohabitation and moving in together usually occur earlier than marriage, and the occurrence of motherhood before marriage can be shaped - at least based on the Hungarian Youth Survey of 2016 - but further examinations are needed to determine the timing and circumstances of childbirth and to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between motherhood and cohabitation.

An important finding of the research is that younger generations, as key actors in demographic changes, do not show a significant change in the framework of family formation, particularly in terms of non-marital childbearing. The results of our study in this regard are consistent with the analyses showing that the traditional bourgeois family image has not significantly eroded in Romania, and the values associated with it have not been relativized. The desire to have children continues to hold a prominent place in individuals' values (Rotariu, 2006; Mureşan, Hărăguş, Hărăguş, & Schröder, 2008; Kiss T., 2019). In this analysis, we have shown that among young people, who are generally considered to be pioneers in the diffusion of new behaviors, they hold stable conservative values regarding relationship formation and family formation. Short-term cohabitation among young adults, primarily in their mid-twenties, is replaced by marriage in their early thirties.

The change in relational behavior can be partly explained by shifting values. However, it has been observed that materialistic, goal-oriented values are more characteristic of a narrower group in society, specifically those who live in cohabiting relationships. Romanian society has conservative values regarding family formation, and marriage functions as the primary basis for having children (Rotariu, 2006). According to Rotariu (2006), non-marital childbearing is more strongly linked to structural conditions in Romania rather than postmodernist ideas or values, as in Western European countries. Both the conservative view of the family and family-oriented values are reflected in couple patterns, the preference for marriage as a form of relationship, and the overall public support for the institution of marriage. The research results suggest that for both young and older generations, the desire to have a child or plans for future childbearing remain strong indicators of marriage. These behavioral patterns are reinforced by social norms.

Empirical data show that consensual unions in the examined population represent a form of relationship that serves as a sort of trial marriage, which in most cases culminates in marriage and can be considered a phenomenon largely specific to younger age groups. A minority of respondents in a cohabiting relationship, approximately one-third, stated that they would not want to marry their partner, while the rest would take this step if certain conditions were met. The most common among these conditions (41%) is deepening feelings for the partner, but many associate marriage with completing studies (21%) and having a child (17%). Having their own home (11%) and an increase in income (8%) are mentioned by far fewer individuals as factors that would motivate them to get married. Therefore, in addition to the prominent emotional factor, marriage decisions are conditioned by a series of pragmatic factors.

The formation of relationships - marriage and cohabitation - is determined by a series of individual and social factors, which are also strongly influenced by the cultural system and values. Regarding socio-demographic and economic factors, we examined the effects of education, student status, and labor market situation. We emphasized that the impact of family background and education has become less important over the years, and children of parents with lower education level do not significantly differ in terms of relationship type. We also found that the proportion of young people in cohabiting relationships has increased across all education levels. In terms of labor force participation, cohabiting couples face greater insecurity compared to married couples. Among individuals aged 18-49, we found no significant differences based on education level and relationship type, but in this cohort, unemployment and exposure to temporary and insecure employment are higher among those who cohabit than among the married population.

After comparing values, it can be concluded that there are no significant differences between married individuals and those who cohabit in terms of the most important values. Family, love, friendship, and freedom rank highest regardless of marital status. Factor analysis of values revealed more nuanced results, highlighting that adults in cohabiting relationships place greater importance on material-oriented goals, while national-conservative and religious values are more important for those who are married.

Chapter 4.2 presents multivariate analyses, and in this section, we examined the specific research questions in two groups, namely young individuals (15-29 years old) and young adults (18-49 years old), regarding marriage and cohabitation patterns in relation to socio-economic criteria,

religiosity, and values. These two marital status categories were analyzed in multiple explanatory models. We used multivariate logistic regression models to investigate the factors influencing marriage and cohabitation formation, while linear regression was used to explore the factors affecting future marriage intentions.

Among young individuals, religiosity proved to be the most important factor that increases the chances of marriage. The results are consistent with previous research that has found a significant association between religious belief and propensity to marry in the 16-29 age group (Pusztai, 2019; Pusztai, Fényes, & Engler, 2022). The likelihood of getting married before the age of 29 is higher among individuals of Roma ethnicity, as well as among those who are inactive and young adults with more secure occupations and their own housing. In rural areas and small towns, there is a higher probability of being in a married relationship compared to those living in large cities (county seats). The analysis of the adult population aged 18-49 provides similar results, with one difference: marriage is most strongly associated with having children.

Among the examined factors, cohabitation is most strongly associated with non-religious beliefs. In other words, the explanatory models concluded that young individuals without religious or other non-religious convictions have the highest probability of forming a cohabiting relationship. Young adult Roma individuals have also a higher probability of forming cohabiting partnerships. This can be explained by the fact that within the Roma community, cohabitation holds a similar meaning to marriage and is considered a long-term relationship. Although it is not legally formalized, traditional Roma law recognizes the cohabitation of young individuals as a form of marriage. On one hand, Roma youths form couples and establish families earlier, even before reaching the official marriage age. On the other hand, many of them cannot afford a wedding ceremony, which usually accompanies marriage, and cohabitation becomes an option as an alternative to marriage among economically disadvantaged individuals (Santelices, 2013). Although the proportion of individuals living in cohabiting relationships has increased overall in recent decades, it remains higher among individuals with low levels of education and among the Roma population.

Finally, we examined the relative probability of marriage and cohabitation among the population aged 18-49 years. Using a simpler model with fewer explanatory variables, we confirmed the previous results. Overall, we can conclude that the chances of cohabitation are higher compared to marriage for individuals under 30 years old and those with a low level of education (primary).

The association of cohabitation with a low level of education is not new result, and the other results are consistent with previous logistic regressions, indicating that the chances of cohabitation are lower compared to marriage if the person resides in rural areas and does not consider themselves religious according to church doctrines.

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