

Who Choses What – a Study of Partnership Formation

In Western and Northern European countries cohabitation is the most general partnership form, especially among young adults. However, demographic and partnership behaviour is not the same in the whole part of Europe: the southern and eastern region, including Romania, is characterized by a relatively low proportion of cohabitation, even among younger birth cohorts. In addition, in the last few years in some Central-Eastern-European countries, among them in Romania, a higher willingness for marriage has become recently one of the most conspicuous demographic behaviour. This act is irregular since it is staying in opposition to the longer trend of partnership behaviour regarding cohabitation and the single way of life. Changes in partnership behaviour differently affects each layer of the society with different socio-demographic characteristics. On the one hand, economic and social background of the individuals and on the other hand, micro-factors such as values or attitudes are influencing together the forms and functioning of partnerships.

While previously the decline of marriages and a widespread of cohabited unions was the characteristic of the youngsters after 2010, like in many European countries, the marriage rates began to rise in the Romanian society. According to data series on the Eurostat's website, marriage rates were 7 per thousand in Romania (Eurostat 2017). In order demonstrate how varied could be the willingness to marry, we hereby present the case of Romania, where after 1990 the number of marriages reached its highest point in 2007. The increase was due to a one-time state funded financial support for those taken their first marriage but which was abolished nearly after the outburst the economic crisis, in 2010. This kind of financial incentives has had a short term effect and temporary growth in marriages.

Beside the marriage practice cohabitations are also various, the composition of this groups shows a variate picture also within Eastern-Europe. Like in most of the European countries, in Romania cohabitation is the most usual among singles, however it was not always like now. Before the social transition the majority of cohabiters were either divorced or widow (Spéder 2005 Mureşan 2008). In the technical literature this type of cohabitation is mentioned as the "old forms" of cohabitation, as opposed to the "new type" which is typical for young people, who choose this partnership form before marriage or as an alternative to marriage. Heuveline – Timberlake (2004) described six ideal types of cohabitation, and in their typology they took into consideration facts as the intention of partners to marry, the duration of the partnership, the proportion of birth giving, while the authors underline the heterogeneity of the cohabiters group. In the conservative societies which has a traditional family profile, including Romania, the perception of unmarried cohabitation is more negative, and the public opinion considers marriage as most fitted relationship form for starting a family. It is no coincidence that in Romania, a relatively small proportion, only 10% of the total population, live in cohabitation, and according to a recent study, the majority of cohabiting couples want to marry later.

However, marriage is still the most widespread partnership form and environment for commitment to starting a family, cohabitation has been spreading among young generations. Survey based researches conducted among the Hungarian youth living abroad (Mozaik 2001, Gebezys 2015, Hungarian Youth 2016) showed a decrease in marriage rates in the last decades and census data revealed that the Hungarian minority in Romania has a slightly lower willingness for marriage than the whole population of the country. Transylvanians' partnership behaviour tends to be closer to the Hungarian patterns in two sense: they postpone marriage (and with this childbearing) and a higher proportion of them live single (Veres 2015). Taking into consideration longer trends, partnership behaviour changes are relevant not only among youngsters, since divorced and widowed show have shown also a less and less willingness to remarry (Murinkó – Rohr 2018).

Overall, relationships are influenced by multi-level processes, which lead to divergent patterns of relationships within the Central and Eastern European region. When interpreting the formation, trajectories of relationships, must be taken into account (1) the changes in the population structure, such as gender or educational composition, which directly influence the formation of that, and (2) also individual life chances, such as the labour market situation, the financial resources and supports, the economic status and the complex system of values and attitudes.

In this paper, I examine the choices, aspects and social determinants of partnership formation through the example of a Central–Eastern European country: Romania.

My basic research question concentrates on how family related attitudes and the socio-economic situation of individuals influence partnership formation, i.e. in what measure does individuals' socio-economic situation affect the formation of their types of relationship. Thus, the research focuses on Romania and within that, the Transylvanian area, but also provides a comparative view of European relations. I consider important to highlight the differences between countries and regions in relationship behaviour, and the examination of how these differences have changed in recent decades.

The topicality of my analysis is strongly connected to observation that we are experiencing the diversification of private life and relationships, what can be observed all over the world: alternative life situations - single-parent families, increasing incidence of LAT and cohabitation, the postponement of family formation and childbearing. On the map of Europe, however, the Middle Eastern region, especially the population in Romania is characterized by more traditional family patterns.

The relevance of the research is that the most widespread theories on changing demographic- and partnership behaviour (van de Kaa 1987, Becker 1981) sought to summarize and predict this behavioural changes in a united frame, which once will become relevant for all European

societies, but this was not substantiated in all cases later. On the other hand, there are rare analysis which concentrates comparatively on the validity of these popular theories in Central and Eastern European countries.

The research is based on empirical sociological data analysis, and through the research objectives, questions, statistical contextual studies and multivariate models, I search for answers to explore and explain the characteristics of relationship and behavioural changes in the Romanian and Transylvanian active population. During my research I'm using a mixed methodology. For statistical data analysis, I undertake the harmonization and secondary analysis of databases from multiple sources. The main empirical sources used in the research: Generation and Gender Survey 2004, Romanian database, Turning points of our lives - Transylvania II. wave, and Romanian censuses: 2002, 2011, EU statistics 2000-2017 and IPUMS census databases.

Among the multivariate models, I'm using factor and principal component analysis, as well as multivariate, multiple linear regression modelling and logistic regression.