

Something Old, Something New - The Hungarian Marriage Patterns in Historical Perspective

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1. Marriage patterns and societal modernization in Eastern Europe

Marriage is probably one of the most sensitive to social changes from the various demographic events. In most cases the patterns of nuptiality closely follow the development path of a society. The institute of marriage is also a core component of family formation, thus it also influences a set of other social phenomena, such as fertility, through the social role of marriage in the given cultural context.

This paper examines the changing trends of nuptiality in Hungary from the late 19th to the early 21st century. With the help of Hungarian historical statistical data we can see these changes from the perspective of broader socioeconomic development over time, during which Hungary has changed from a predominantly agrarian society into an urban industrial one. Thus, I will focus on the relationship between modernization and population dynamics in Eastern Europe. The paper will follow the perspective of social demography, acknowledging that population dynamics are inseparable from their social context. Nuptiality trends are especially suitable for such analysis, because their close interconnection with societal development.

The institute of marriage can be considered as a link between population change and social control. Rothenbacher (2002) argued that before the industrial revolution, marriage in Western Europe was an important mean of population control. Fertility was restricted to marriage, and entry to marriage was strictly controlled. Also, land tenure was closely connected to marital status, as feudal lords tried to maximize their income from tenants (Seccombe, 1992). This control was often seen as one component of capitalist development, eventually changing the family formation patterns in the West. This view is contested, however, and others argue that the large preindustrial families and joint multigenerational households were long ceased to be the characteristics of Western Europe (Mitterauer and Sieder, 1982).

Nuptiality patterns are usually investigated within the framework of household formation. Approaching this question from a historical perspective, John Hajnal's seminal work is probably the most cited by demographers. In his two major studies (Hajnal 1965, 1982) he made generalizations about the "European" (i.e. Northern and Western European) and "non-European" patterns of marriage and family structure. Eastern Europe

in this generalization is not a clear case, rather a blurred transition zone between the two major patterns. The famous Trieste – St. Petersburg line actually goes through Eastern Europe, however, the region is usually considered to be a part of the "non-European" pattern. With respect to for household structure, Hajnal clearly argued for the dominance of the large, joint households in Eastern Europe.

Hajnal's work ignited a long academic debate on marriage and household formation patterns. Among his supporters were Peter Laslett and the Cambridge demographers, while others expressed more criticism. Jack Goody (1996) for example argued that the differences were overemphasized by Hajnal and his followers, and it is not clear how these differences contributed to the development of capitalism or to modernization in general. Rothenbacher (2002) pointed out a significant heterogeneity with regards to the "European" pattern. Others, such as June Sklar (1974) challenged the universalistic classification of Eastern Europe into the "non-European" pattern. Similarly, Michael Mitterauer (1996) and Karl Kaser (1996), who both argued for more diversity when studying the family structure of the Balkans, pointed out that Hajnal's "non-European" pattern is very heterogeneous.

The role of culture and social norms is a central component in the study of marriage patterns, and also in population theory in general (Caldwell, 1981). Philip Kreager (1986) suggested giving up the search for universalistic population regimes, and turn to more limited approaches in terms of geography or culture. He also argued that the study of demographic regimes as institutions in which population change takes place opens up the possibility to study intermediate social structures that guide decision-making at the micro level.

Dirk Van de Kaa (1999) pointed out that the Hajnal-line well corresponds with regional cultural and linguistic borders in Eastern Europe. As another example for this argument, Faragó (2003) investigated the marriage and household formation patterns in the 18th century Hungary, and concluded that significant subnational differences exist, roughly corresponding with regional cultural borders. However, some scholars, contest the view that the Western European late marriage was some sort of custom, and tie it to more complex socioeconomic factors (Seccombe, 1992).

This proposed heterogeneity eventually challenged the assumed universality of the famous *zadruga* system also. The *zadruga*, the extended household, was long considered to be the central component of Southeastern Europe's social structure. It did not emphasize the financial independence as a main factor in marriage considerations, since the land was divided among all sons, in contrast with the Western European practices. Recent research argued that the *zadruga* was more related to certain economic activities or geography than to culture or ethnicity (Todorova, 1993).

Even with this intraregional heterogeneity, the Western and Eastern part of the European continent had observable difference in nuptiality patterns at the beginning of the 20th century. The border of the two patterns is blurry at best, and it is contested whether it follows the line Hajnal determined. Nevertheless, when examining trends over time, Rothenbacher (2002) concluded that a convergence could be observed between the two parts of Europe in the first half of the 20th century. The reason for this convergence was basically the changing nuptiality pattern of Western Europe. Marriage became more universalistic and the average age at marriage decreased until the late 1960s. Meanwhile, marriage in Eastern Europe did not really change, only fluctuated due to various macro-level changes and policy interventions.

In the late 1960s, a new nuptiality trend started to unfold in Western Europe. This was part of the second demographic transition, originally discussed by Ronald Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa (van de Kaa, 1987). This theory focused on the spread of certain social norms with regards to the family, contributing to the very low fertility in Western Europe. The nuptiality aspect of this theory was the increasing age at first marriage and a subsequent decline in marriage rates leading to shrinking childbearing period of women.

The theory of the second demographic transition argues for the importance of cultural factors, especially in the changes in the women's social situation. Increasing female presence in higher education and their subsequent growing economic independence strongly contributed to the changing marriage patterns and fertility behavior. Also, the liberalization of divorce made it possible to conveniently end unwanted marriages, and many people chose not to remarry again. These factors were stronger than the counterbalancing increase in cohabitation, as a substitute for marriage.

The real difference was in the fertility behavior, as cohabitation less likely resulted in having children.

It is very interesting to contrast this change with the demographic development in Eastern Europe. During the socialist period, the situation of women in this region also changed. The break with the traditional gender and family roles seemingly had ideological reasons behind, such as the socialist emphasis on gender equity, but the most important factor was economic necessity. In the early socialist period, economic development agendas strongly relied on labor supply. By the late 1960s, female labor force was the last reserve in industrial development. Increased female participation in the employed labor force was important for economic development on the short run, but it had a significant impact on fertility, which started to decline. Various central policies, such as maternal benefits, promoting high fertility could not counterbalance this trend.

From the 1980s the Eastern European socialist systems started to open up for Western norms. When around 1990 socialism collapsed in the region, Western social norms rapidly found their way to Eastern Europe. The demographic trajectory of the two parts of Europe has shown considerable convergence (Monnier and Rychtarikova, 1992). However, major demographic trends did not necessarily play out in the exact same manner. Taking the second demographic transition as an example, it was argued that while the underlying ideational changes (increasing cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, intended childlessness) are similar, local social context could significantly alter the logic of change (Sobotka et al, 2003).

In the next section of this paper I discuss the various aspects of nuptiality patterns and investigate how they changed over time parallel with the winding road of Hungarian modernization.

2. The Hungarian marriage and modernization patterns over time

2.1 The four periods of Hungarian modernization

From the viewpoint of socioeconomic development, the modern history of Hungary can be divided into four major periods: the one before the First World War, the interwar period, state socialism and post-socialism. In this section I will briefly discuss these periods.

In the late 19th century, Hungary was a dual society, where the new capitalist elements of life were surrounded by the traditional norms of the old social order (Berend, 2003). The country was predominantly agrarian, both in terms of economic activities and collective social norms. The slow modernization of Hungary started only after the 1867 Consensus, which created the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. However, this modernization could not influence the nuptiality norms for three decades. It was only in 1895, when the Civil Marriage Act made marriage a civil institute, and divorce was legalized on the basis of civil law. Church weddings became optional, however, religious ceremonies remained the social norm until the 1950s, and their importance prevailed in rural areas throughout the socialist period.

With some regional differences, the 19th century Hungarian nuptiality patterns included the universalistic nature of marriages (95 % of women married before the age of 50), the young age at first marriage (around 20 years), and the social appreciation of marriage as an important and necessary requirement to be an adult member of the society (Csernák, 1996). This corresponded with the agrarian, rural structure of the society at that time.

In the interwar period, the general pattern of economic activities has changed only a little. With the loss of most territories rich in mineral resources, agriculture remained the major sector of economy. The social order survived the dissemination of the Habsburg Monarchy, and the structure of the society has changed only a little. Strong Christian norms prevailed about collective behavior. The various efforts for the country's modernization in the first half of the 20th century have produced a capitalist economic

system in the agrarian periphery, but the social and especially the political structure did not follow the Western development patterns (Schöpflin, 1993).

The communist takeover after the Second World War meant a radical departure from the previous development trajectory. Public (state) ownership became dominant, the market was excluded from economic activities, agriculture was collectivized and state investment almost exclusively targeted the industrial sector. This model of industrial modernization was based on the late 19th century vision of Marxist ideology and the interwar Soviet experiences. Although this path of economic development had some reality in the early Russian context, due to historical and cultural differences it was misplaced in Eastern Europe, in a seemingly similar rural periphery. Eventually, it failed to incorporate the structural changes in the industry during the 1970s, thus could not help to close the gap between Eastern Europe and the West on the long run.

During the socialist period radical changes took place in the social norms also. The major social transformation of the 1950s and 1960s resulted in new forms of collective behavior. The various components of this transformation, such as the increased social and spatial mobility were results of deliberate state intervention by extensive policy measures.

This policy intervention was one of the most important characteristics of this era, influencing nuptiality patterns also. While before the Second World War, it was the unregulated social norms that controlled collective behavior, during the socialist era the state had enormous coercive capacity to promote particular behavior forms. Most of these policies, however, had unforeseen and sometimes unintended consequences. Rapid urbanization, for example was a side effect of urban industrial development policy and agricultural collectivization. As urban population grew, the modes of family formation changed, and not only because of the changing social norms, but also because practical problems, such as insufficient housing. The introduction of maternal benefits and the new regulations in the legal age of marriage also contributed to the fundamental change in family formation and household structure.

The fourth major era of socioeconomic development in Hungary was the post-socialist period, starting in 1990 with the first post-socialist elections. During this period, the country was opened up to the global economy with large scale foreign direct

investment from transnational companies. Unfortunately it happened at a time when the Eastern European economies were in deep recession after the collapse of socialist industries. Thus, the leverage over socioeconomic development significantly changed.

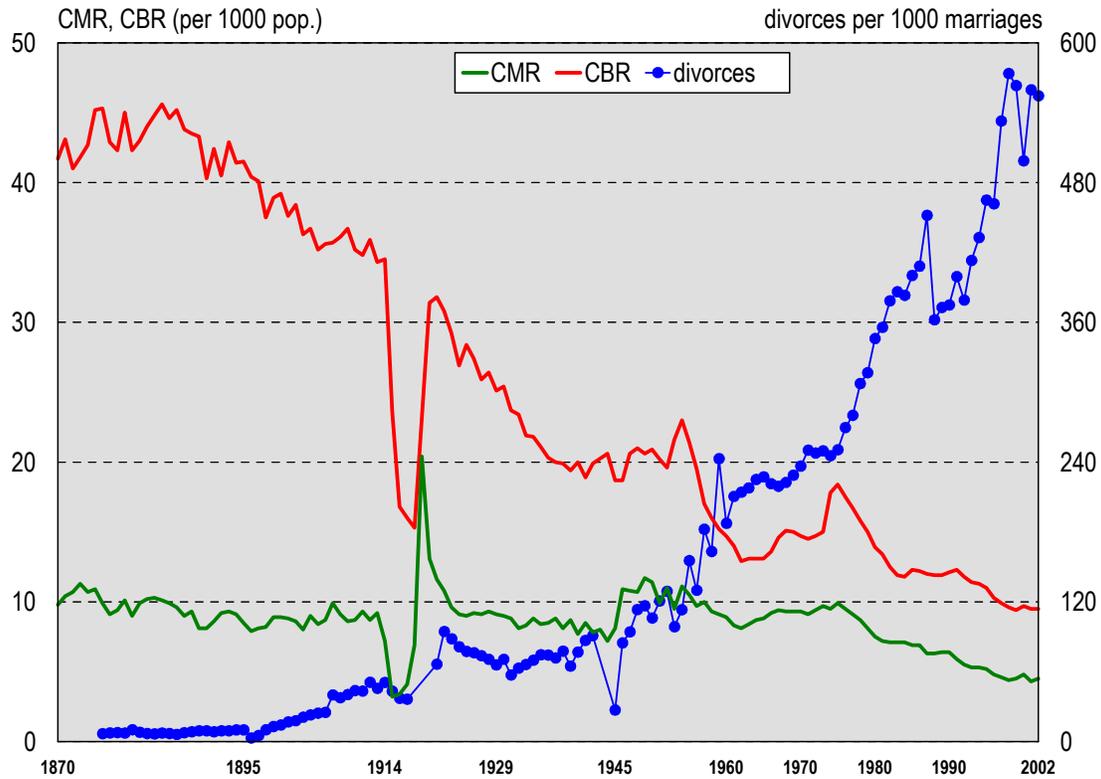
The end of the egalitarian development agenda of socialism resulted in rapidly increasing social inequalities in Hungary. The state was no longer the fundamental development actor, and its withdrawal was especially fast from subsidies on consumer goods. Nevertheless, the level of consumption increased, as Western goods could freely flow to the country after four decades of isolation. Consumption patterns were only one aspect of the changing collective behavior. Real and perceived Western behavioral patterns, including demographic behavior, were rapidly interiorized. This reinforced the converging demographic trend to Western Europe since the 1980s.

In the following discussion, I will go through these four periods of Hungarian history of socioeconomic modernization, and investigate how nuptiality patterns have changed during these periods. The emphasis will be on the complex interrelation of economic change, shifts in social and cultural norms, state policies and historical legacies.

2.2 Hungarian marriage patterns from the 19th to the 21st century

Figure 1. shows the crude birth and marriage rates, and the divorces per 1000 marriages. Until the mid-1880s, births fluctuated due to local events, such as the 1873 cholera epidemic, or the economic recession of the early 1880s. The overall fertility decline started at this time, and occurred almost undisturbed until the Second World War. Although the First World War left a huge gap in births, the trend recovered by the early 1920s. The Second World War interestingly had no such profound effect on fertility. Fertility increased in the 1950s, due to the strict abortion policy, and this created a demographic wave in the mid-1970s, but this wave effect was eliminated by the post-socialist delay in births.

Figure 1.
Births, marriages and divorces, 1870-2002



Marriage trends changed only a little until the Second World War. The missing marriages during the First World War were only delayed, and actually even a marriage surplus occurred (Csernák, 1996). The crude marriage rates for women were lower at this time, due to the significant loss of men in the war. During the interwar period a slow decrease can be observed, but in the Second World War there wasn't really any marriage gap, unlike during the First World War. This also means that there were not many lost marriages to catch up with, and the postwar marriage increase just mildly changed the flat trend. Moreover, this postwar increase was rapidly eliminated by the agricultural collectivization in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which created a large uncertainty for the dominant rural population, resulting in a lower intention to marry. From the late 1960s, many of these delayed marriages were eventually completed, and the generous maternal benefits of this time also made marriage more attractive, through the intermediate cultural norm that childbearing should occur within marriage. This was

further reinforced by the government policy of preferring married couples when it came to eligibility for housing. It was a very important component, since addressing the chronic housing shortage, was dependent entirely on the state after the market was excluded. The economic recession and the slow ideational changes from the late 1970s ended the upward marriage trend. The number of marriages started to decline, and still declines today.

Divorce was not only a socially unacceptable mode of ending a marriage until 1895, but also wasn't legally possible. The Civil Marriage Act, regulating marriages and divorces under civil law, made it legally possible, starting a growing rate of divorces. A small peak can be observed after the First World War, when a lot of postwar marriages proved to be unsuccessful, and also social relations have changed in many families after the soldiers came home. Divorces were growing in the interwar period, and were withheld during the Second World War, but carried out afterwards, thus the trend did not really change until then. However, after 1950 it took a steep increase, when new regulations were introduced, making divorce easier.

It was not only the new liberal regulations, but also the profound social transformation in the socialist era that resulted in an increasing number of divorces. The traditional structure of the society has fundamentally changed. The new collective norms and the increasing social and spatial mobility resulted in significant tension within the family. This was especially true in the rural society, with its closed and more rigid social norms. The agricultural collectivization, the redirection of the young rural manpower to urban industrial jobs, and the increasing opportunities for independent female employment had a fundamental influence on traditional family norms.

As an increasing number of marriages ended with divorce, threatening the ideal picture of the "socialist family", in 1986-87 the communist party put pressure on courts not to allow that many divorces. This resulted in a significant, but only short decrease in the divorce rate. The regime change, and the subsequent problems of the post-socialist era created another boom in divorces, and now more than half of the marriages are ending this way.

Table 1. shows the proportion of population 15 and above by marital status and gender from 1949. The proportion of married population was constantly higher for men.

This seems to be strange, since men usually marry older, but in this case this is the result of the significant difference in life expectancies. During this period, the proportion of widowed women was between 15 and 18 percent, while in the case of men it was only 3-4 percent. The proportion of never married population "corrects" this view, it is higher for men.

Table 1.
Ratio of the population 15+ by marital status, 1949-2002 (%)

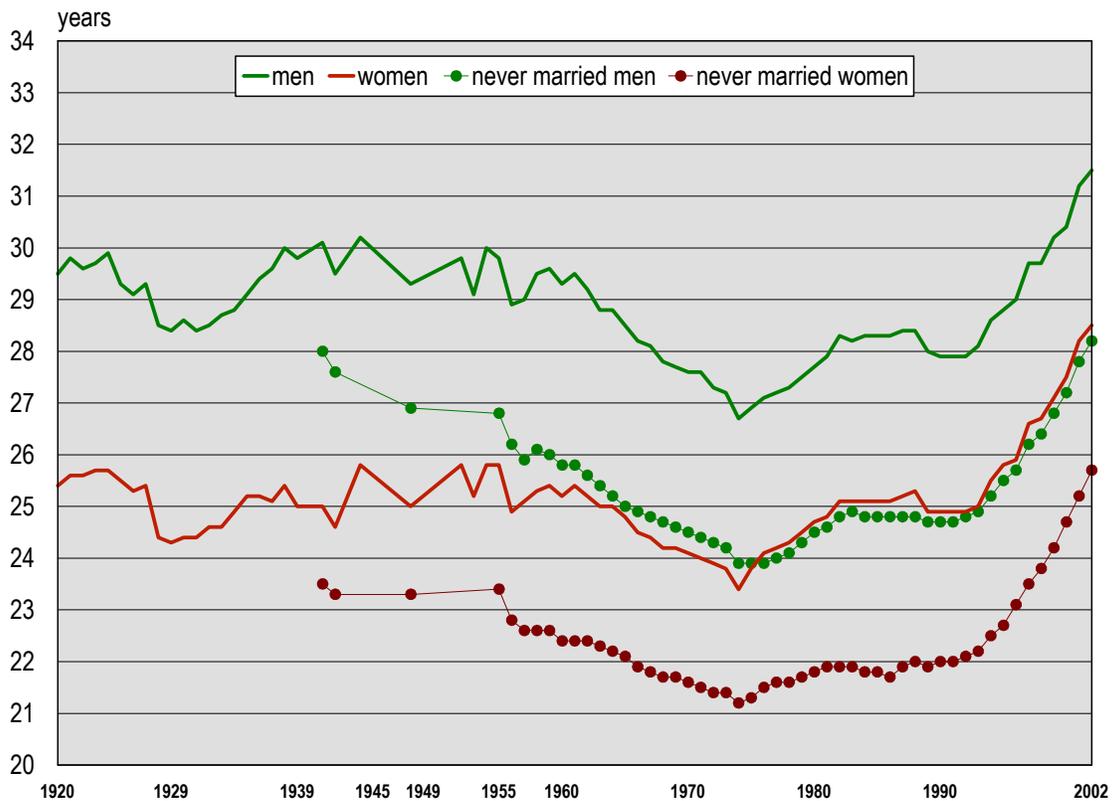
	Men		Women	
	never married	married	never married	married
1949	30.6	64.5	22.7	59.1
1955	26.3	69.1	19.3	62.4
1960	23.7	71.5	17.3	64.4
1965	23.8	71.1	17.1	64.4
1970	24.7	69.9	17.2	63.8
1975	24.0	69.5	16.1	63.7
1980	22.0	70.8	13.8	64.3
1985	23.0	68.3	14.1	61.8
1990	25.1	64.4	15.9	58.1
1995	29.1	60.0	19.2	53.7
2000	32.2	55.8	21.7	49.7
2004	34.7	53.3	23.6	47.3

From the proportion of the never married men and women we can also conclude that the universalistic nature of marriage has ended by the Second World War. The period of state socialism, however, with its emphasized norms and values was generally supportive for marriage. The proportion of married population increased, while the proportion of never married decreased. But shortly after the beginning of the post-socialist transformation, the ratios converged back to the postwar level, and the current decrease of the proportion of married population seems to be a longer trend.

Figure 2. shows data about the average age at marriage. In the 1920s, the postwar economic growth made marriages and family formation easier, having a decreasing effect on the average age at marriage. The Depression, however, had an opposite impact, especially for men. Until the socialist era there was about a four-year difference in the

age when men and women married (around the age 25 and 29, respectively). The legal age for marriage at this time was 24.

Figure 2.
Average age at marriage, 1920-2002



After the communist takeover, extensive policies were introduced to achieve a social transformation according to the Marxist ideology. Among these was the effort to decrease the parental control on family formation, in order to make social and spatial mobility easier. One measure for achieving this goal was to regulate the legal age of marriage. In 1952 the legal age of marriage was decreased to 20, and shortly after to 18 years. This change is also strongly related to the increasing number of marriages at this time.

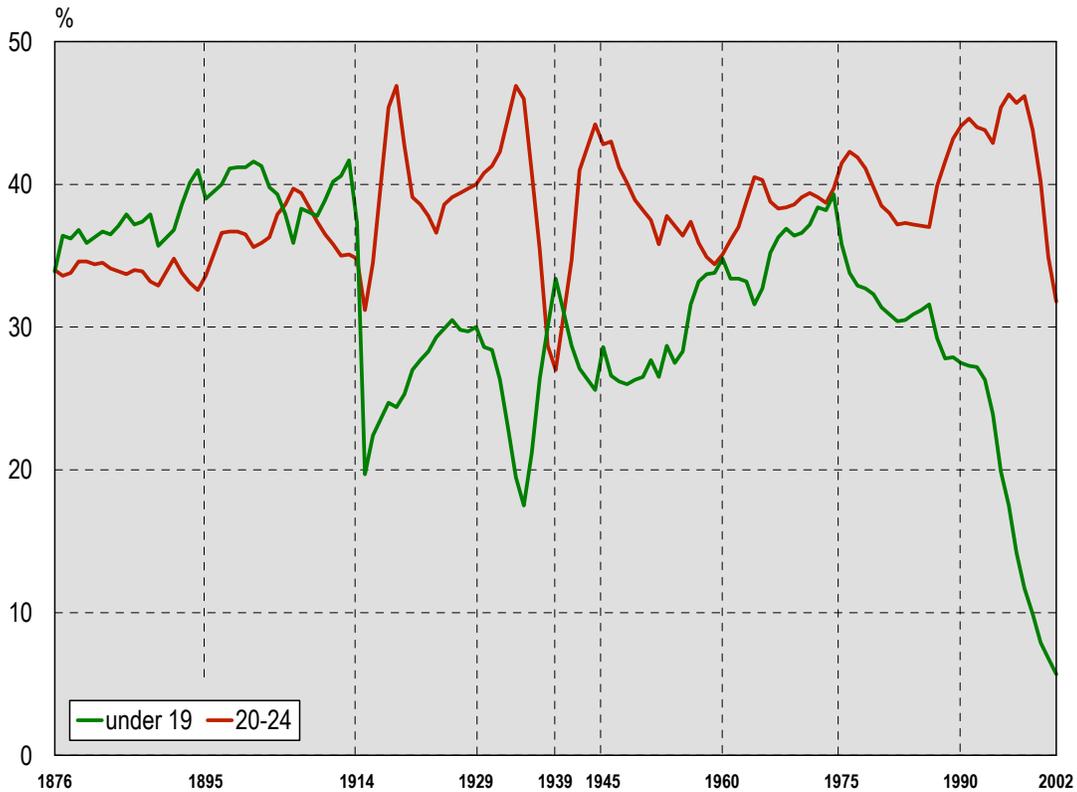
As we can see on Figure 2., the average age at marriage started to decrease, somewhat converging back to Hajnal's "non-European" pattern. In the early 1970s it was around 24 years for women and 27 for men, which also means that the age difference

shrank about a year since the interwar period. The average age at first marriage was even lower, but had the same pattern over time. In the 1940s it was 27 years for men and 23 years for women. By the early 1970s it went down to 24 for men and 21 for women.

From the mid-1970s, as the second demographic transition started to unfold in Western Europe, the age at marriage increased in Hungary also. This was not only the result of the ideational changes, as the country was still isolated from the West, but also the economic recession, which hit Hungary in the mid-1970s, shortly after the oil crisis. The real change, however, came in the 1990s. With the post-socialist transformation, not only the economy collapsed resulting in a steep decrease in the standard of living, but also at the same time Western social behavior patterns, including those of in nuptiality, became models for Eastern Europeans. This, however, was not a simply adaptation. Rather, in a more general way the impact of globalization created similar cultural behavior patterns, introducing those that were the characteristics of most Western countries since the 1970s. The average age at first marriage in contemporary Hungary is 28 for men and 26 for women, significantly contributing to the fertility decline.

Besides the average age at marriage, the distribution of marriages among various age categories is also a good indicator of nuptiality trends. Figure 3. shows the proportion of marrying women by selected age groups under 24 years of age. Until the early 20th century, the largest proportion of marrying women was those of under 19. With the beginning of the First World War, their proportion decreased by 50 percent, while the proportion of women 20-24 increased, showing the restructuring of the marriage market. In the interwar period the marriage patterns of the women 20-24 and women under 19 in this respect are the mirror images of one another. In the 1920s, the share of women under 19 increased, but the Depression era and to some extent the Second World War replayed the same WWI pattern.

Figure 3.
Proportion of marrying women by age groups, 1876-2002

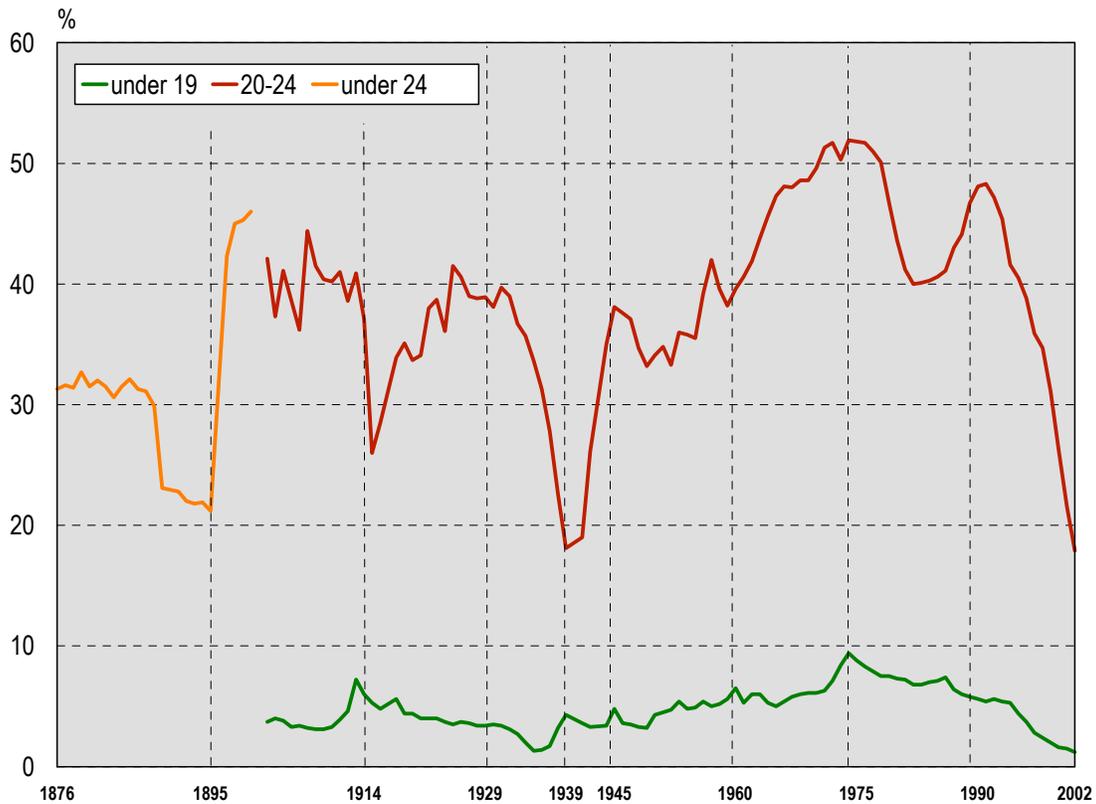


During the early period of socialism, due to the above mentioned change in the legal age of marriage, young women married more often, corresponding with the previously discussed decrease in the average age at marriage. Their share increased until the mid-1970s, reaching pre-WWI levels. From this point, however, the proportion of marrying women under 19 started to decline rapidly, and turned into a large dive after 1990, declining from 28 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2002. Until the mid-1990s, the corresponding change in the age group 20-24 was an increase, even if in a fluctuated manner. From that point, however, as the first marriages were delayed to even older ages, the share of this age group started to decline also.

With regards to the men, the effect of age difference at marriage can be clearly seen (Figure 4.). Generally, the proportion of men marrying under 19 has been low, never reaching 10 percent. In the 19th century, the statistical category was did not make a

distinction between ages under 24, but we have no reason to believe that this trend was any different.

Figure 4.
Proportion of marrying men by age groups, 1876-2002



The first major change happened in 1895. After the Civil Marriage Act, young men started to marry in much greater numbers. Within a couple of years, the proportion of marrying men under 24 has more than doubled. Most likely, the Civil Marriage Act helped to ease the community and family control over marriage, and made it possible for young men to choose more freely.

Due to the First World War men between 20 and 24, the bulk of the military force, married less likely, similarly to the trend we have seen at women under 19, their corresponding age group. Although by the end of the 1920s, their share reached the pre-WWI level, with the Depression and the general uncertainty of the 1930s it started to decline again. Interestingly, its lowest point was in 1939, which means that not the actual

military activities, but the inevitability of the war in the late 1930s caused this change. During the war, actually, the proportion of marrying men between 20 and 24 increased, and by 1945 it almost reached the pre-Depression level.

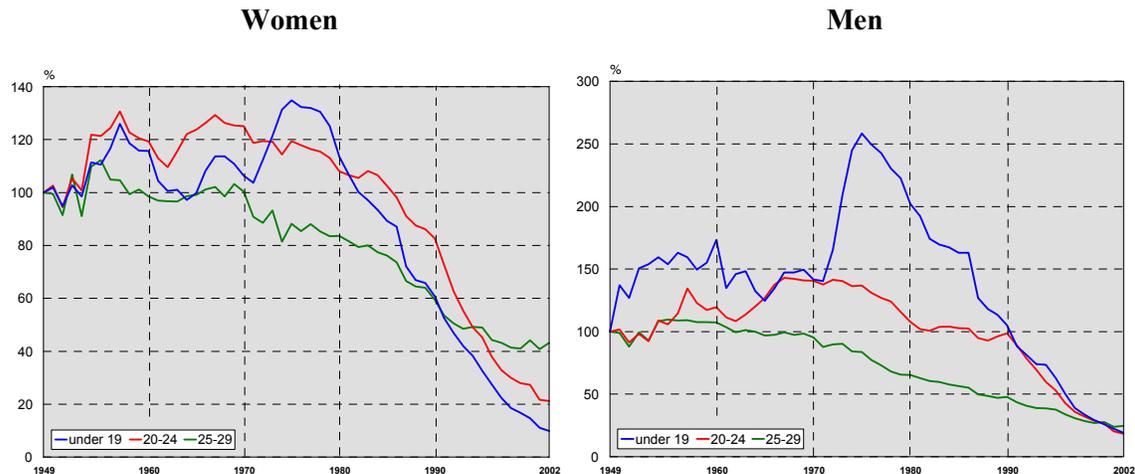
During the socialist period, the average age at marriage decreased, and we can see that both age categories shown on Figure 4. increased their share from the total number of marriages. The share of men under 19 doubled by 1975, reaching an all time high. Part of this was a result of a new regulation that in 1973 decreased the *female* legal age for marriage to 16 years. With this, the proportion of young marriages increased, because the cultural norm about the age difference could be kept. Until this point it was somewhat difficult for men under 19 to find a spouse, since if women finishing high schools or corresponding trainings at 18 married, they usually chose partners over 20. This time was the peak for women marrying under 19 also in modern Hungary, as it can be seen in Figure 3.

Shortly after this, however, the trend has changed, and people married later in their life course. First, the proportion of men marrying under 19 started to decrease, reaching almost zero by 2002. Then, shortly after the post-socialist transformation, the proportion of marrying men between 20 and 24 declined below 20 percent. This latter decline was twice as large as what happened in the Depression-struck interwar years within the same time period. The reason for this is that while in the 1930s, the decline (or in other words the increasing average age at marriage) was strictly economic, and had no corresponding pressure due to changes in social norms, in the post-socialist period, it was both economic and cultural, due to the unfolding ideational change.

Figure 5. shows the change in the number of marriages per 1000 population in three age categories. 1949 is taken as 100 percent, to show the change throughout the socialist period. In the case of the women we can see the waves of increase for the two younger age groups during the early socialist era. Corresponding with this, the number of marriages between 25 and 29 did not increase a lot. The marriage boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s has happened for the women under 24 years of age. The peak in the mid-1970s for the women under 19 reflects the above mentioned change in the legal age for marriage for women. From the late 1970s, all the selected age categories experienced

decline in marriage, however, due to the delayed marriages, this decline for women 25-29 was less steep.

Figure 5.
The change in the marriages per 1000 in various age categories, 1949 = 100%

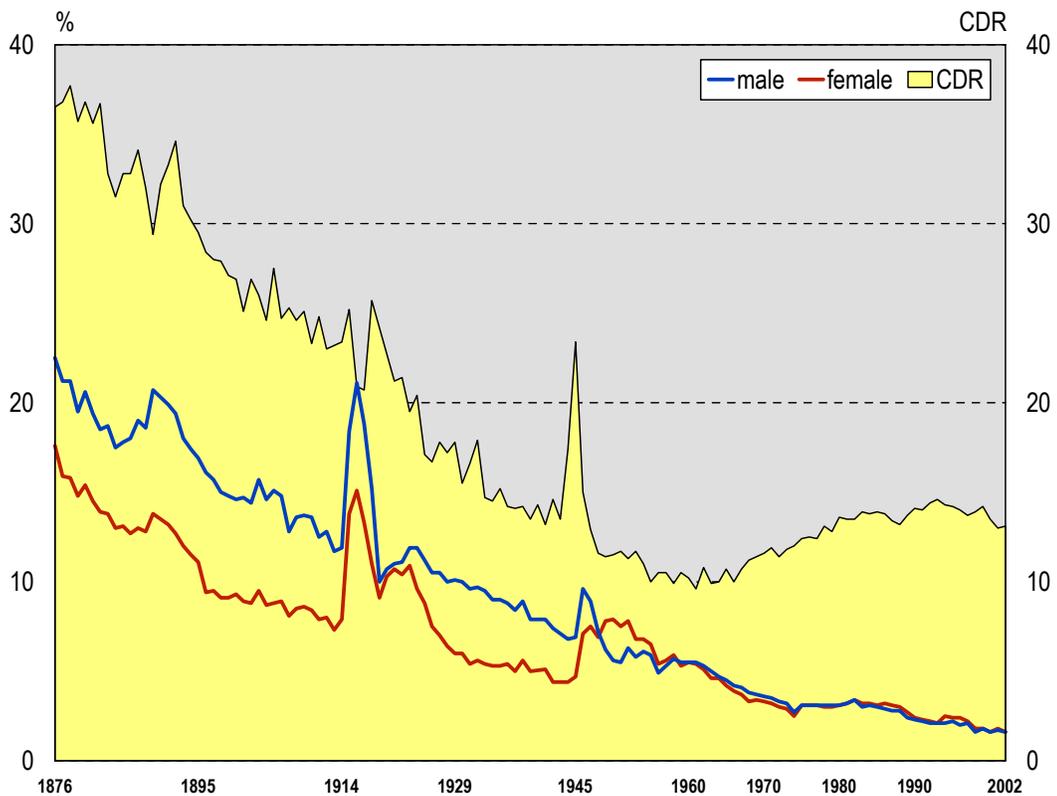


The same issue with regards to men shows less fluctuation. Also, while in the case of women, the waves are similar for the age groups 19 and below and 20-24, for men these two age categories show different peaks over time. Right after the communist takeover, it was the very young men who benefited from the change in the legal age. From the late 1960s, it was the 20-24 year olds, who started to marry in greater numbers. It was partly because by this time the economic transformation was over, and most of the rural men who were uprooted with the agricultural collectivization could establish a certain standard of living. Then, in the mid-1970s, it was again the below 19 category that experienced another peak, due to another change in the legal age.

It is also an interesting difference that while the three selected age groups have different marriage rates in case of the women, there is a strong convergence for men. By 2002, marriages at all three age categories declined to about 25 percent of the 1949 level for men. For women, the change was different for the three age groups. It followed the expected pattern, corresponding with the changes in the age at marriage: by 2002 it declined the most for the youngest (10% of the 1949 level), and least for the oldest of the three (40% of the 1949 level).

Nuptiality trends are also influenced by the remarriage of widows (Figure 6.). In the 1870s about one of every five marriages involved at least one widowed person. This, however, was different for men and women. Widowed men remarried not only faster, but also more often, as it was socially more acceptable. Also, due to the differences in the age at marriage, if men became widows they were in better position in the marriage market than women. This difference prevailed until the Second World War.

Figure 6.
Proportion of marriages by widows, 1876-2002



It is interesting to observe the difference between the two world war patterns. According to the data there was a large increase in the First World War in marriages by widows. Most importantly, this increase was the characteristic of both men and women. At the same time the crude death rates do not indicate such outstanding increase in deaths, which was the characteristic of 1944-45. Also, the war in 1914-18 did not affect

Hungary proper, only the periphery regions, which makes a scholar think: where do these widowed men come from?

The answer is not entirely clear with this respect. The peak of widow marriages in 1916 might account for the somewhat larger war losses of Hungary in 1914-15. But why there is no peak around 1920, after the even greater losses in 1918, when the crude death rate was the higher? Part of the answer to this riddle lies probably in the general social turmoil at that time. With a considerable population displacement from the periphery early in the war, it might look easier to end marriages with claiming the death of the spouse, than filing for divorce.

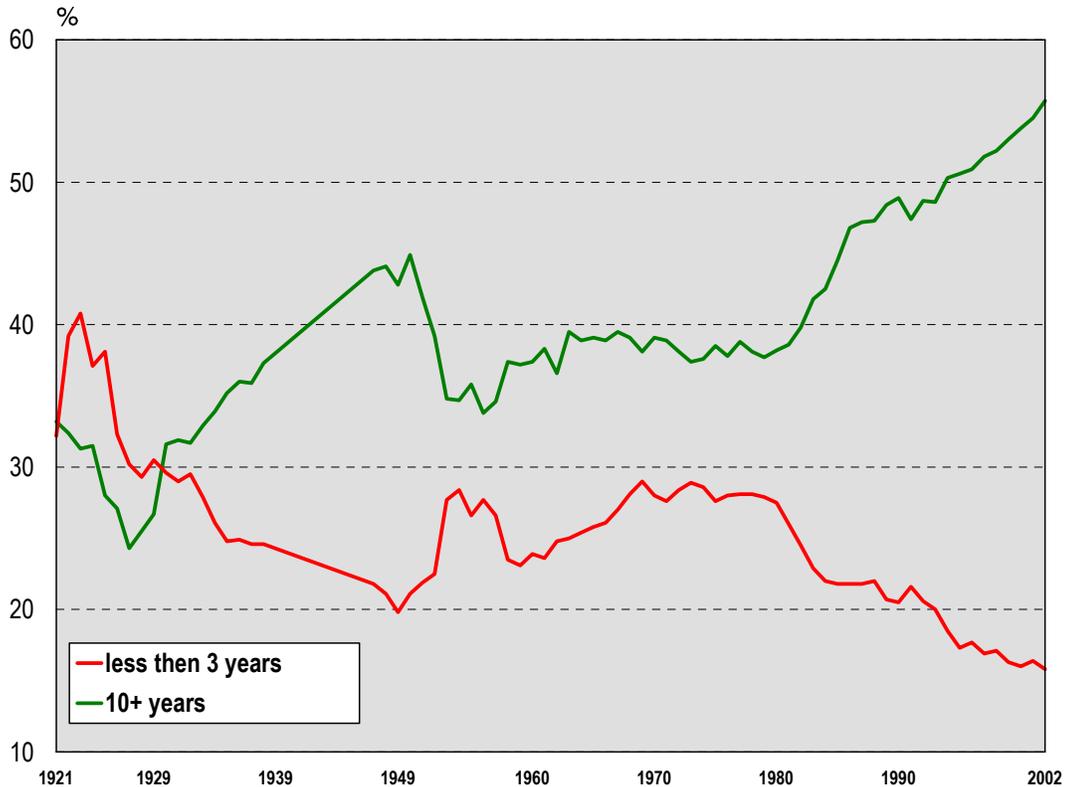
The situation was very different in the Second World War. The last two years of the war meant great losses for all: soldiers on the front, people who suffered from deportation and civil population due to the bombings. Eventually, the war reached Hungary in 1944-45 with the withdrawal of the German and the arrival of the Soviet troops. The high peak in the crude death rates accounts for that. However, the widowed marriage rates for men and women are not parallel. The reason for this is that a large number of Hungarian soldiers were taken as POWs, and spent long time in Soviet camps. They were released only slowly, and many never made it back to Hungary. The delayed female remarriage, extending into the 1950s indicates this situation. This rate was relatively high for years as gradually either news came about the death of the spouse or widows eventually gave up and remarried.

After the Second World War, the general trend of the decreasing proportion of widow remarriages continued. The historical difference between the male and female widow remarriages ended, and from the 1950s a gender convergence can be observed. The overall decreasing proportion of widow remarriages can be tied to the increasing longevity, as less and less spousal deaths occurred at a time, when the other partner was still young and active. The gender convergence corresponds with the changing social structure from the 1960s, including the increased female independence, and the changing cultural norms with respect to that.

The changing norms can be traced in the changing divorce patterns also. As it has already been mentioned, divorces started to increase after the Civil Marriage Act in 1895. This change, however, was not always balanced with regards to the duration of the

marriage. In the early 1920s, one third of the divorces affected marriages that took less than three years, another third those that lasted longer than 10 years, and the last third was in between. Starting from this situation, it is interesting to see how the duration of the marriage played out in the divorce trends since then (Figure 7.).

Figure 7.
Proportion of divorces by the duration of the marriage, 1921-2002



After the First World War the proportion of divorces from short marriages increased. Hungary at that time went through a significant social turmoil and a profound territorial loss with the Trianon Treaty in 1921, and this probably took its toll on recent marriages. However, from the mid-1920s, it was rather the long marriages that broke up, especially after the Depression. From that point the line of the divorces from short and long marriages are almost the mirror images of each other.

In the 1950s, it was again the short marriages that proved to be less durable. The reason for this is similar to the post-WWI situation, being the great social transformation behind, for two main reasons. One is the generally increased number of marriages, and

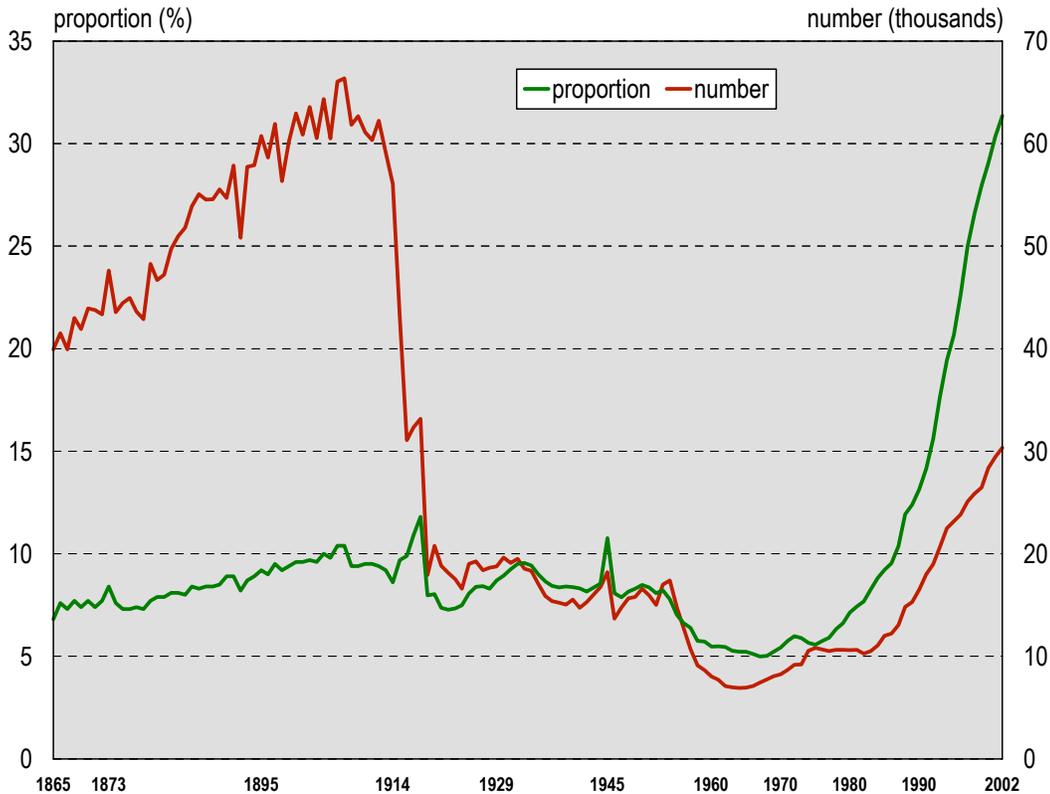
among those many inevitably did not turn out as expected. The second reason is probably the rural transformation after the postwar land redistribution. Due to this redistribution a large rural population felt that they have sufficient economic basis to form a family. But after the agricultural collectivization of the 1950s, many of them were displaced, and many new families could not handle this situation, especially if there were no children yet.

The changes from the late 1970s in both curves occurred by somewhat different causes. The easing social control on collective behavior could be one reason behind the general increase in divorces, and it seems that this had a stronger impact on the long marriages. Also, many couples were not able to handle the rapidly increasing stress originated in the increased workload from the second economy. This view is supported by the increasing male mortality from the same period.

The decreasing proportion of divorces from short marriages did not only occur as a statistical response for the increasing divorce from long marriages. With the general decline of marriages and the increasing prevalence of cohabitation, many marriages that might end in divorce after a few years were not established at all. Cohabitation gave the convenient opportunity to test relationships before serious commitments.

One consequence of the increasing rate of cohabitation is the rising number of births out of wedlock. Figure 8. shows the change with respect to this, both in absolute numbers and in percentages since 1865. Until the First World War both the number and the proportion of births out of wedlock increased. Around 1914, one out of ten births occurred outside of marriage. The First World War brought a dramatic drop in the number of births out of wedlock. However, at the same time, their proportion actually increased, which means that births in marriage declined even more. After this, apart from a small peak in 1945, births out of wedlock remained relatively stable until the late 1950s.

Figure 8.
Births out of wedlock, 1865-2002



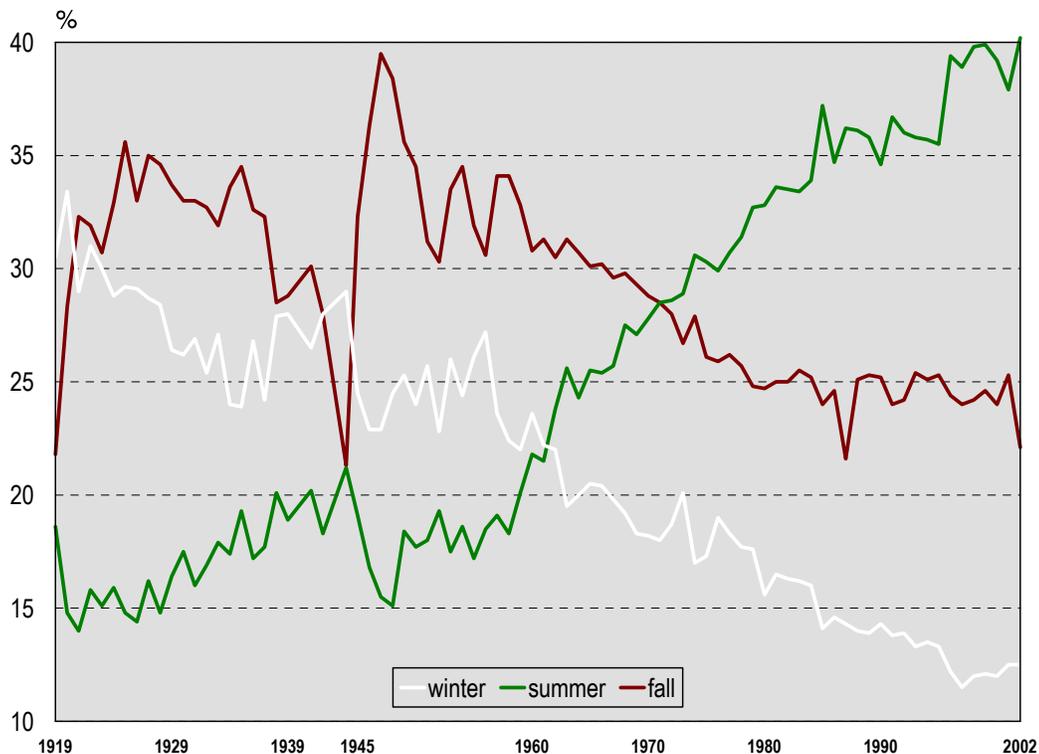
The late 1950s meant the general establishment of socialist norms, and among these were the negative views on births out of wedlock. As a result, by the 1960s the proportion of these births declined to an all time low 5 percent. Also, at this time, especially from the late 1960s, the generous maternal benefits made couples strongly prefer births within the marriage (besides the increasing number of marriages in general). By the mid-1970s, however, the maternal benefits started to loose value, especially if compared to the participation of the spouse in the second economy, which latter contributed to the overall decline of fertility. At the same time, the ideational change that caused the increasing cohabitation had its logical impact on the births out of wedlock. From the early 1980s, a rapid increase can be observed, largely accelerated by the post-socialist transformation.

Today, about one third of all births is out of wedlock in Hungary. Its corresponding phenomenon is the decrease in births in general, as consensual unions are

less stable. However, research in Hungary shows that during the 1990s, the average number of children of married couples is lower than the number of children with parents in consensual unions (Hablicsek, 2000). Two particular reasons can account for this. The first is the ethnic difference, as the Roma minority with higher than average fertility tends to prefer cohabitation. The second is the fact that cohabitation often involves divorced couples with children from the previous marriages.

The last issue to discuss is related to the changing economic activities in the 20th century, with respect to the seasonal timing of the marriage. Traditionally, until the First World War, most marriages were made during the winter (Figure 9.). This is a typical characteristic of predominantly rural societies, as agricultural activities do not allow much time for celebration when there is a lot of work to be done. From the 1920s, however, the number of winter weddings started to decline, and in the interwar period, fall weddings were the most popular.

Figure 9.
Seasonal distribution of marriages, 1919-2002



The most important trend is the increase of the summer weddings. This had only one break, after 1945, when the land redistribution and the short-lived revival of smallholder agriculture made the summer the most important economic season again. However, from the 1960s due to the rapid industrialization and the agricultural collectivization, the structure of the society has changed a lot. Not just the norms became different, but with the dominance of the industrial and administrative labor force, summer became the season when the vacation leave was given out. These changes made summer the most popular and convenient season to marry.

3. Summary

This paper went through the last century of socioeconomic development in Hungary and investigated the relationship between modernization and population dynamics in general, and nuptiality patterns in particular. We saw how development policies and historic events affected marriage trends. We can conclude that although these policies and events had substantial impact on nuptiality, the most profound changes were caused by broader socioeconomic currents.

Although traditionally Eastern Europe was different from the Western part of the continent in marriage and family formation patterns, this difference, symbolized by the Hajnal-border, has disappeared by the end of 20th century. In the first half of the 20th century the main vehicle of convergence was the shift in Western European patterns, while from the 1960s, it was the Eastern European pattern that changed more.

From the viewpoint of Eastern Europe, and Hungary in particular this is not surprising. The main structure of the society did not change a lot until the Second World War. From the 19th century, the various historical events' localized impact was the main reason behind nuptiality changes. Many of these events of course affected long-term socioeconomic development, hence influenced nuptiality patterns through altering the development trajectory of Hungary. The territorial losses after the First World War for example, reinforced the agrarian economic structure of the country, keeping the predominantly rural character of the society, with prevailing traditional norms about

family formation. The Second World War was one of the main factors behind the imposition of the state socialist system on Hungary, which in turn broke the traditional agrarian structure of the society and promoted new norms.

The real changes in Eastern Europe occurred after the communist takeover. The new government had a deliberate agenda to transform the society into an urban industrial one. It is a different academic debate whether their vision of modernity was well grounded or applicable to the particular circumstances in postwar Eastern Europe. What is important that their vision was eventually put into practice with coercive policy measures, and had a profound impact on Hungarian society. Macro changes that took place in an organic manner over a long period of time in the West, such as the decline of agriculture, the rise of the industrial society or the process of urbanization, occurred only within a generation in Hungary. This transformation put an incredible stress on the social fabric of the country.

Nuptiality patterns in Hungary started to change from the 1950s. These changes, however, were not unidirectional. In the early period, the policy emphasis was on speeding up the social transformation. The decrease in the legal age for marriage, and the general social mobility resulted in increasing marriage rates and decreasing age at marriage. At the same time, however, legal liberalization of the divorces (introduced for the same exact reason) actually worked in the other direction, making marriages less stable.

The nature of policy environment was also different. Until the mid-1960s, mostly economic development policies were deployed, and population changes (with some exception, such as the fertility boom after the strict abortion regulations) were both intended and unintended side effects of these policies. Breaking the traditional rural family structure and norms for example, was carried out by agricultural collectivization and offering better wages in urban industrial jobs. Mobilizing the female labor force to support extensive industrial development was also an economic policy, having fundamental impact on family formation and norms.

From the mid-1960s, explicit considerations about population change gained more space. The Marxist ideology concluded that population equals power, hence it was

imperative for these societies to apply pro-natalist policy measures. Maternal benefits or housing policy were such measures that had an impact on nuptiality also.

From the mid-1970s, due to the economic recession and the decline in state capacity to conduct large scale development agendas, marriage rates started to decline. At the same time, divorces continued to increase. The last major economic policy was allowing the second economy to substitute for goods the state was not able to provide, but it had a devastating impact on family formation. The slow ideational changes started a converging trend to the Western European patterns.

Marriages declined in numbers, and also were delayed in the life course. The average age at marriage increased, shortening the childbearing period of women at a time when the social norm was still having children in wedlock. Cohabitation increased, similarly to the Western patterns, and the growing prevalence of intended childlessness or remaining single also shows the unfolding second demographic transition in contemporary Hungary.

In this respect, this paper also concludes that recent population dynamics in Eastern Europe show great resemblance to those of happening in Western Europe. There are local variations of the same dynamics, but since the same macro level social and economic forces shape Eastern and Western Europe, and also a cultural similarity can be observed, this should not be a surprise. What really interesting is the long trajectory of interrelated societal and population development in countries like Hungary that tried to continuously catch up with the West, though not necessarily in demographic development.

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