

Cohabitation and Marriage

– Facts, Opinions, Trends and Transitions¹

Zsolt Spéder,
Demographic Research Institute, Budapest
E-mail: speder@mailop.ksh.hu

Marietta Pongrácz
Demographic Research Institute, Budapest
E-mail: speder@mailop.ksh.hu

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Please do not quote (comments are more than welcome).

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Abstract

The empirical investigation 'Turning points of the life course' in 2001/2002 (16364 respondents) aims to understand the emerging new demographic behaviour after the collapse of the communist system. The paper describes the evolving new type of partnership-form cohabitation. As a starting point we compare some features of marriage, 'old' and 'new' type of cohabitation, than try to capture differences behavioural features (values, rationality, quality of partnership). Using partnership history data we define the historical time of the emergence of cohabitation and conclude that the process started before the societal transition. Using educational achievement we could define the social-structural setting of cohabitation. The life course perspective enables us to investigate the inter-relationship of cohabitation and marriage, and discuss how far is cohabitation a pre-marital relationship.

0. Introduction

The rising occurrence and acceptance of cohabitation is without doubt one of the most conspicuous feature of the demographic changes that has occurred in the last decade and a half in Hungary. Of course, this phenomenon is by no means unique and has been widely described in other countries as well. (Bachrach, et.al., 2000, Bumpass, Lu, 2000, Cherlin 1992, Kiernan 2002, Thornton, 1988, Smock, 2000) This change is one of the key elements of the concept of ‘second demographic transition’ (Van de Kaa - Lesthaege 1987). The spread of cohabitative arrangements must of necessity indicate a decrease in the number of marriages and/or may signal changes in the meaning and content of marriage as an institution. However, it would be an oversimplification to interpret these processes merely as cohabitation replacing marriage. Premarital cohabitation (‘trial marriage’) directly indicates the connections between the two forms of partnership. At the same time, we would not be justified in saying that all cohabitation ultimately leads to marriage and that the spread of cohabitation presents no challenge for the institution of marriage. Altogether, we are currently experiencing a turbulent and transitory period in the forms of lasting partner relationships. One of the central issues of the social-demographical research project ‘Turning points of the life course’ is the understanding of the transitions of the forms of partnerships². The fundamental concept of this research project is the same as that of the ‘Generation and Gender’ program (UN/ECE 2000) and it performs a longitudinal study of demographic processes, among them the changes in partner relationships. The full utilization of the data system and the assessment of the influences of structural and behavioural factors will become possible after the second round of data collection since it is only then that the ‘selective’ and ‘adaptive’ processes may be separated. (Lesthaeghe-Moors 2002). Without the second round, the data currently at our disposal allows for a very narrow interpretation and permits us only a description of the initial situation.

In comparing *marriage and cohabitation* we will first compare social characteristics of the respondents, then we will use certain indicators to point out differences in certain aspects of values systems. The questions on the ‘suggested’ and ‘useful’ forms of living together in the questionnaire target the discovery of community expectations, in the words of Lesthaege and Liefboer: the ‘normative controls’ at work in the community. After the basic comparisons we will focus on trends in changing behaviour and on certain life-course features of cohabitation and marriage. We will identify the historical emergence of the cohabitation as first partnership and indirectly we will offer a remark to the discussion on the historical demographic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The study of the trends give the opportunity to investigate the importance of the social setting, the educational differences in the emergence of the new partnership form. Finally, we will focus on transition from first cohabitation and the trends of transitions.

² The ‘turning points of the life course’ is a representative social-demographic panel survey, the first wave of the survey was carried out in 2001/2002, 16394 respondents, age 18-74. The first wave questionnaire included full partnership and fertility history, current partnership relation and household structure, parents main partnership relations, quality of partnership and attitudes towards family behavior, uncertainty, childrearing values. It incorporate wide range socio-economic background variables, as labor market situation, education, material well-being, income, housing etc. A detailed description of the concept see Spéder 2001.

1. *Basic Features of Partnerships*

Up until recent times, marriage had been the only form of long term partnerships in Hungary. A very small percent of the population lived in cohabitation and only postmarital cohabitations prevailed. (Csernák, 1992) The spread of cohabitation started gaining momentum in the late 1980s (Kamarás, 1996, Bukodi, 2001). Most of those living in lasting relationships (63% of the 18 to 74 age group) still live in marriages (87%) but cohabitative arrangements are becoming popular among young people (to which point we shall return) Most of those living in cohabitation are today unmarried (57%), one-third of them are divorced and 10% of them are widowed. These three groups indicate the differentiated nature of cohabitative arrangements and we may surmise that the content of relationship also varies significantly between these groups. Those in the first group are running a ‘trial marriage’ before tying the knot, those in the other group choose this living arrangement as an alternative to marriage. Those that are divorced have already voluntarily dissolved a relationship which they earlier thought would be lasting. All this made it sensible for us to treat these groups separately in the chapter describing the various types of cohabitative arrangements. However, the low number of elements allows us to set up only two groups: those who are unmarried (‘new type of cohabitation’) and those who had been divorced or widowed (‘old type of cohabitation’).³ This division is supported by the age distribution of those living in cohabitation, since unmarried people living in cohabitation tend to be much younger.⁴

Table 1. Distribution of people between 18 and 74, by marital status and form of partnership

Type	%
Unmarried, living alone	21,1
Unmarried, living together	4,6
Married living in marriage	54,4
Married, living in separation	1,3
Divorced, living alone	7,2
Divorced, living in cohabitation	2,6
Widowed , living alone	8,0
Widowed, living in cohabitation	0,7
Total (%)	100,0
N	16 363

³ In the two groups taken together, we have 80% divorcees and 20% widowed

⁴ To better understand the features of the ‘new’ type of partnerships, we divided the married people into three groups: young couples (under 40), middle aged couples (40 to 59) and older couples (60 and over). By this, we have managed to filter out the cohort effect, however roughly. In the comparison of married and cohabiting forms of living, young married couples will have an especially important role.

Table 2. Different forms of partnerships by age groups (%)

Age group	Living in marriage	Living in cohabitation	
		Unmarried	Widowed/divorced
18–29	10,1	62,9	5,6
30–39	20,5	23,9	19,6
40–49	25,0	9,4	30,0
50–59	22,4	2,1	27,4
60–69	16,0	1,6	14,6
70–75	6,0	0,1	2,8
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	8898	758	538

Later we will focus on the choice between cohabitation and marriage, so let us now present the social characteristics of those living in these unions. As far as *education levels* are concerned, there is hardly any difference between those living in marriages and cohabitations (Table 3) In contrast to Western European countries where cohabitative arrangements are mostly the choice of higher educated and better trained young people, in Hungary the education level of people in cohabitative partnerships lags behind that of people living in marriages. It would be too early to generalize, but right now, there is nothing to indicate that the ‘new type’ of cohabitation is a ‘fashionable’ form of life which trickles down from the more educated social groups. What is truly conspicuous is that a breakdown by education level – which strongly differentiates the new Hungarian society – shows no significant differences.

Table 3
Education levels by the different forms of partnership (in %)

Education	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	19–39	40–59	60–	‘New type’	‘Old type’	
Less than primary	1,4	2,4	17,4	5,8	6,1	5,5
Primary	15,6	21,6	34,3	21,9	28,4	22,8
Vocational	37,5	31,5	20,2	21,5	32,7	31,1
Secondary	29,8	28,6	17,2	27,7	22,5	26,4
Higher	15,6	15,9	10,9	12,1	10,2	14,3

Total (%)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	(2727)	(4218)	(1957)	(759)	(538)	(10196)

Data on the *economic activity* of the respondents again show no significant differences between those opting for cohabitation and those living in marriages. The ratios of those employed, self-employed, unemployed and having other economic status is almost identical, whether speaking of young married couples or those living in the ‘new’ cohabitative relationships. A marked difference can only be found among those on maternity benefits and those in the ‘other inactive’ category. A much higher percentage of married people are on maternity benefits (i.e. have children) and if we were to break down the data further by gender, the difference would be even greater. We were expecting a high ratio of students among the cohabiting couples but this expectation has not been fulfilled. In today’s Hungary, student life seems incompatible not only with having children but also with having lasting relationship. Those who live in ‘traditional’ cohabitation exhibit a breakdown pattern similar to that of middle aged and older married couples. (We should remember there are more middle-aged divorcees than older, cohabiting widows.) We have also examined the differences by income status and places of residence but found no significant correlations. All in all, we can conclude that the major economic indicators of those living in marriages and those cohabiting are very similar and no characteristic differences between them can be established.

Table 4. Economic activity of those living in partnership, by form of partnership

Economic activity	Married			Cohabiting		Total
	18–39	40–59	60–	‘New type’	‘Old type’	
Employed	61,3	58,0	6,5	60,3	46,9	48,6
Self-employed	8,2	9,5	1,4	6,2	7,6	7,2
Unemployed	7,0	4,4	0,1	8,9	4,7	4,6
Old age pensioner	–	6,9	81,3	2,2	17,5	19,5
Claimant of disability allowance	1,5	16,1	6,2	2,1	14,9	9,2
Maternity benefits	16,5	0,6	0,1	9,5	3,4	5,5
Homemaker	2,7	2,4	3,0	2,5	2,0	2,6
Student	0,5	–	–	2,0	–	0,3
Other inactive	2,3	2,2	1,5	6,2	3,0	2,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,	100,0

It was expected that the *fertility behaviour* of those living in marriages and those cohabiting be different on account of age composition of these groups. Whereas married people have a 1.83 children on the average, this figure is only 1.17 for those living in cohabitation. If we differentiate this as previously, the average number of children for married people in the different age groups will be 1.64, 1.98 and 1.83. Cohabitors who

have never married have 0.65 children on the average while those in traditional cohabitative arrangements have 1.93. The table below, detailing the number of children, clarifies the picture further. There is no sharp difference between married couples⁵ and they are characterized by a dominance of two-children families. We can also say that young couples do not lag behind middle-aged couples -- but the two kinds of cohabitative relationships are indeed characterized by markedly different fertility behaviours. The majority of never married people who live in cohabitation are childless (59.9%) and 20% of them have only one child. This is the group least active in childbearing. The highest ratio of multiple children is to be found among those divorcees and widows who live alone while this group has a relatively low ratio of parents with two children. This seems to be the most heterogeneous group from the perspective of fertility. It is important to understand the forms of partner relationships in order to assess fertility processes. The two may constitute simultaneous processes that go back to the same root -- or one may be presupposing the other.

Table 5. Number of children in partnerships by form of partnership (in %)!

Nr of children	Married			Cohabiting		Total
	18–39	40–59	Over 60	'New type'	'Old type'	
None	13,8	5,2	7,9	59,9	9,5	12,3
1	29,2	19,9	27,9	22,8	31,0	24,7
2	40,9	54,8	47,1	12,3	36,1	45,5
3	12,3	15,0	11,9	3,7	13,9	12,8
4	3,8	5,1	5,2	1,3	9,5	4,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	2723	4215	1953	759	538	10188

2. Types of Partner Relationships – Behaviour components

There are countless numbers of works in social sciences highlighting the fact that in modern societies the standardization of life courses is diminishing and the freedom of individual choices is expanding. (Beck, 1996, Friedrichs, 1998, Liefborer, 1999; Corijn, 2001). At the same time, other pieces of scholarly works indicate the structural constraints of choices and the limits of individual freedom. (Leisering, 1995). In demographic literature the presumption that changes in demographic processes and the demographic behaviour of individuals are the consequences of structural changes (in welfare state, labour market, etc.) and value changes (individualization, diminishing social control) has become generally accepted. In our research we attempted to measure

⁵ Naturally, we are aware that the fertility of generations born in different historical periods differ from each other, but this is not a primary concern here. On this, see Kamarás, 2001.

the effects, even if in a limited fashion,⁶ of countless structural and behavioural changes. In the foregoing we have looked at some structural factors, even if in a limited fashion, and now we turn to behavioural elements.

There are many problems associated with behavioural elements. One of them is that an empirical study of this phenomenon goes back a shorter time than the study of objective indicators and consequently there is less scholarly consensus on their usability. Also, the analysis of cross-sectional data with regards to behavioural elements is rather contradictory. In demography, this is well attested by the volume edited by Lesthaeghe. (Lesthaeghe, 2002). While looking at objective variables theoretically we can be sure that education levels or age are causes and cannot be effects; analysing values, opinions and demographic events (partner relationship, number of children, etc) together, it is much more difficult to clarify what is the cause and what is the effect. Even though social sciences regard values on the level of individual as rather stable, we cannot be sure that childbearing or divorce do not modify these. In other words, we cannot say whether our values 'adapt.' At the same time, we can presume that people with different values will make different decisions and select different options in a period where the number of options is increased. Lesthaeghe has performed an excellent analysis of this issue from the perspective of demographic processes and he stresses values and orientations where panel-type analyses can be very fruitful. (Lesthaeghe, 2002)⁷ Having considered all this, here we focus on a few behavioural variables that might play an important part in selecting one type of partner relationship over another, but they are less determined by adaptive or selective processes. At the same time we realize that from the perspective of our particular topic, truly novel findings will become possible only after a second wave of data collection.

2.1 Values: religiosity

The decision to live in cohabitation as opposed to marriage can be influenced by a number of subjective and objective circumstances. Research has revealed that in some of the cases, the reason is a postponement until a change in the circumstance preventing marriage (lack of a secure job, lack of suitable residence, etc.) As for those cohabiting, the reason in some of the cases is a conscious rejection of marriage which is often verbalized as 'we don't need a certificate' suggesting a practical reason and pre-empting further questions. However, we think that behind this practical behaviour rejecting formalities, there are certain value judgments, in other words, the choices between different forms of partnership are the result of a value-driven choices between options emerging from differentiating social conditions. (Barber et al, 2002) We posit that the attitude toward religion – existing or non-existing – might serve as basis for deducting value differences. (Kiernan, 2000) At the same time we suppose that people's religiosity is a stable part of their value system, that is, less exposed to the above-described adaptive/selective mechanisms. To apply this to partnership: it is unlikely that the choice of a form of partner relationship will have an effect on people's religiosity. That is why it makes sense to examine the correlation between the religiosity of those living in

⁶ A more detailed analysis of structural elements will become possible after the second wave of data collection

⁷ We can see the effectiveness of the panel analyses in the volume edited by him

marriages and those living in cohabitation. We measured religiosity in our study by two types of questions – one was a traditional direct question about religiosity (see Table 6), the other pertained to a sort of symbolic religiosity, specifically to rites of church and community. (Table 7)

The ratio of those who follow the doctrines of churches is much higher among those living in marriages and in this group those who are ‘religious in their own way’ are also represented at an above-the-average rate. But how will the picture change if we apply the age variable to the married group? The ratio of those following the doctrines of the church is highest among those over 60 while the ratio of non-religiousness is surprisingly high among young and middle-aged married couples – even though it is even higher among middle-aged couples living in cohabitation. Comparing young married couples with people living in nonmarital (premarital) cohabitation we will find that the ratio of those who are religious according to the teaching of churches is higher in the former group while the ratio of non-religiousness is higher in the latter. This is a very important feature because the spread of cohabitative arrangements impacts young people primarily. The difference in religiosity between married and cohabiting couples is not overwhelming but tangible.

Table 6. Types of religiosity by people living in marriages and cohabitation, belonging to different age groups (in %)

	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	18–39	40–59	60–	‘New type’	‘Old type’	
I am religious, I follow the doctrine of the church	13,3	14,5	28,6	6,1	10,2	16,0
I am religious in my own way	55,6	58,9	57,8	52,9	55,6	57,2
I cannot say	6,7	3,9	1,9	6,7	6,3	4,6
I am not religious	23,2	21,6	10,7	33,6	27,3	21,1
I do not wish to respond	1,0	1,0	0,9	0,5	0,4	0,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	2723	4213	1955	758	538	10187

We also measured the religiosity of people living in and outside of marriages by gauging their attitude towards rites of the community and the church. We posed three questions – about the perceived importance of christenings, church weddings and church funerals – and constructed a three-tier scale on the basis of the responses. Our data unambiguously shows the ratio of those attaching greater importance to these rites is much higher among people living in marriages. Some people among those living in cohabitation attach no importance to two out of the three rites. (Table 7) A further breakdown of the data along these questions showed that the older the respondents are, the more importance is attached by them to christenings, church weddings and church funerals. An exemption to

the linearity of direct proportion is the youngest age group of 18 to 29. They attach greater importance to church rites than the two subsequent age groups (30 to 39 and 40 to 49), in other words, the linearity of the opinions is observable from people in their thirties on. Obviously there are many other value-related factors at play in the choice between the two forms of partnerships. Further multi-variable analyses must be performed to clarify the effects of the various factors but we are confident that these later analyses will confirm the significant effect of religiosity.

Table 7. Rites observed by people in different forms of partnerships ('symbolic religiosity')

	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	18-39	40-59	60-	'New type'	'Old type'	
Not religious	19,9	18,6	10,9	26,7	26,9	18,5
Both	46,9	44,4	33,3	53,9	48,8	43,9
Religious	33,2	37,0	55,8	19,4	24,4	37,6
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	2687	4129	1923	746	525	10010

2.2 Values and Expectations: Recommended Form of Life

The role of the diminishing social control mechanisms in new demographic processes has often been assessed in the relevant literature. (Lesthaeghe 1996, Liefbroer 1999) We concur in the opinion that marriage is primarily a community institution and its decline is partly a product of the 'disappearance' of community spaces and the transfer of partnerships into a 'community vacuum.' We tried to measure these community expectations (which are individual values as well) i.e. the rejection or support for the two forms of partnerships in an indirect way. ('*What form of partnership would you recommend young men and woman to choose?*')

Table 8. Forms of partnership recommended to young people, by those living in partnerships (%)

	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	18-39	40-59	60-	'New type'	'Old type'	
Alone, independent	1,7	2,2	0,8	3,4	2,0	1,9
Cohabitation	4,4	4,7	3,2	24,1	19,7	6,6

Cohabitation followed by marriage	69,7	57,5	30,5	69,5	61,5	56,7
Marriage	22,1	33,0	63,0	1,6	14,1	32,5
Does not know	2,1	2,7	2,6	1,4	2,6	2,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	2720	4217	1956	760	538	10191

The responses unambiguously reflect the marriage-centred attitude of the respondents. A decisive majority of the total respondents regarded marriage as the desirable end state of partnerships. Those living in cohabitation constituted no exception to this and neither did young people. At the same time an overwhelming majority of the respondents including those living in marriages regarded a premarital cohabitation ('trial marriage') as desirable and commendable. (Table 8) This seems to signify that a decisive majority of those living in cohabitation, regardless of earlier marriage history, regards cohabitation as a transitory form which appears at certain juncture in a life course. The ratio of those who regard cohabitation as an alternative to marriage is by no means negligible but they are certainly in the minority. This is true for 25% of those living in a 'new' type of cohabitation and 9.7% of all the people under 30⁸. The ratios seem to suggest that those living in an unmarried cohabitation are thinking of tying the knot later or have been forced by outside circumstances to adopt this form of cohabitation. The ratio of those rejecting all forms of (unmarried) cohabitation is not insignificant though certainly in the minority. One-third of the people living in couple partnerships belong to this group but the majority in this category is constituted by the oldest respondents. This attitude is less widespread among young people: 11.2% of those between 18 and 29 share this opinion. What is especially important about the permissive attitude of the middle-age groups is that for young people – being their parents – they represent the most important community control. Among them we find fewer people rejecting all forms of cohabitation (only marriage is permitted) and those who regard cohabitation recommendable as a temporary form of living together are in majority. Regarding all forms of living arrangements, we must point out that being single is not a recommendable form of life among the young or the old, the married and the cohabiting – and a negligible minority (3.4%) of those living singly deems it an ideal form of living. This seems to bear out Utasi's findings who concluded that being single in Hungary is not an alternative form of living but a failure to form a partnership. (Utasi, 2002)

We also looked at whether pregnancy plays a part in the transition from cohabiting to marriage. Responses given to this question⁹ reflect a previously unprecedented liberal attitude people did not used to exhibit. (S. Molnár-Pongrácz, 1998) (Table 9)

⁸ In this study, we could not create tables to go with all the data

⁹ The question was the following: 'How important do you think it is to get married if the woman in the cohabitative relationship gets pregnant and wants to keep the child? If it is important, when should the marriage take place?'

Table 9. Perception of the importance of marriage in the public opinion among those living in partnerships (%)

	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	18–39	40–59	60–	'New type'	'Old type'	
Not at all important	9,1	7,7	3,1	25,0	19,4	9,1
Not really important	24,7	20,2	7,7	37,8	33,5	21,0
More important than not	30,1	26,4	18,3	19,5	20,6	25,0
Important	35,4	44,6	69,5	16,9	25,8	43,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

The traditional formalization of the family status of the child to be born into the family is primarily important for those living in marriages, both young and old, but there are those among them for whom the 'formal family status' of the child is not overly important. A majority of people living in cohabitation, especially in the new form of cohabitation, does not think this important¹⁰. Divorcees and widows living in cohabitation have a more traditional view on this.

Even though strictly speaking we cannot compare our data with those of earlier studies, it seems to us that assessments of partnership are much more permissive today and less prescriptive. The prejudices that are reflected in such Hungarian expressions as 'wild marriage' (=common-law-marriage) and 'living together illegally' (=living in sin) are not to be found today. The strictures against cohabitation gave way first to tolerance then to recommendation of it as a form of living. At the same time, marriage continues to be a value since the majority of young people do not regard it as an obsolete institution but as the final form of partnership to be attained. Of course all this suggest a transformation in the institution of marriage, which needs further exploration.

2.3 Rational Reasoning in Choosing Forms of Living – What is More Advantageous?

There are divergent public notions about the advantages and disadvantages of marriage and living together without being married. Some people contend that the partners invest more energy into nurturing a relationship when it is not cemented by a 'certificate' but by emotions. Others will say that marriage constitutes the assumption of serious responsibility for each other and therefore this form ensures a more harmonious living for both the spouses and the children. (Waite, 2000) We have posed questions in this regard to married people (some of whom lived in cohabitation earlier) and to those currently living in cohabitation. Needless to say, our expectation was to see a divergence of

¹⁰ We should recall that they exhibit a very high rate of childlessness. This group can be a very interesting one when it comes to the examination of adaptive processes

opinions of the advantages and disadvantages along the lines of the different forms of partnerships, if not for other reason, then because people have to reduce ‘cognitive dissonances’. The responses given to queries about advantages and disadvantages yielded a somewhat surprising picture. (Table 10)

Of course it is not unexpected but rather reasonable that those living in marriages would not regard any other form of cohabitation as more advantageous. What is more surprising, however, is that those living in cohabitation do not regard the form of living chosen by them as more advantageous in almost any respect. This is of course partly due to the majority in this category that regard marriage as the ultimate form of living together to be attained at the end. What is most surprising and thus demanding further study and interpretation, is that those living in cohabitation opted for the neutral stance of ‘it is not the legal form that matters’ in almost all the questions. Also surprisingly there is a high ratio of married people also opting for the ‘it is not the legal form that matters’ stance. Could these results be suggesting that the choices are not made on the basis of the listed factors, or that generally speaking the institutional frameworks of partnerships are in the process of transformation, or that perhaps other reasons are concealed behind the reply ‘it is not the legal form that matters’? Needless to say, only further research can attempt to provide answers to these questions.

Table 10. The advantages/ disadvantages of different forms of partnership as perceived by those living in partnerships (%)

Cohabitation or marriage will better ensure ...	Marriage more than cohabitation	Cohabitation more than marriage	It is not the legal form that matters
	Married		
Financial security	58,3	1,2	39,3
Childbearing, the future of the child	76,5	0,7	22,1
Survival of the relationship	53,6	2,1	42,9
Successful conflict management	46,9	4,1	46,6
Realization of individual goals	40,8	8,9	48,1
The approval of parents and relatives (Anna is it good?)	76,3	0,9	21,4
	Unmarried, under 40		
Financial security	49,1	1,0	49,9
Childbearing, the future of the child	72,2	0,8	27,0
Survival of the relationship	44,5	4,2	5,8
Successful conflict management	38,3	4,2	57,6
Realization of individual goals	30,1	10,1	59,8
The approval of parents and relatives	72,1	1,0	26,9
	Cohabiting		
Financial security	20,1	6,1	72,7
Childbearing, the future of the child	39,5	3,8	55,1
Survival of the relationship	15,6	9,1	74,3

Successful conflict management	11,7	10,9	75,9
Realization of individual goals	10,6	13,1	74,6
The approval of parents and relatives	43,9	4,9	49,1

If we look at the details of the different aspects, we find that marriage is deemed most advantageous by both groups in the aspects of childbearing, the future of the child and the opinion of parents and relatives. Conflict management between partners and the attainability of personal goals are deemed as least dependent on the chosen legal form, in other words, the view demanding conflict management and relationship maintenance in a loose partnership based on emotional and not legal ties might be rejected.

2.4 *The Quality of Partnerships*

The statement above is supported by opinions regarding the quality of the relationship, the satisfaction level with marital or cohabitative relationship. Both married people and those living in cohabitation seem to be highly satisfied with their partnership and they gave it an average rating of 8 out of 10 points. The satisfaction indicator of marriages (8.76) is slightly higher than that of the cohabiting couples (8.39) but the difference is slight indeed. Judging the highly positive assessment of family life and the quality of partnerships in the light of the high number of divorces we might be justified in suspecting that questions pertaining to the quality of partnership touch upon the most sensitive areas of the private sphere and the respondents feel that some problems are just not for the public to know about.

The other question pertaining to the quality of partnership shows no great distribution even though we posed it in a less sensitive ‘inquiry environment.’¹¹ While married people worry less about their partnership, this is really true for older people. There is no marked difference in this respect between newly married people and those living in the ‘new type’ of cohabitative arrangement. Of course we are aware of the fact that the quality of partnerships depends on a lot of other factors. A close examination of these alters the picture emerging here only slightly (Gödri, 2002). At the same time, we expect to be able to propose a greater number of new statements after the second wave of data collection when we will have the chance to look at life-course turns, such as whether a lower level of satisfaction, all other factors being controlled, is more likely to lead to separation or not. (cf. Bumpass, 2002).

Table 11. Worries over the relationship, among those married or cohabiting (%)

How worried are you over your partnership?	Married			Cohabitation		Total
	18–39	40–59	60–	‘New type’	‘Old type’	

¹¹ The relevant question (worry over partnership) is embedded into a list of possible sources of worries (health, future of country, future of self, partnership, etc.)

None at all	62,6	73,0	81,7	57,8	62,0	70,1
A little	22,7	16,5	9,6	29,0	23,7	18,2
A lot	14,7	10,6	8,7	13,2	14,3	11,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
N	2699	4156	1893	758	532	10038
Satisfaction (average)	8,85	8,57	8,99	8,48	8,10	8,69

3. *The spread of cohabitation as first partnership – trying to identify the landmark in change of the demographic behaviour*

Within the inquiry into the demographic pattern shift, an intriguing problem is presented by the spread of this new form of partnership: in which generation and in what period did it begin to become popular? Explanations of the changes in Central and Eastern Europe tend to tie the changes in demographic behaviour to social changes and the change of the political regime. As far as the changes in fertility are concerned, vital statistics suggest that this presumption is not without some basis. With regards to partnership careers we only have vital statistics in the areas of weddings and divorces, but they also suggest a determining role for the political regime change on account of the significant decline in the number of marriages. Before looking at the ratio of marriages vs. cohabitations in first partnerships, let us examine whether the life course timing of union formation had undergone a modification.

When comparing data of 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 a union 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. The postponement of union formation in the life course is clearly observable in the data.

Table 12

The ratio of those who formed a lasting partnership by the ages of 20, 25, 30 within the given birth-date cohort, among women (%)

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	-	-

Total	38.9	81.6	92.4
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A significant decline could be found among those who had had a lasting partnership by the age of 20 yet. The figure dropped from over 40% to under 30%: while 45.8% of the women born in the late 1960s had been living in lasting partnerships before the age of 20, the same figure for those born in the late 1970s is 27.4% (Table 12). As we go toward higher age groups (toward earlier birth dates), the difference between the generations increasingly diminishes. At the same time it seems that those born later will not be reaching the partnership-ratios of those born earlier, even by the time they reach 30. The decline of the ratio of those who had formed a lasting partnership by a given age was first observable in the cohort of women born between 1967 and 1971 and the ratio continued to decline in all subsequent groups that could still be analyzed. The members of this above-mentioned group were 20 years old between 1987 and 1991. The commencement of the postponement of union-formation then seems to be tied in directly with the period of the political regime change, perhaps preceding it by some years. The trend seems to gain strength after the change of the political regime and refuses to die down by the time of the survey. Could this be the period when the ratio of those starting their first partnership in a cohabitation shows the first signs of increasing?

The continuous transformation of the first partnership at the expense of marriage and at the benefit of cohabitation seems to have commenced in the cohort of women born in the first half of the 1960s (1961 to 1966) and has not peaked by the time of the survey taking. In this particular cohort, the ratio of women starting their first partnership in a cohabitation increased two-fold compared to the previous cohort, while the ratio of those starting their first partnership in a marriage had declined. The “dominance shift” between cohabitation and marriage with regards to the first union-formation emerged with the group born between 1972 and 1976, whose members became adults after the change of political regime. In this group, more people started their partnership careers in cohabitation than in marriage

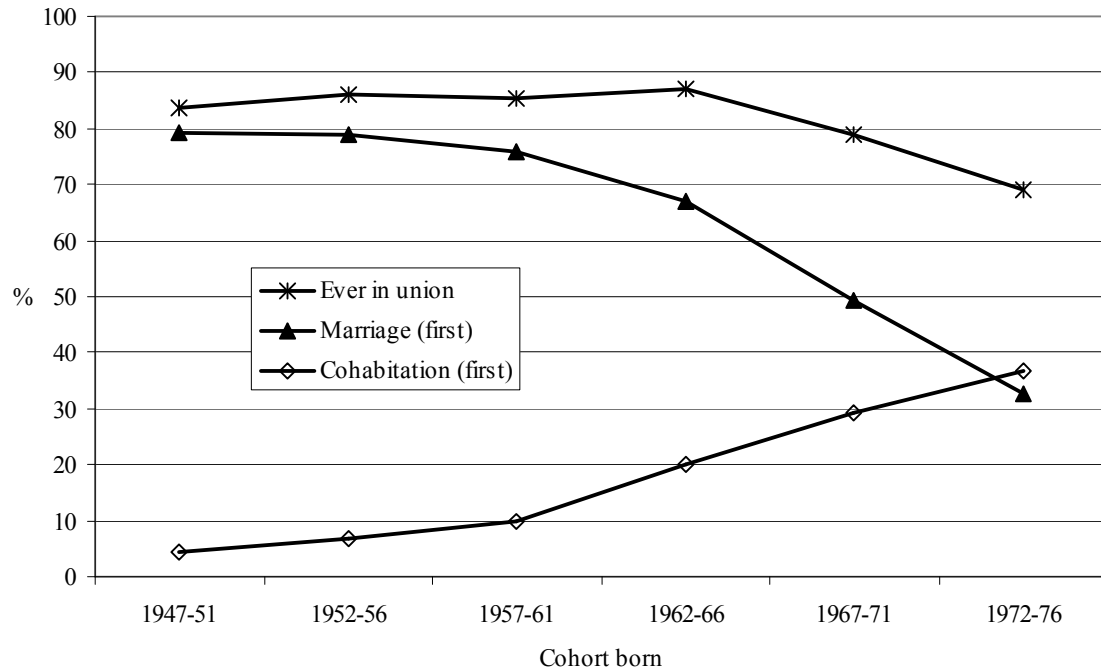


Figure 1
Changing relation of marriage and cohabitation as first partnership
Ever in partnership, ever married, first union as marriage, first union as cohabitation by
age 25 (female)

Of course, we cannot discount the possibility that in this group, more of those who will form their first union at the close of their 20s will do it in a form of marriage than in cohabitation – but on the basis of data from the earlier-born cohort we do not think this very likely. (Since a significant portion of cohabiting relationships end up in marriage, if we were to look at the dominant partnership type current in 2001/2002, we would find a higher number of women living in wedlock.)

The dominance shift, the primacy of cohabitation as the form of the first union, has happened relatively rapidly: it took 15 years for cohabitation to gain the upper hand, to move from an insignificant to a dominant form of partnership.

When examining historical differences, let us recall the fact that the ratio of cohabitation as the first form of union started increasing among those born between 1962 and 1966. These people were aged 24-28 in 1990 and a significant majority of them had started their partnership careers prior to the political regime change. The diffusion of cohabitation as first union did not commence after the change of the political regime but predated it: *starting before the change of regime, it gathered momentum subsequently*. While union-formation is tied to the change of the political regime, it is obvious that the diffusion of cohabitation as first union had started prior to the change.

Table 13
The ratio of those opting for cohabitation vs. marriage by the age of 20, 25 and 30, in the
given age cohorts

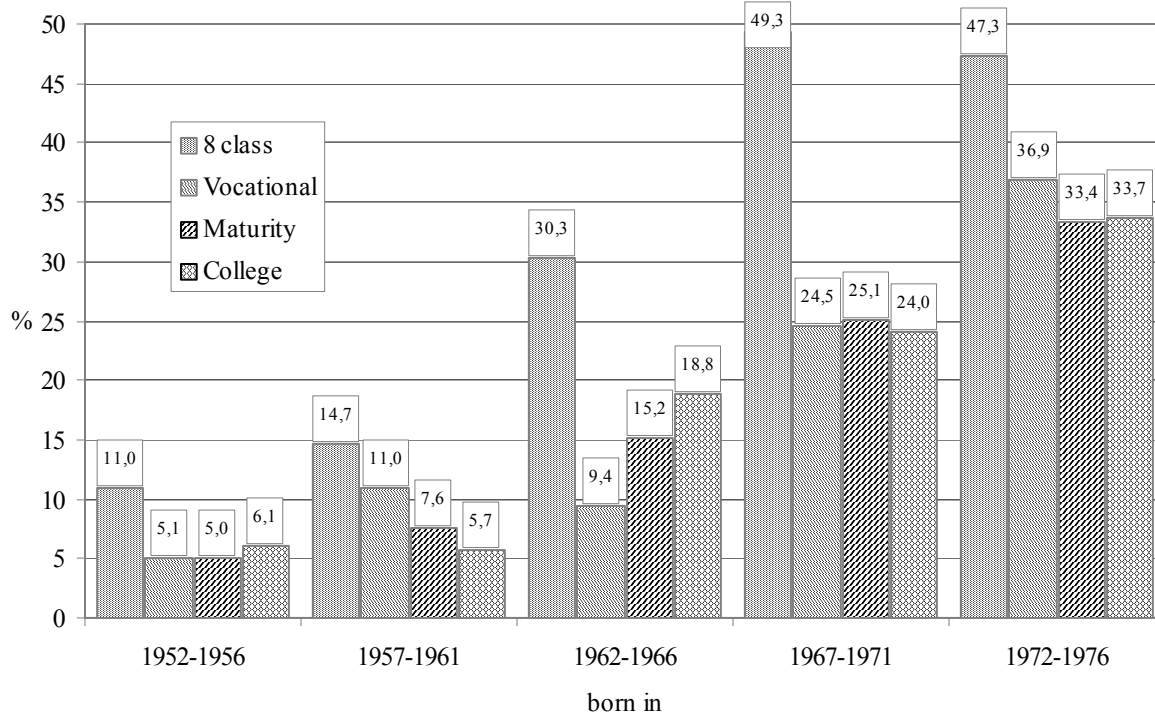
	By 20		By 25		By 30	
	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation
1947-1951	37.9	2.8	79.4	4.3	86.6	5.4
1952-1956	37.5	4.7	79.0	6.9	85.6	8.5
1957-1961	38.7	6.6	75.7	9.8	82.5	12.1
1962-1966	34.3	11.6	66.9	20.2	71.1	22.5
1967-1971	19.6	18.4	49.4	29.4	55.5	34.1
1972-1976	14.0	19.7	32.6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

4. Diffusion of cohabitation as first partnership and educational differences

There are various assumptions regarding the social groups that played a major part in spreading cohabiting relationships. Because this is a diffusion of a new type of lifestyle, most theories assume that it is spreading among the best educated the most powerfully and “trickles down” from the top of the social hierarchy. The trickle-down theory, which assumes a top-to-bottom direction of diffusion would fit better with the paradigm of the “secondary demographic transition.” At the same time, the majority of empirical analyses concluded that it was spreading most not among college and university graduates but, for instance in the US, among working class women. (Bumpass, Lu, 1999, Cherlin 1992, Thornton, Axin, Teachmen, 1995). The question is whether our data enable us to contribute to this debate.

If we break our earlier presented data down by completed levels of education, we will be somewhat nearer to the answer. 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 25¹². We should start with comparing the data of those born between 1957 and 1961 and between 1962 and 1966, since this is the time period when the start of the diffusion of cohabitation as the first union type was registered to commence.

¹² We could not select age 20 as the dividing line because those who are to have higher degrees are still in school



Social differences and diffusion of cohabitation
The ratio of women having first cohabitation at age 25, by level of education (%)
Figure 2

The ratio of those opting for cohabitation exhibits a strong increase both among those with the lowest and those with the highest completed education levels. The figure for the former group is 14.7% to 30.3% and for the latter, 5.7% to 18.8%. While the ratio is 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 with a secondary education seem to be “catching up”: in both cohorts, those with a secondary education seemed to reach the ratio recorded among those with higher education. In the youngest cohort, the ratio seems to be growing uniformly – with the exception of those with the lowest education – and is at around 35%.

The ratios mentioned here are the values of one of the indicators of the spread of cohabitation as first union, measuring the diffusion against the total number of people in a given age group. It is a suitable indicator, but we should do well to examine the spread of cohabitation among those whose first union was marriage or cohabitation. This filters out the fact that those with higher education have less time to form unions before the age of 25 than those with secondary education. The ratios thus calculated will fine-tune our picture of the diffusion of cohabitation further, but will not turn the above-mentioned relations around (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 highest among those with the lowest education and it was among these women that the cohabitation as first union became dominant, exceeding 50%.

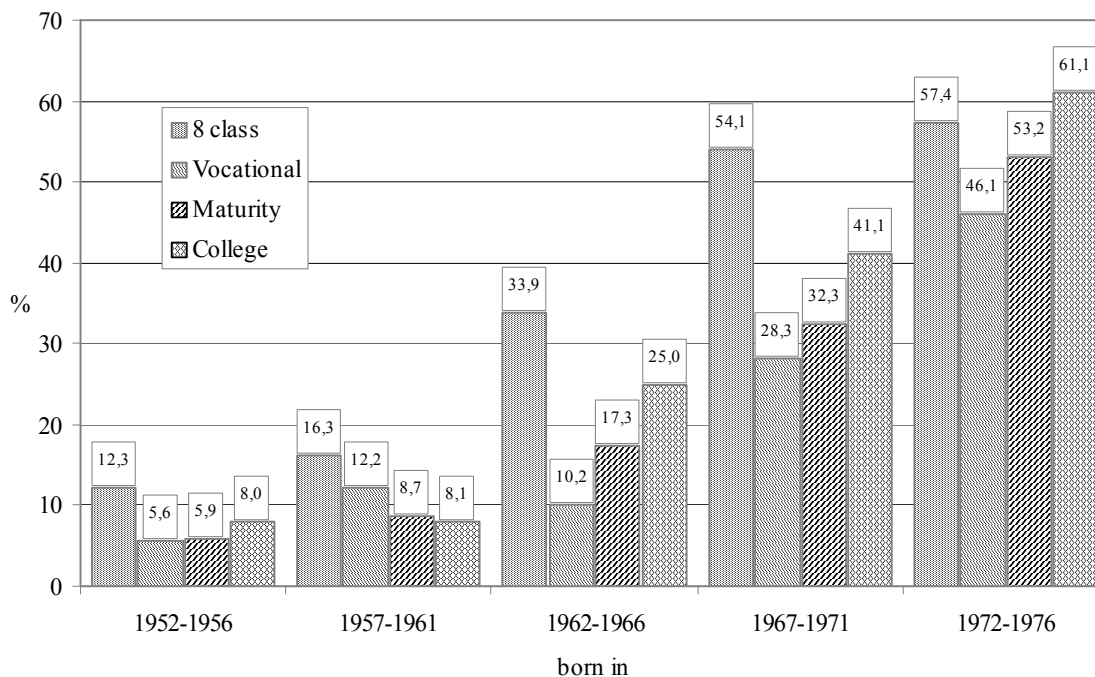


Figure 3
Social differencis and diffusion of cohabiteton
The ratio of woman having first cohabitation until age 25 in relation to those entering any kind of union (%)

We can see this first among those born between 1967 and 1971 and in the subsequent cohorts, the ratio is at over 50% in all education level groups¹³. At the same time, we must point out that the dynamics of diffusion is very strong among those with a higher education. While the ratio is at 8% in the 1965-1961 group, the figure in the next younger 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. The start of a dynamic growth could be observed among the lowest and highest educated simultaneously and the ratios grew significantly in the group born between 1962 and 1966. Prior to this, these ratios were above the average among those with the lowest education levels and so subsequently, this education group exhibited all throughout the highest ratio of women starting their partnership careers in cohabitation with the exception of the youngest age group. Those with a secondary education exhibited a “follower” behaviour during the period under examination. Therefore we cannot possibly state that cohabitation as a lifestyle, as a pattern, would “trickle down” from the top – the

¹³ The commencement of the partnership careers of this cohort takes place primarily after the change of the political regime

diffusion seems to start in the lower social strata and gather momentum at both ends of the social hierarchy. Those in between exhibit a “follower” behaviour.

5. The first cohabitation: premarital partnership or alternative to marriage?

The spread of cohabitation does not necessarily mean the decline of the pervasiveness or significance of marriage but has obviously impacted the relationship between marriages and cohabitations, both in the past and in the present (Bachrach, et. Al, 2002, Axin, Thornton, 2002). From the perspective of the change in meaning and content, it is a fundamental question whether the partnership careers that start out in cohabitation will turn into a marriage or stay a cohabitation (Bumpass, Lu, 1999). Popular opinion in Hungary prefers the “trial marriage” aspect of cohabitation, but many hold cohabitation to be an alternative to marriage. In the course of this present analysis, we should examine what cohabiting relationships become after a certain period of time: whether the partners will stay in cohabitation or turn it into a marriage or whether the relationship breaks up.

For starters, let us see what happens after a certain, predetermined period of time – 12, 24 and 60 months. The results show that the response to this query largely depends on the time that elapsed since the formation of the union. While after 12 months, a significant majority (70.8%) of the cohabitative relationships are intact, five years on the figure drops to 22.6%. Simultaneously with this, the ratio of cohabitations turning into marriages goes on the increase: even after 1 year, the ratio is at 18.5% but it exceeds the halfway mark after five years (54.8%), indicating that over half of the cohabitations became marriages. During the five years, 13.3% of the cohabitations ended in a break-up, while in 9.3% of the cases, the cohabitation was followed first by a marriage then later by a divorce.

*Table 14
Transitions of cohabitations 12, 24 and 60 months after union-formation*

Partnership careers	12 months	24 months	60 months
Stays cohabitation	70.8	50.7	22.6
Cohabitation → marriage	18.3	33.0	54.8
Cohabitation → dissolved	5.0	7.4	13.3
Cohabitation → marriage → divorce	6.0	8.8	9.3
Total %	100	100	100
(N=)	2312	2216	2023

To see how lasting the first partnerships are, we should compare the durability of partnerships starting out as marriages to those that started out in cohabitation, regardless of the changes of forms.

Table 15
Durability of cohabitations and marriages within specific time periods

Time elapsed since formation	First partnership			
	Marriage		Cohabitation	
	Intact	Dissolved	Intact	Dissolved
12 months	99.1	0.9	89.0	11.0
24 months	97.5	2.5	83.8	16.2
60 months	93.1	6.9	77.4	22.6

According to the results, unions that start out as marriages are more durable than cohabiting relationships. The role of cohabitation in partnership careers and the role it plays in the content of relationships needs further investigation.

The modifications over time of the relationship between marriage and cohabitation -- as well as the changes in these concepts — are further illuminated if we look at the differences of the partnership careers that started out as cohabitations in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and the transitions between partnership forms. This examination requires that we change the grouping according to birth dates (birth cohorts) and set up partnership cohorts instead. Those who formed their first union in the same chronological period belong to *the same partnership cohort*. It is our opinion 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 formed¹⁴. We calculated the appropriate ratios for 12, 24 and 60-month periods and as the table at the end of the chapter shows, they exhibit the same tendency. But let us look at the details of a specific, 24moths period.¹⁵

Our data shows that from the point of view of the *durability* of cohabitation, the low point was reached by unions formed at the turn of the 1980s (Figure 4). A little over one-third (34.6%) of cohabiting unions formed at this time survived for two years as cohabitation. Beyond this time period, the durability of cohabitation goes on the increase simultaneously with the spread of first cohabiting relationships. 60% of cohabitations formed in the 1990s actually managed to survive for the first two years in the same form. This seems to indicate -- especially in the light of data form the 60-month period (Table 17) -- that cohabitations become marriages less frequently and at a later point in time. The ratio of cohabitations that turn into marriages reached the highest point at the turn of the 1980s, when 41.9% of all cohabitations turned into marriages within the space of two years. Subsequently, the ratio stabilised around one-third and occasionally showed signs of decline. The growth of the durability of cohabitations then seems to have taken place not primarily at the expense of marriages but at the expense of dissolutions. Of course, if we compared the lasting cohabitation unions with those that metamorphose into marriages, the signs of decline and postponement are unequivocally there. We observed

¹⁴ There is a strong correlation between partnership and birth cohorts, but there is no complete overlap

¹⁵ The 12 and 60 moths periods data show the same tendencies. (cf., Table 16 and Table 17)

declining ratios in those partnership trajectories where cohabitation turned into a marriage that ended in divorce.

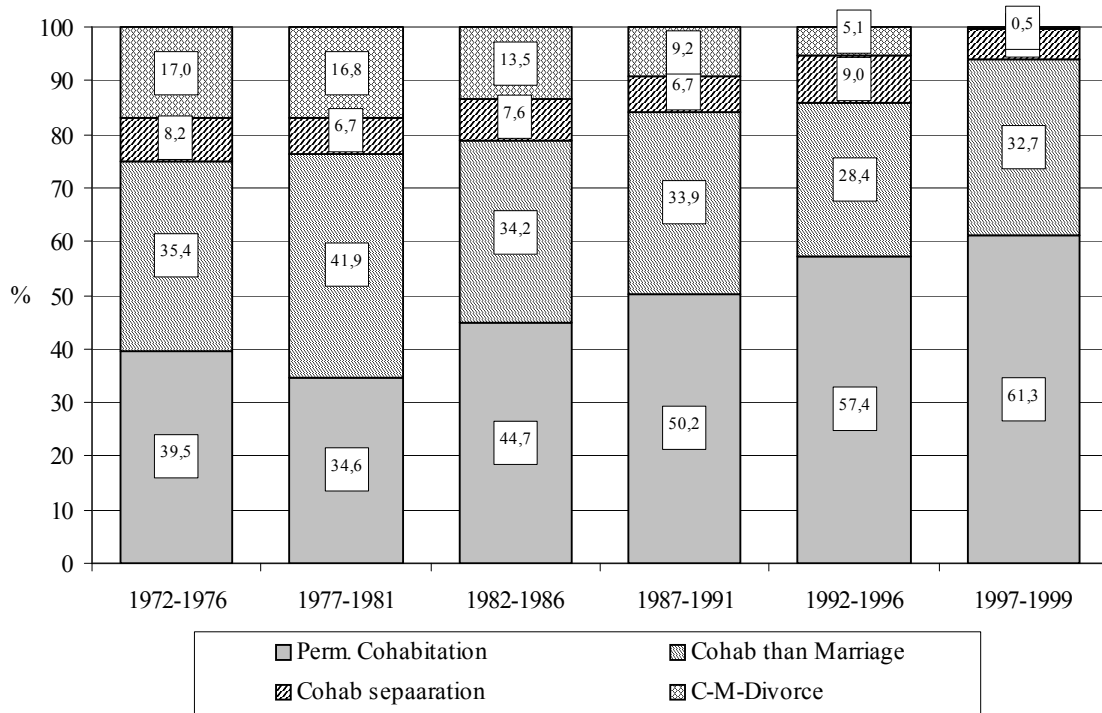


Figure 4
Transitions from first partnership as cohabitation:
24 months after, by partnership-cohorts

Let us then return to the question posed in the title, namely, whether the increase in cohabitations as first unions indicated the spread of cohabitations as trial marriages or as alternatives to marriage? A comprehensive answer can of course only be provided at the completion of the life course. It is, however, an indisputable fact that the majority of first cohabitations turn into marriages. In other words, most of the premarital cohabitations are trial marriages. At the same time, temporal 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.

Table 16
Transitions from first partnership as cohabitation:
12 months after, by partnership-cohorts

Married	1972-1976	1977-1981	1982-1986	1987-1991	1992-1996	1997-2000
Perm. Cohabitation	57.8	57.1	65.1	70	75	81.1
Cohab than	24.5	28.2	19.7	18.4	15.6	14.6

Marriage						
Cohab sepaaration	6.8	4.5	3.9	4.7	5.7	4.1
C-M-Divorce	10.9	10.2	11.2	7.0	3.7	0.2

Table 17
Transitions from first partnership as cohabitation:
60 months after, by partnership-cohorts

Married	1972–1976	1977–1981	1982–1986	1987–1991	1992–1996
Perm. Cohabitation	16.4	16.9	20.4	26.7	32.1
Cohab than Marriage	47.9	55.1	52.6	51.8	50.4
Cohab sepaaration	14.4	11.2	11.8	13.7	14.4
C-M-Divorce	21.2	16.9	15.1	7.8	3.2

6. Summary

The results so far give us a basic description of the new time of cohabitation compared to marriage. In our investigation we plane to extend our work. We plan to deepen our understanding and reshape somewhat the structure of our. We would like get a more detailed understanding in two questions. Firstly, having more information about quality of partnership, we would like incorporate the dimensions disagreements. Secondly there is a chance to go further, unfolding patterns of cohabitation in the life course. Thirdly we would like to open the question, what kind of fertility behaviour could be linked to the new type of partnership, and ask whether there are socio-economic differences in cohabitative childbearing.

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