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The developmental trends of cohabitation in the Lithuanian society

Extended abstract

Background/ research questions

Cohabitation as a first partnership is considered the key indicator of the ‘modern’ family and is associated with such demographic features of ‘modern’ family as postponement of marriage, decline in fertility, increase in non-marital childbearing and increase in divorce rates. The emergence of the contemporary cohabitations and the structural and cultural forces underlying this process are conceptualized in the theory of the *second demographic transition* (van de Kaa 1988; 2004). There is a large body of scientific evidence on the onset and trends in the development of cohabitations in the countries of North America, North, South and West Europe. The research proves the diversity of the developmental trends of cohabitations across and within the individual countries of these regions. There have been several attempts to summarize these developments and to produce a theoretical scheme that would capture the developmental stages of cohabitation (Prinz 1995; Rindfuss, Van denHeuvel 1999; Casper, Bianchi, 2002; Heuvelin, Timberlike, 2004; Kiernan 2004). One of the recent attempts belongs to Sobotka and Toulemon (Sobotka, Toulemon 2008). These authors distinguish three main stages that describe the development of cohabitation in Europe: diffusion, permanency and cohabitation as a family arrangement (Sobotka, Toulemon 2008: 99).

The research on cohabitation in Lithuania was until recently to a large extent limited by the absence of the precise data and the significant advancement was made only with the implementation of the GGP. The new empirical data provides opportunity to take a more accurate look into the development of cohabitation in Lithuania and to reconsider social and cultural forces that stimulate this form of demographic behavior. What was and is the developmental trend of cohabitation in

Lithuania? How does it relate to the one discussed in the previous literature? Was the cohabitations that became manifest in the 1990s a completely new form of partnership formation in the Lithuanian society as it is often presented in the literature? Can we attribute the causes of the rise of cohabitation to the endogenous or exogenous factors? How to position these factors within the theoretical framework of the family changes in Central and Eastern Europe?

Data and methods

The paper is based on the data of the *Generations and Gender Survey*, Lithuania (1st wave). The GGS (1st wave) was conducted in Lithuania in 2006. The sample size was 10036 respondents aged 18-79, the sample – nationally representative.

The main dependant variable was the type of the first union and the variable was computed considering: a) the respondents' partnership history that records all the previous partnerships; b) the recent partnership if this partnership is the first; c) recent partnership if this partnership is the first and partners are living separately. For the event history analysis the dataset was transformed from an event-based data structure to a persona-time (diary) data structure. The applied methods are descriptive statistic, event history analysis and logistic regression.

Preliminary results

The development of cohabitation in Lithuania is analyzed looking at the type of the first partnership by birth cohorts and by calendar period (Appendix; Figure 1 and Figure 2). We observe the significant rise in cohabitations starting with the cohorts born in the 1965-1969 period and a very rapid increase in this form of partnership in younger birth cohorts (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the birth cohorts of the 1950s (1950-1954 and 1955-1959) demonstrate a moderate acceptance of this partnership form.

The analysis of the development of cohabitation is complemented by the period analysis that records the type of first partnerships established every successive year (Figure 2). We observe that till the beginning of the 1970s the proportion of cohabitations among all first unions was very

insignificant. The 70s and 80s mark a moderate but steady increase in the cohabitations as the first partnership form and at the end of the 1980s the share of cohabitation among all first unions increased up to 25 per cent. Thus the society stepped into dramatic societal transitions of the 1990s with legacy of the significantly changed family formation patterns. The two subsequent decades are marked by the very fast tempo of the rise in cohabitation as a first union and this corresponds to the general trend of the development of cohabitations in the region. The beginning of the 21st century is distinguished by the predominance of the cohabitation as the first partnership while the majority of the first unions start as cohabiting non-marital unions. Thus, considering the manifestation/scope of the cohabitation several stages that portray the developmental trajectory of cohabitations in Lithuania in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries could be distinguished. The first one is the *marginal stage* that lasted till the 1970s; the second stage – *latent acceleration* - span over the 1970s and 1980s when the rise in cohabitation was moderate but steady; the third stage – *rapid acceleration* - was typical for the last decade of the 20th century when the tempo of the rise in cohabitation has accelerated but the dominance of marriage as the first partnership was still sustained; the last stage - the stage of *predominance* of cohabitation - started in the end of the 1990s and still persist.

The cohabitation as a transitional stage in the family formation process lasts longer with every younger birth cohort (Figure 3). In the older birth cohorts around 80 per cent of cohabitations that ever ended in marriage had experienced this transition at the end of the first year. Respectively in the younger birth cohorts the number is 60 per cent.

Thus, employing the theoretical scheme suggested by Sobotka and Toulemon (2008) we argue that cohabitation in Lithuania is at the end of the stage of diffusion and with some signs of the stage of the permanency. Moreover the stage of diffusion could be regarded in it's complexity and this reveals that the diffusion of cohabitations and the onset of the changes in the family formation in Lithuania could be relocated prior to the 1990s.

Figure 1. Type of the first union by birth cohorts, per cent

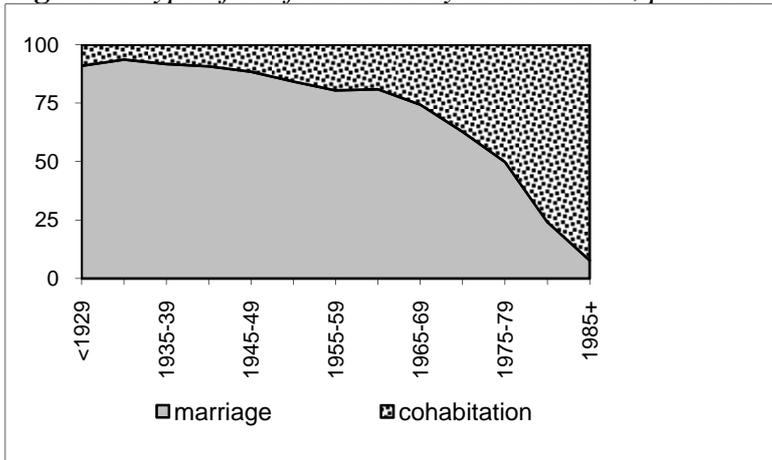


Figure 2. First partnerships by the type over the calendar period (year), per cent

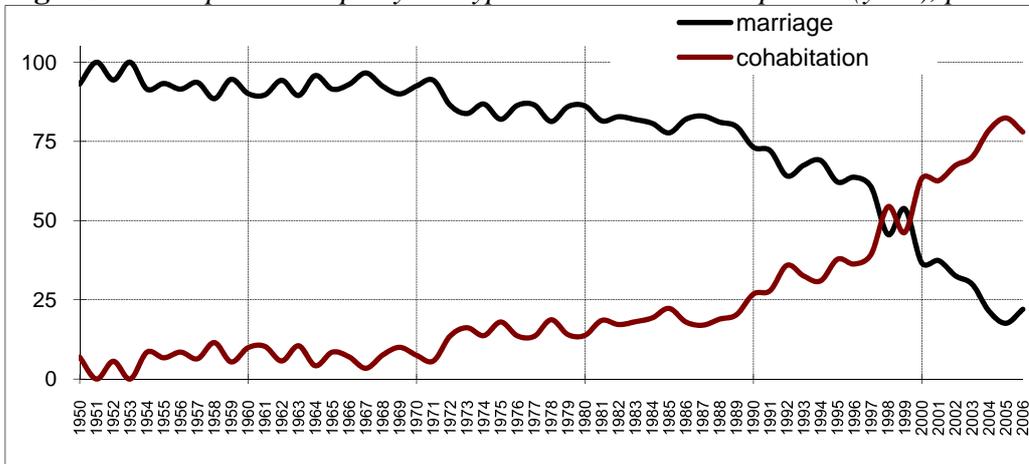


Figure 3. Survival functions, first partnership as cohabitations that ended in marriage by birth cohorts

