

## MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION – FACTS AND OPINIONS COMPARED

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### 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 (Cherlin 1992; Kiernan 2002). This change is one of the key elements of the concept of 'second demographic transition' (Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe 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-demographic research project 'Turning points of our life course' is the understanding of the transitions of the forms of partnerships. 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.<sup>1</sup> The full utilisation of the data system and the assessment of the influences of structural and behavioural factors will become possible after the second wave of data collection since it is only then that the 'selective' and 'adaptive' processes may be separated (Lesthaeghe and 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

<sup>1</sup> For the description of the concept of the Hungarian research, see Spéder 2002. The panel survey 'Turning points of our life course' was supported by NKFP, Budapest No. 5/128/2001.

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 Lesthaeghe and Liefboer: the 'normative controls' at work in the community. Finally, in the concluding part of our study we will focus on certain life-course features of cohabitation and marriage.

### BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERSHIPS

Up until recent times, marriage had been the only form of long term partnerships in Hungary. A very small proportion 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 never married (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 part describing the various types of cohabitative arrangements. However, the low number of elements allows us to set up only two groups: those who have never married ('new type of cohabitation') and those who had been divorced or widowed ('old type of cohabitation').<sup>2</sup> This division is supported by the age distribution of those living in cohabitation, since never married people living in cohabitation tend to be much younger.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the two groups taken together, we have 80% divorcees and 20% widowed.

<sup>3</sup> 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 1  
*Distribution of people between 18 and 74, by marital status and form of partnership (2001/2002) (%)*

Type	%
Never married, living alone	21.1
Never married, living in cohabitation	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

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Table 2  
*Different forms of partnerships by age groups (2001/2002) (%)*

Age group	Marriage	Cohabitation	
		Never married	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

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

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 cohabitation (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 generalise, 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 (2001/2002) (%)*

Education	Married			Cohabiting		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)

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

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 correlation. 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  
 (2001/2002) (%)*

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	100.0	100.0

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

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 couples<sup>4</sup> and they are characterised 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 characterised 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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

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 (2001/2002) (%)*

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

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

#### FORMS OF P PARTNERSHIP – BEHAVIOUR COMPONENTS

There are countless numbers of works in social sciences highlighting the fact that in modern societies the homogenisation of life courses is decreasing 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 (Mayer and 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 (individualisation, diminishing social control) has become generally accepted. In our research we attempted to measure the effects, even if in a limited fashion,<sup>5</sup> 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 at-

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed analysis of structural elements will become possible after the second wave of data collection.

tested 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)<sup>6</sup>. Having considered all this, here we focus on a few behavioural variables that might play an important part in selecting one type of partnership over another, but they are less determined by adaptive or selective processes. At the same time we realise that from the perspective of our particular topic, truly novel findings will become possible only after a second wave of data collection.

#### *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 verbalised 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 judgements, 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 partnership 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 marriages and those

<sup>6</sup> We can see the effectiveness of the panel analyses in the volume edited by him.

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 non-marital (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 forms of partnership and age (2001/2002) (%)*

	Married			Cohabiting		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

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

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 forms of partnerships*  
(‘symbolic religiosity’) (2001/2002) (%)

	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

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

#### *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 (2001/2002) (%)*

	Married			Cohabiting		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

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

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 30<sup>7</sup>. 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 cohabitation outside marring is not insignificant though certainly in the minority. One-third of the people living in 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

<sup>7</sup> In this study, we could not create tables to go with all the data.

regard cohabitation recommendable as a temporary form of living together are in majority. Regarding all forms of living arrangements, we must point out that living alone 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 living alone 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 question<sup>8</sup> reflect a previously unprecedented liberal attitude people did not used to exhibit (S. Molnár–Pongrácz 1998) (Table 9).

Table 9  
*Perception of the importance of marriage among those living in partnerships (2001/2002) (%)*

	Married			Cohabiting		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

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

The traditional formalisation 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 important<sup>9</sup>. 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 'liv-

<sup>8</sup> 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?'

<sup>9</sup> 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.

ing 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.

*Rational Reasoning in Choosing Forms of Partnership – 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 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 dissonance'. 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 (2001/2002) (%)*

'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
Realisation 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
Married, 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
Realisation 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
Realisation of individual goals	10.6	13.1	74.6
The approval of parents and relatives	43.9	4.9	49.1

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

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.

*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’.<sup>10</sup> 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 (Bumpass 2002).

Table 11  
*Worries over the relationship, among those married or cohabiting (2001/2002)*  
(%)

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

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

<sup>10</sup> 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.).

## MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION IN THE LIFE COURSE

Comparing the ratio of those living in marriages and cohabitation (55% and 8% respectively) makes one wonder whether it is justified to talk about a dramatic spread of cohabitative arrangements. At first sight, the cross-sectional data seems to suggest differently, since at the time of the survey seven times as many adults lived in marriage as in cohabitation. We will be nearer to the truth if we also look at the number of people who *ever* lived in cohabitation or what forms of partnership people chose *first*. Over four-fifth (81.6%) of the adult population in our sample has lived at one time or another in a cohabitative arrangement. 91.8% of those who ever lived in a partnership have lived in a marriage as well. Currently, two-thirds (67.2%) of those who ever lived in a partnership are married. At the same time, a quarter (25.8%) of those who ever lived in a partnership also lived or lives in cohabitation. 6.4% of all respondents and 7% of those who ever lived in a partnership had at one time lived in cohabitation that did not lead to marriage. Currently, one-tenth (9.9%) of those who ever lived in a partnership live in cohabitation.

Which is to say that the cohabitative form of living arrangement has been and is chosen by many more people than is suggested by the cross-sectional data (current partnerships). We need to elaborate our interpretation of cohabitative relationships in the future, but we already have a basis to see its relation to marriage. 14% of those who tied the knot for the first time lived together with the partner before marriage ('trial marriage') and 25% of divorcees formed cohabitative relationships after the divorce. The fundamental question – to what extent young, under-30 people currently living in cohabitation will be willing to enter into marriages – can only be answered after the second wave of data collection.

The distribution and changes in time of *first partnerships* presents us with a more nuanced picture of the changing role of marriage and cohabitation in partnerships. We know that for two-thirds (64.7%) of the respondents, marriage was the first relationship when the partners were living together. At the same time, 17% of all respondents (i.e. 25% of all people involved in partnerships) started their partnership history with a cohabitative arrangement. Looking at the ratios by cohorts we can form a pretty clear picture about the changes that occurred recently (Table 12). While in the older cohorts (almost) all the people started out with a marriage, one-fifth of those in the middle-age group (e.g. 40 to 44) used to live in cohabitation with their first partner, the majority of first relationship is cohabitative among people in their twenties today. (Of course, this is a probability as we do not expect but cannot discount the possibility that

a decisive majority of those who never lived in partnerships will marry their first partners.)

Table 12  
*People belonging to different age groups, by the type of their first partnership (2001/2002) (%)*

Age group	Form of first partnership			
	Marriage	Cohabitation	None	Total (N)
18–19	0.7	9.4	89.9	904
20–24	10.8	28.1	61.1	1 768
25–29	33.5	40.7	25.8	1 691
30–34	53.9	33.9	12.2	1 483
35–39	68.6	23.9	7.5	1 298
40–44	77.7	16.1	6.2	1 604
45–49	83.6	11.2	5.2	1 773
50–54	89.0	6.2	4.7	1 479
55–59	91.5	5.3	3.2	1 318
60–64	93.9	3.1	3.0	1 146
65–69	94.1	2.5	3.4	1 020
70–75	94.5	2.3	3.2	906
Total	64.7	17.0	18.4	16 390

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

The comparison of the *first* form of partnership (Table 12) and the *current* form of partnership (Table 13) seems to suggest that some of the cohabitative arrangements turn into marriages. The ratio of marriages is higher than that of cohabitation already in the 20 to 24 age group, which could not be possible unless the first cohabitative partnership turned into marriage. As for people between the ages of 25 and 29, three times as many people live in marriages than in cohabitation (Table 13) even though 40.7% of these people had their first partnership in the form of cohabitation (Table 12). For the historic timing of the change, we can see that cohabitation became the dominant form of partnership among those born in the early 1970s (1972–1976).

Table 13  
*People belonging to different age groups, by the type of their current partnership (2001/2002) (%)*

Age group	Current partnership			Total N
	Marriage	Cohabitation	No partner	
18–19	1.7	5.0	93.4	905
20–24	18.2	13.8	68.0	1 768
25–29	49.7	13.8	36.5	1 691
30–34	64.6	11.3	24.1	1 483
35–39	69.1	8.5	22.5	1 299
40–44	69.0	8.1	22.9	1 604
45–49	68.1	6.9	24.9	1 772
50–54	69.8	6.2	24.0	1 479
55–59	66.7	6.0	27.3	1 318
60–64	62.7	4.8	32.5	1 146
65–69	58.7	3.4	37.9	1 021
70–75	46.6	1.8	51.7	908
Total	54.9	8.1	37.0	16 394

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

The transition from one form into the other can be studied on the basis of partnership-history data. For our specific topic, the 'new' type of cohabitation is of special importance. What happens to the (first) cohabitative relationships? What percentage of them are dissolved, maintained or turned into marriage? Also: does the transition pattern change? The fate of cohabitative relationships depends to a large extent on the time elapsed since its inception. With the passage of time, a greater number of them turn into marriage or get dissolved while the number of surviving relationships consequently declines (Table 14). Two years (24 months) after their inception, one-third of them turn into marriages and five months after 'moving in', half of them turn into marriages (Table 15). Four-fifths of these relationships are intact at the end of the first year, but this is only true for 27.8% of them after five years.

The cohort-specific analysis of the data will allow us to perceive the changes occurring in time. When looking at what changes occurred in time in the first cohabitative partnership, the inclusion of the oldest people might be misleading, since at the time of their partnership-formation the ratio of people opting for a cohabitative arrangement was very low. Looking at young and middle-aged people we find that the ratio of cohabitation turning into marriages somewhat declines. This is true for all time periods even if our table only shows status changes in the first 24 months (Table 15). The decline is quite even due to the spread of the other two forms of living among young people:

the ratio of those dissolving a cohabitative arrangement as well as the ratio of those sustaining a cohabitative arrangement for a longer time both grow among the youngest people in our sample. In this perspective a very modest change can be detected in partnership careers. Nonetheless if we take into consideration the dramatic rise in the spread of cohabitative arrangements in first relationships, we cannot detect decisive changes in the sample regarding first cohabitative arrangements. A good portion of cohabitative arrangements – 42% of them after 5 years – turn into marriages. Needless to say the transition between partnerships should be subjected to further inquiry.

Table 14  
*The form of partnership, 12, 24 and 60 months later  
among those who started out cohabiting (2001/2002) (%)*

Partnership	12 Months	24 Months	60 Months
Marriage	12.6	29.4	50.9
Dissolved	8.0	13.4	21.3
Cohabitation	79.4	57.2	27.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
%	2430	2291	1861

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Table 15  
*Status of partnership 24 months after first cohabitation, by age groups  
(2001/2002) (%)*

Partnership	Age groups						Total
	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–75	
Marriage	20.8	33.3	37.6	37.0	28.4	28.6	29.4
Dissolved	18.0	10.4	10.9	12.3	6.0	14.3	13.4
Cohabitation	61.2	56.3	51.5	50.7	65.7	57.1	57.2
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N=	867	778	412	146	67	22	2291

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we have analysed some features of marital and cohabitative relationships with the help of data collected in 2001/2002 in what we plan to be the first wave of a longitudinal study. We can state that the ratio of those living

in cohabitative relationships at the time of the survey taking conforms to the national average. However, the number of people who ever lived in a cohabitative arrangement outside marriage is much higher than this, in other words, a much higher number of people have experienced this form of partnership. It is also apparent that the number of people opting for a cohabitative arrangement in their first relationship is growing among young people. The demographic and socio-economic composition of married people and those living in cohabitation exhibited no significant differences. The ratio of younger people is higher among cohabiting couples but they have a lower average number of children.

The study of the value systems of the respondents seems to suggest that there is a correlation between value systems and forms of partnerships: those living in cohabitative arrangements exhibit a weaker bond to religion than those who live in marriages. The analysis of individual opinions revealed that those living together at the time of the survey taking formed a complex group from the perspective of their future plans. Part of them regard cohabitation as a transitory form of living before marriage while others regard it as a final decision. This heterogeneous composition is partly responsible for the uncertain opinions expressed by respondents over the advantages and disadvantages of married life versus cohabitation.

In the past decade or two, the practice and social acceptance of cohabitation have gradually increased. Our analyses show that the meaning of cohabitation is rather differentiated: some people regard it as an arrangement preceding marriage, others an arrangement following marriage and yet others think of it as an alternative to marriage. In theory, a panel-like approach makes it possible to track those who were living in cohabitation at the time of the first wave of survey taking – to find out whether cohabitation turns into a marriage over a time, whether the relationship gets terminated or if the partners opt to remain in the ‘illegal’ relationship for ‘ever’. It will be even more important to study the objective circumstances and/or subjective motivations that help or hinder the transition between the different forms and we will arrive at a much finer picture of cohabitative relationships and the meaning of marriage and cohabitation.

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