

**The born and unborn Children of the 1989 Transition:
effects of the socio-cultural circumstances of childbearing**

The National Strategic Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008¹ briefly summarises the social dangers of the demographic processes taking place in Hungary: „The Hungarian demographic situation is characterised by low fertility and at the same time by low number of births coupled with increased life expectancy, which together lead to the continuous ageing of society. This has severe effects on labour force relations, on the long-term financial sustainability of social protection systems, and for example on the educational system as well.”

The demographic behaviour of the Hungarian population in many respects was already similar to that of the majority of Western European countries decades ago, and after the 1989 Transition this process did not only follow, but assumed new elements as well. Since 1981 the number of live births was less than the number of deaths. The overall fertility ratio dropped to 1.23 by 2011 from 1990 (when it was 1.85). Fewer and fewer people get married each year, and the popularity of alternative forms of romantic relationships, especially cohabitation increases. It is important to note that on the whole less children are born in cohabitation than in marriages according to the statistics². In 2012 45 per cent of children were born out of wedlock. Since 1990 the number of children born outside of marriage has more than doubled, but when compared to 1980 their number has increased four times³. In almost 25 per cent of the households with children are lone-parent families; they raise 22 per cent of the children.

Several studies aimed to investigate the reasons of changing demographic behaviour and the persistently low number of births in Hungary and in other European countries in the past years. Demographic and sociological studies conducted so far have proposed various explanations for these phenomena. Some studies focus on structural circumstances, on the social and economic crisis of the country, on the economic recession and the ensuing (existential) insecurity. Explanations encompass the problem of changes in values relating to the transition, the realignment of norms, and the increasing anomie. Changes in the social situation of women and the expansion of education are important explanatory factors as well⁴. Last but not least, the instability of the family and child support system, the difficulties of

1 <http://www.szmm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=1375&articleID=30804&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>

2 Kamarás István: Családalapítás és gyermekvállalás az 1990-es években és az ezredfordulón. In: Demográfia, 2001. 44. évf. 1-2. szám 44-73.

3 Eurostat

4 Husz Ildikó: Iskolázottság és a gyermekvállalás időzítése. In: Demográfia, 2006. 49. évf. 1. szám 46-67.

acquiring housing, and the increased risk of pauperization affecting families with children all play an important role in these changes⁵. Nevertheless, several studies have pointed out that there is a big difference between the number of children planned and the number of children born in Hungary. Therefore, the answer to the question why the (otherwise planned) children were not/are not born appears to be crucial.

In 1989 the Sociological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences initiated a longitudinal panel study among parents expecting their first child in 8 settlements of the southern region of the Budapest agglomeration in Hungary. In the first phase of the study 300 women in the last trimester of their pregnancy were asked to fill out standardized questionnaires. They included questions about their health, work, financial and housing conditions, the quality of the partnership, and the childhood of the mother. In the second phase, the families were revisited 3-13 months after giving birth. Then altogether 194 families (both mothers and fathers) filled the questionnaires plus 50 in-depth mother interviews were made. The researchers gathered information about the plans and hopes of the parents, what they thought about the possibilities and future of their child.

20 years after, in 2011 the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA) funded a 3 year research to (re)continue this special family panel data, to follow up the life history of the families taking part in the research around the political transition in 1990. In this third phase we found 117 families and asked all three family-members concerned (mother, father and the grown-up child). These were questions on their health, work, financial and housing conditions, and the quality of their partnership.

Those positive or negative effects that parents expecting and having their first child are exposed to can be decisive with respect to their willingness to have further children. The best way to confirm the empirical proof of these causal relations is using longitudinal (panel) data that is by collecting data from the same participants.

Analyzing our data three major types of families can be isolated concerning childbearing. The largest group did realize their intentions. Those families planned mostly two children and in their life-course, they did not have to face such difficulties that would force them to revise their plans. Two other groups at the same time renounced their previous intentions either having only one child, or giving births to more than two.

5 Spéder Zsolt: Mintaváltás közben. A gyermekvállalás időzítése az életútban, különös tekintettel a szülő nők iskolai végzettségére és párkapcsolati státusára In: Demográfia, 2006. 49. évf. 2-3. szám 113-149.

The aim of our presentation is to reveal the characteristics of these families. What were the turning points in their life, what were the influential factors that hindered them from giving birth to a second child or encouraged them to bear more children?