

TRENDS IN MARRIAGE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE 20th CENTURY*)

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Abstract: In the 20th century the significance of marriage for the reproductive behaviour of the population changed. However, the example of the Czech Republic is particularly interesting in that over the course of the century the marriage rate first increased significantly, accompanied by a simultaneous decline in the mean age at first marriage (at the start of the 1940s), and later the marriage rate fell again (in the 1990s), so that by the end of the 20th century young people were marrying at a later age and lower rate than they were a century earlier.

Keywords: nuptiality

The significance of family and marriage for individuals and society has meant that nuptiality has always been the object of attention in demographic research, but for a long time it was considered as more or less a reflection of the contemporary economic situation in society: the more favourable economic developments were, the more often young people acquired the necessary means to set up their own households, and the higher then the number of marriages that occurred as a result. Conversely, in periods of economic recession, as it was more difficult to accumulate the necessary resources, the number of marriages was lower¹⁾. Yet it was never a matter of concern whether the formation of a marriage meant that a new household would be founded or whether the new married couple would continue to share the household of the parents of one of the spouses. This development was essentially modified only once the age structure of the marital eligibility of the population changed²⁾. This had not changed much even when the family economy gradually began to lose its position of key importance, and an increasingly larger proportion of the population supported itself by means of wage labour – in order to provide for one's household economy this meant simply looking for sources of livelihood elsewhere. This approach was based on a general awareness of the fact that it was usually the family, an orientational family or one's own family, that made it possible for people to maintain a dignified existence and position in society, and that it was marriage that represented the legal foundation of a newly established family and thus of its acceptance by society.

The marriage rate at any given time is the result of the effect of a variety of factors, one of which is the overall economic situation in a given country and in individual social strata of the

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¹⁾ T. R. Malthus first drew on this phenomenon at the end of the 18th century to formulate his opinions on the possibilities for limiting excessive population growth. Although his essay was a direct reaction to the Poor Law in England (Hinde, 2003: 111 ad.), it accurately captured the essence of the relationship between marriage and economic development.

²⁾ The exception confirming the rule was the period of so-called demographic crises, when fluctuations in the marriage rate resulted from a high level adult mortality, even though essentially the mechanism was the same.

population in particular. Other factors include general attitudes among the population but in particular among unmarried individuals toward marriage, the population climate, and finally the preceding marriage rate and the divorce rate. The first of the factors cited here has an effect on the degree to which people have the opportunity and want to marry and at what age, and also how large the group of people that are eligible for marriage at a certain age is. The result is the annual numbers of marriages and the structure of spouses. However, it is evident from the character of the factors cited here that it is not possible to exactly determine their weight.

In analyses of population development in the Czech Lands, nuptiality has been somewhat sidelined, although it has been an integral part of every more comprehensive study of population development (e.g. *Boháč*, 1936; *Srb – Kučera*, 1959; *Srb*, 1975; *Kučera*, 1994). In the second half of the 20th century there emerged both a number of studies monitoring the main nuptiality trends in the country (*Růžička – Kučera*, 1967; *Konečná*, 1977a; *Konečná*, 1977b; *Lesný*, 1983; *Rychtaříková*, 1986; *Vereš*, 1991) and work focusing on methods of studying nuptiality (*Zbořilová*, 1977; *Pavlík – Rychtaříková – Šubrtová*, 1984). A gradual improvement in the quality of data also made it possible from the 1970s to retrospectively construct nuptiality tables (*Tabulky*, 1989; *Pikálek*, 1998).

The second half of the 20th century, or particularly the very end of the century, was marked by a fundamental turnaround in the approach to marriage, a shift that was caused by the effects of the external, economic environment, but also by the effects of the cultural environment on the family and the institution of marriage. Sociologists identified these changes relatively early on and drew on them to explain the changes that were occurring in family composition (*Alan*, 1989). A radical shift in the timing and intensity of entering into marriage during the 1990s was reflected in a boom in the number of articles on this topic and especially work relating to the growth in the number of informal partnership unions and the percentage of extramarital births. From the numerous studies that emerged during this time, it is perhaps enough to mention just some of the most significant among them: the annual report on population development published by the Czech Statistical Office and published in *Demografie*, written by *Vladimír Srb*, *Milan Aleš*, *Milan Kučera*, *Miroslav Šimek* and now by *Terezie Kretschmerová*, *Kryštof Zeman*, along with the analyses that were published between 1994 and 2002 edited by *Zdeněk Pavlík*, the most recent of which contains a synthetic summary of developments in the 1990–2002 period (*Pavlík*, 2002). Leaving aside the growing amount of work produced by the sociological community, which in itself could form the subject of a separate paper given the explosion in the number of articles published on the subject of the family, often conceived within the framework of “gender studies”, and also the lengthy discussion on the topic of the second demographic transition that has been published on the pages of *Demografie*. Among larger publications I will mention only the work by *Rabušic* (2001) and a publications on contemporary Czech women by *Dana Hamplová*, *Jitka Rychtaříková* and *Simona Pikálková* (2003), which has a broader demographic subtext. The issue of nuptiality is today so much a part of analyses of other demographic processes that it would be necessary to cite a major part of all the demographic work produced over approximately the past decade.

While explanations of the occasional fluctuations in the marriage rate long made do with either a brief reference to economic trends or to changes in the age composition of the population at the peak age of nuptiality, today explaining changes in nuptiality behaviour among the population largely falls within the sphere of sociological studies, as it reflects not just the effect of the economic situation but also changes in the value system of a predominant part of the population and changes in attitudes toward the institution of marriage.

Therefore, it is interesting to document this development using just simple demographic data. Czech statistics offer relatively enough relevant data, but not enough to cover the entire

20th century. While data from the standard records of natural population growth provide information on the number of marriages throughout the period observed, the information they offer on the composition of spouses varies and changes over time. For example, only since 1961 has it been possible to calculate tables of first-marriage rates based on the number of marriages by age of the spouses (*Tabulky...*, 1989)³. Therefore, it is also necessary to draw on structural data contained in the population censuses that cover the entire 20th century. Given the significance of first marriages, most attention is focused on marriages between singles, even though the significance of repeat marriages of widowed or divorced individuals should not be overlooked or underestimated.

Table 1 Selected characteristics of first marriages among the population of the Czech Republic in the 20th century according to the population census

Sex	1900	1910	1921	1930	1950	1961	1970	1980	1991	2001
Singulate mean age at marriage										
Men	27.7	27.8	28.6	27.6	26.1	25.1	24.4	24.8	25.1	28.3
Women	25.2	24.9	26.2	25.9	21.8	20.9	21.1	21.4	21.8	25.8
Percentage never married aged 15–19 years										
Men	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.2	99.2	98.8	98.7	98.4	99.8
Women	97.9	97.8	97.9	97.2	91.0	91.5	91.4	91.5	92.6	99.1
Percentage never married aged 20–29 years										
Men	46.1	47.2	54.6	45.8	34.1	24.9	20.9	23.3	27.6	53.2
Women	36.3	31.8	41.1	32.9	17.3	9.1	9.3	8.9	10.9	31.5
Percentage never married aged 45–49 years										
Men	6.6	7.2	7.1	6.3	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.8	6.3	8.8
Women	9.7	10.3	10.1	10.9	9.3	6.0	4.6	3.0	3.2	3.6

Using census data the effect of nuptiality trends on the structure of the population by age and marital status can be monitored relatively well, and they reveal both the intensity of marriage and the timing of marriage. It is enough to compare the percentages of people who never married at a given age, for example, in the 15–19 age group, from which it is possible to glean the intensity of nuptiality at a low age, in the 25–29 age group, as this age interval indicates the intensity of marriage at an age of high physiological fertility. Traditionally, the percentage of people who never married at the age of around 50 (e.g. 45–49 years) has been regarded until recently as an indicator of the percentage of men or women who remain definitively outside reproduction. It is also possible to use the census data to calculate the average age at first marriage (assuming that migration is not taken into consideration).

The census data, combined with some selected indicators of population growth, clearly show that the 20th century can be divided into three periods. The dividing lines between these three periods (or transitional periods) can be approximately set as the end of the 1930s and the start of the 1940s and then the start of the 1990s. These two dividing lines are also connected with major historical events of significance for all of society, which fundamentally affected not just the political but also the social and economic situation of the Czech Republic and its population. Therefore, they can also be usefully applied as dividing lines in the analysis of nuptiality trends, even though the first and second periods can be viewed as more or less open intervals – the start of the 20th century was a logical continuation of the development that preceded it, its conclusion then clearly augurs the situation in the immediate future.

³ We can leave aside other characteristics that can be used to describe marrying partners – their nationality, religion, social position, or educational background, all of which are difficult to compare the long term even though they could be useful for a deeper analysis of marriage behaviour.

Table 2 Marrying partners by marital status in the Czech Republic in selected years

Periods	Type of marriage per 100 marriages								
	Single groom			Widowed groom			Divorced groom		
	Single bride	Widowed bride	Divorced bride	Single bride	Widowed bride	Divorced bride	Single bride	Widowed bride	Divorced bride
1901–1910	83.8	2.7	0.0	9.5	3.9	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
1931–1937	85.4	1.5	1.6	5.4	1.5	0.6	3.0	0.4	0.6
1961–1970	79.8	0.6	4.6	0.7	0.8	1.0	6.0	0.9	5.6
1991–2000	67.2	0.3	8.3	0.2	0.3	0.8	8.7	1.0	13.2

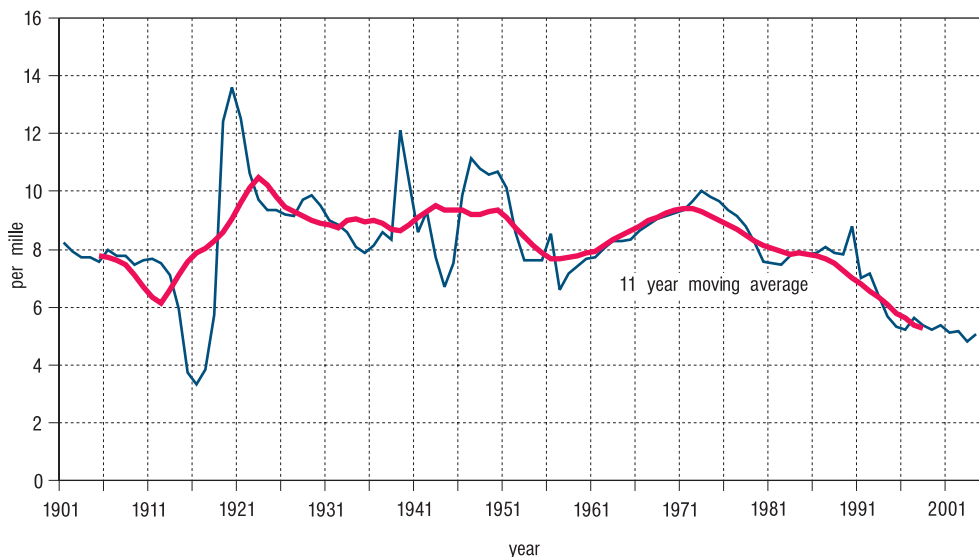
Source: Population and vital statistics, author's calculations

Table 3 Marrying partners by gender and marital status in the Czech Republic in selected periods

Periods	Men			Women		
	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Single	Widowed	Divorced
1901–1910	86.5	13.4	0.1	93.4	6.6	0.0
1931–1937	88.5	7.5	4.0	93.8	3.4	2.8
1961–1970	85.0	2.5	12.5	86.5	2.3	11.2
1991–2000	75.8	1.3	22.9	76.1	1.6	22.3

Source: Population and vital statistics, author's calculations

Figure 1 Crude marriage rate in the Czech Republic in the 20th century



The period of waning “European-pattern” nuptiality (“the postponement of marriage”)

If we monitor the number of marriages in the first four decades of the 20th century, we find that, despite fluctuations resulting from significant external stimuli, the marriage rate remained relatively stable over time and the crude marriage rate varied between 8 and 10‰. With the exception of the First World War (when the crude marriage rate fell below 4‰) and the subsequent compensatory wave (when the crude marriage rate went up to 14‰), the values were similar throughout the century to those that prevailed throughout most of the 19th century.

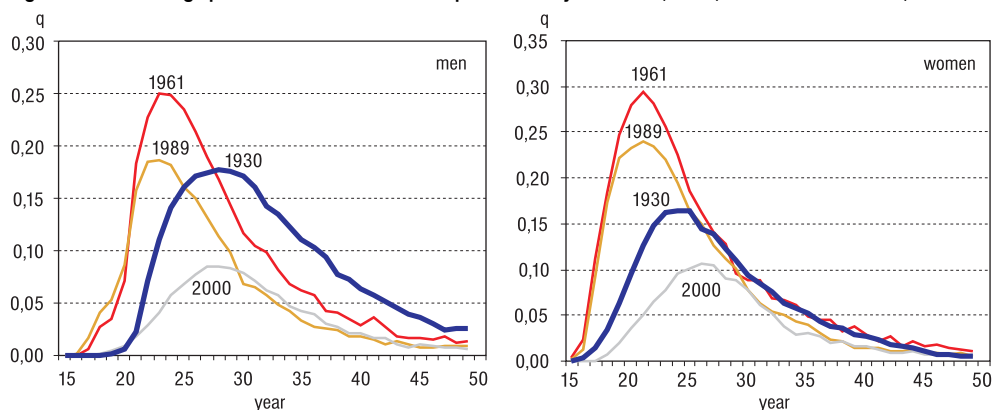
During the first decades of the 20th century there was no substantial change in nuptiality. If we leave aside the abnormal circumstances of the First World War, nuptiality indicators in the 20th century remained at the level of the late 19th century, information on which is provided by data from the censuses of 1900 and 1910. Men most often married for the first time after the age of 25 and women around the age of 25; 10% of women and 6% of men remained never married. These formed the major part of all marriages, as usually around 85% of grooms were single and 93% of brides were single (with the exception of the war years and the post-war compensatory wave). The remainder were marriages of widowed persons, while only a marginal proportion of divorced people re-married at that time.

That men married for the first time at around the age of 30 and women around the age of 25 was not considered in any way an old marriage age, and it corresponded to contemporary practice, while younger grooms and brides were not favoured. In 1936 *Antonín Boháč* stated that weddings were premature if they occurred before the groom was 25 or the bride 21 (*Boháč*, 1936). In 1937 only one-fifth of men's and one-eighth of women's marriages could have been described as premature in this sense. We should add that in 1918 the minimum age of marital consent was lowered from 24 to 21, but this had no notable effect on the age at which people tended to marry, probably owing to the continuing obligation of military duty among men, which came to an end around the age of 22–24 years, or in cases somewhat later.

In the 18th and most of the 19th century a similar marriage age was typical for the populations of many European countries, and *John Hajnal*, who was the first to draw attention to this fact (*Hajnal*, 1953), referred to this type of marriage-age pattern as the European marriage pattern (*Hajnal*, 1965). Later the significance of marriage age for differentiating marital fertility in Europe in general was demonstrated (*Coale – Watkins*, 1986), and it was found that the Czech Lands also followed this marriage pattern (*Fialová*, 1981; *Pavlík – Fialová – Vereš*, 1990), regardless of the country's ethnic heterogeneity (*Boháč*, 1936). The “postponement of marriage” could be regarded as a means of controlling marital fertility, and after the transition to family planning at the end of the demographic revolution it gradually lost its function.

The decline in the percentage of marriages of widowed persons was mainly a reflection of improving mortality rates, as within the period of 1910–1930 alone the life expectancy of men at the age of 20 increased from 40.8 years to 45.4 years and women from 42.9 years to 48.0 years (*Dějiny...*, 1996: 396); the number of widowed persons of middle age thus decreased and therefore so did the number of those who after the death of their partner tried to marry again. Repeat marriages of divorced individuals had almost no effect on the marital rate, even though the percentage of such cases slightly increased during the years of the First

Figure 2 First-marriage probabilities in the Czech Republic in the years 1930, 1961, 1989 and 2000 men, women



Czechoslovak Republic as a result of the gradually rising divorce rate (in 1920–1924 the crude divorce rate was just 0.46‰, in 1935–1937 it was 0.65‰).

The period of the “golden age” of the family (under state socialism)

The situation began to change toward the end of the 1930s. On the one hand, the relationship between the marriage rate and marital fertility completely weakened, as the majority of the population accepted the idea of family planning, and thus the number of children born in a family began to depend on the conscious decisions of parents and was not then too influenced by the spouses' age at the time of marriage, especially the age of women. Also, the economic and political situations changed, as the economic crisis of the early 1930s was followed by an economic revival. However, a long and complicated effect was produced by political crises, which culminated in September 1938 with the annexation of the border area of Czechoslovakia by Germany and with the Nazi occupation and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939.

The only reliable data on population development in 1939–1944 are for the Czech population under the Protectorate, but they point to a turnaround in nuptiality during these years. The marriage rate among young people increased during the occupation and jumped especially at the start of 1940 (*Kučera*, 1994: 46). In 1937 the average age at first marriage among the total population (without distinguishing ethnicity) was 27.5 years for men and 24.9 years for women. In 1938, among the Czech population under the Protectorate, this indicator was 28.1 years for men and 25.0 years for women; however, by 1944 it had fallen to 26.4 years for men and 22.5 years for women. Although a certain deviational effect on the age structure may be expected from the large cohorts born in the compensational waves in the early 1920s, thus increasing the high marriage rate during these years, the data nonetheless indicate a change in nuptial behaviour.

There were several reasons for this change, though it is not possible to exactly distinguish the scope of the effect of each one. Therefore, the order in which they are presented here has nothing to do with their order of importance. The first reason was the compensation for low nuptiality in the first half of the 1930s, which resulted from the effects of the economic crisis, and certainly also from the effect of the increased level of employment at the end of the 1930s and the full employment from the start of the Protectorate, as the population was forced to supply Germany with military and other products. Other factors were the dissolution of the Czechoslovak army, the abolition of compulsory military service, and the closure of Czech universities in 1939, all of which mainly affected the lives of young men, but given that grooms tended to select younger brides, it may also have had an effect on the marriage age of women. Also, the Protectorate conscripted labour to work in Germany – one way of avoiding being sent to work outside the Czech Lands was by marriage. At the end of the 1930s and in the early 1940s pro-nuptial attitudes clearly prevailed: in 1939 the crude marriage rate was the second highest recorded in the 20th century, but as the occupation continued it again decreased.

The trend that began at the start of the war years continued however even after the end of the war. During the socialist period the state exhibited a dualistic stance toward families. On the one hand, it tried to weaken the family, when by nationalising private property everyone gradually became an employee of the state and the family ceased to be an important economic production unit. On the other hand, it provided initially just declaratory but later even material support for marriage, which was based on a value system that survived from the preceding period, when the institution of marriage enjoyed enormous credibility and most people endeavoured ultimately to become part of a marriage (*Hamplová*, 2001). After the 1948 communist coup, the wage equalisation applied across the state contributed to increasing the homogenisation of society, a trend later confirmed by sociologists (*Machonin*, 2005: 127). In

society most people continued to wish to marry at least once in their life, and this attitude was supported by the continuously high social prestige accorded to married men and women (especially in comparison with singles). The equalisation of the living standard seemed to make it easier to achieve this ideal. This situation was not unique: the high prestige ascribed to marriage and the elimination of social barriers between classes at the end of the Second World War occurred all over the European continent – sociologists refer to this period as the “golden age” of the family and marriage (e.g. Sullerot, 1991). Marriages at a relatively young age were facilitated by numerous other circumstances, such as full employment, the slow increase in the percentage of young people at universities, the lowering of the age of marital consent to 18, and the shortening of the period of compulsory military service to two years, so that most men had completed service by the age of 21. In the 1970s a contributing factor was also that people closed themselves off within their families, as the regime made other forms of social intercourse impossible (Možný, 1991).

Nevertheless, the short-term fluctuations in nuptiality in Czechoslovakia during the first decade after the end of the Second World War indicate the continuation of a close connection between nuptiality and the social development and economic situation of the population. First the marriage rate significantly increased again, so that in 1948–1952 it surpassed the level of 10‰ (the third time this occurred in the 20th century). This was followed by a period during which the rate ranged between 7 and 9‰ and only grew to a level above 9‰ in 1969; in 1973 the crude marriage rate for the fourth and final time exceeded 10‰ (10.03). Since then it tended to decline, and in the 1980s it hovered around 7.5–8‰. The increases in nuptiality corresponded to periods of a more favourable population climate, especially at the start of the 1970s, when the high numbers of marriages reflected both changes in the age structure, as people born in the post-war population boom were reaching peak marriage age, and pro-natal measures introduced in support of marriage among young people under 30 years of age, which included a housing policy aimed at mass construction of pre-fabricated panel tenement buildings (cf., e.g., Kučera, 1994). Decreases were connected with the deterioration in the economic situation (the 1950s and 1960s) and from the mid-1970s it was possible to observe a continuous, slight decline in nuptiality in general.

During this period were men and women typically married at a young age (men most often around age 25 or even younger, women most often around age 20–22) – and only a very small percentage of women remained unmarried (fewer than 3%). But for the 1970s, data indicate that this trend had turned around and that the percentage of people marrying was no longer growing, which is shown in the increasing numbers in the marriage-rate tables for single men and women by age (Table 5).

A decline in nuptiality among widowed people (Tables 2 and 3) could also be observed, occurring amidst conditions of stagnating mortality among middle-aged men and just slightly improving mortality among women (in 1950–1990 life expectancy at 30 among men decreased by 0.2 years and among women increased by 3.5 years). Conversely, the percentage of divorcees among marriage brides and grooms increased relatively quickly, but they still tended to marry single people. This was a reflection of the rapid rise in the divorce rate, affecting the marriages of people who were still relatively young. In 1984–1989 the highest rate of divorce occurred between the third and fifth year of marriage (the total divorce rate had by then reached almost 40%; Pavlík, 2002: 33). However, owing to the continuing prestige (and rewards) associated with marriage, divorcees tended to re-marry relatively soon after divorce, and in doing so they contributed not only to the higher marriage rate but also to the high percentage of people living in a marriage.

The nuptiality model typical for the Czech Lands up to the end of the 1980s was one in which almost 97% of women and 94% of men marry at least once in their lives amidst a relatively high level of repeat nuptiality, so that usually around 80% of the middle-aged pop-

Table 4 Total first marriage rates by gender and the index of marital fertility (i_m) in the Czech Republic in the 20th century (for selected years)

Year	Men	Women	i_m
1900	.	.	0.519
1910	.	.	0.529
1921	1.49	1.23	0.462
1930	0.94	0.93	0.536
1937	0.84	0.99	0.575 ¹
1950	1.20	1.21	0.680
1960	1.05	1.05	0.727
1970	0.92	0.93	0.704
1980	0.84	0.88	0.733
1989	0.88	0.91	0.674 ²
2000	0.53	0.46	0.503 ³

Note: ¹ 1936, ² 1991, ³ 2001

Czech Republic became very similar (Fialová, 1991). In the majority of countries in Western and Northern Europe an increase in nuptiality also occurred after the Second World War, but the change in nuptiality circumstances was not as substantial and long-term, and since the 1960s it has been possible to observe the emergence of different trends signalling a decline in the marriage rate along with an increasing average marriage age (Sullerot, 1992).

Although at first glance this model looks stable (by the 1980s it was affecting de facto the second generation), it was essentially very fragile – the highest number of first marriages in the Czech Republic occurred during the first few years of a young person's adult life. Young people most often married immediately after completing their secondary education in circumstances where only around one-tenth of the young generation attended a post-secondary school. Full employment meant a guaranteed regular income, there was an established system of social welfare, and housing allocation made it possible for people to eventually obtain their own housing. Other important factors conducive to a higher marriage rate should not be ignored – poor contraception, which given the high prestige enjoyed by the institution of marriage and the relaxation of intimate relations among young people resulted in an increased number of unplanned pregnancies, the preference for childbirth over abortion, and efforts to ensure a child was born within a marriage, all these increased the number of marriages (in the 1950s, 40% of first-order children were born within the first nine months of marriage, in the 1960s roughly one-half did, and in the 1970s it was sometimes as high as 60% (Kučera, 1994: 105). During this period there was a significant relationship between nuptiality and fertility.

The period of the postponement and rejection of marriage

The change in the political system in 1989 was not reflected immediately in the marriage rate; on the contrary, in 1990 the number of marriages even increased somewhat (in this case it was a kind of pragmatic reaction to a statement issued by the banks that they would only be providing newlywed loans to the end of 1990). However, in 1991 the number of marriages began and continued to fall. Instead of the usual 70 000 marriages annually, from 1995 the number began to average around 55 000 annually (the low point thus far was reached in 2003, when just under 49 000 marriages took place, and the crude marriage rate thus fell to 4.8‰). The decline was largely caused by the decrease in the intensity of nuptiality among younger people: among young men at the age of 25 it fell to one-third of its previous level (e.g. at the age of 23, which in 1989 was the age of peak nuptiality, when 187 men out of 1000 single men married, in 2002 only 40 men out of 1000 single men married; the age of peak nuptiality increased to 28 and 29 years of age, when 78 men out of 1000 married). Similarly, the highest

ulation (aged approximately 24–45, but with small differences between men and women) is married. This was similar to the situation in other countries in Eastern Europe, with the difference that the model in the other countries was traditional and no major changes occurred in the character of the nuptiality model after the Second World War: a young marriage age and a low percentage of people who never married was characteristic in this region especially earlier in history (that is why it tends to be referred to in historical-demographic literature as the “non-European” marriage pattern, Hajnal, 1965). In this regard it was interesting to observe how the situations in the Czech Lands and in Slovakia converged and owing to developments in the

intensity of nuptiality among women shifted from age 20 (240 brides out of 1000 single women in 1989) to age 25–27 (97 brides out of 1000 single women in 2002). Among both men and women marriage under the age of 20 became extremely rare (among men such marriages accounted for just 1% of all marriages in 2002 and among women only 6% out of almost 53 000 marriages) and marriages among people over the age of 30 began to account for an increasingly significant proportion of all marriages – in 2002 more than one-third of single grooms and more than one-fifth of single brides were over 30 (Kretschmerová, 2004: 157). The average age at first marriage increased in 2002 to 28.8 years and among women to 26.4 years. According to the nuptiality table for 2000, more than one-third of all men and almost one-third of women at the age of 35 would remain unmarried.

However, in the 1990s, which can be described as a transitional phase leading to later marriage, the change in the intensity of the timing of first marriage is revealed less well by transversal data (transversal indicators are still somewhat affected by the preceding long-term high rate of marriage at a young age) and is demonstrated better by the values derived from a longitudinal study of individual cohorts. From the cohort born in 1954, 66% of men and 87% of women married at least once by the age of 25, while in the cohort born in 1974 only 34% of men and 58% of women did.

The percentage of protogamous marriages significantly decreased, accounting for less than two-thirds of all marriages by the end of the 20th century (Table 2). The decline in nuptiality was also affected by the decline in the intensity of nuptiality among divorcees and to a certain extent also widowed people. Among the latter the phenomenon can partly be explained by the increase in life expectancy among middle-aged people. Among divorcees, whose numbers continued to increase as the rate of divorce remained high in the population (in 2001 out of 100 people over the age of 15.10% were divorced men and 11% were divorced women), much of the same reasons as those observed among singles lie behind the reduced appeal of repeat marriages. Except for those divorcees who reject the idea of remarrying after the collapse of their first marriage, the reasons probably include the rapidly spreading changes in the overall value orientations that occurred, as Czech society opened up to contemporary European society and relevant associated phenomena, such as changes in the economic situation (the re-establishment of a market economy, the re-emergence of unemployment, the re-evaluation of the responsibility of individuals for their own economic situation).

Another key factor contributing to the low marriage rate was clearly the fact that marriage

Figure 3 Women and men ever married by age and generation, Czech Republic

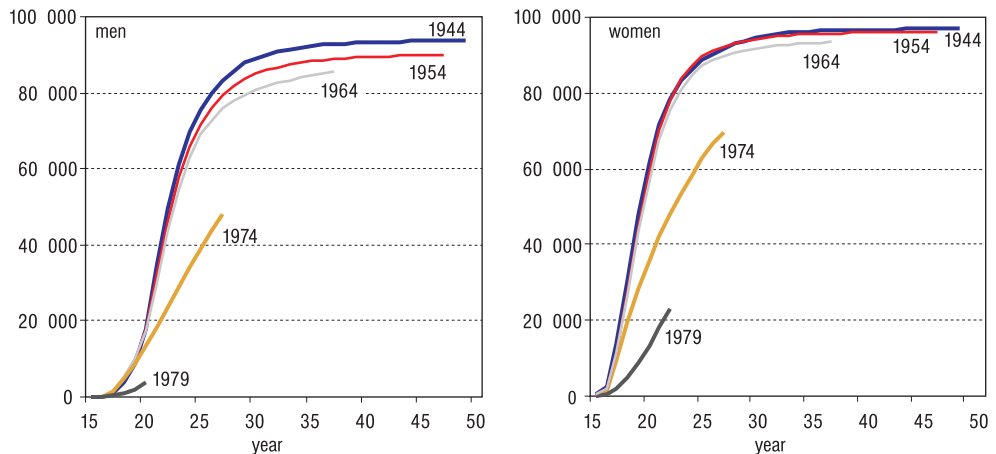


Table 5 Proportion never married at the relevant age (l_x) according to net nuptiality tables for Czech Republic

Year	l_{25}		l_{30}		l_{35}		l_{50}	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1930	68 856	41 793	26 790	20 080	12 135	13 614	4 995	9 719
1961	30 792	11 218	10 705	5 184	6 531	3 512	4 170	2 346
1970	31 150	13 380	13 300	6 404	8 842	4 691	5 830	3 491
1980	38 765	14 172	19 343	6 168	13 887	4 108	10 259	3 103
1990	31 114	13 125	14 915	6 544	11 151	4 824	8 910	3 804
2000	79 259	62 288	51 759	38 181	38 813	30 725	30 430	25 503

Source: Tables, 1989; Pavlík, 2002; year 1930 – author's calculations

is above all a legal act, in which the rights and responsibilities of the spouses are precisely defined, and among the part of the population embracing liberalism in its broadest form it was perceived as an act signifying the loss of freedom or identity. Among the younger generation, essentially only practising Christians regard marriage as a step that leads obviously to starting family, while other young people hold this view only if their partnership is doing well, and for others it no longer has any appeal (*Představy...*, 2000: 69). And it may be that there is a growing percentage of people in the population who have consciously given up the idea of establishing any kind of partnership.

The decline was also partly brought about by the tolerance of Czech society toward informal unions. According to survey findings, up to 70% of single people regard premarital cohabitation as an acceptable start to partnership life (*Představy...*, 2000: 68). What must also be taken into consideration are the better quality and more widespread use of contraceptives, which reduced the risk of unwanted pregnancy, especially among young people.

Since the start of the 1990s there has also been general evidence of the postponement of marriage to a later age and among part of the population even the outright rejection of the idea of marriage.

Conclusion

Nuptiality trends among the population inhabiting the territory of the Czech Republic in the 20th century can be regarded above all as a reflection of the significance of marriage for starting a family (and setting up a household). It must after all be remembered that marriage is a legal act and so it also depends on how important it is from the perspective of society that a partnership have a legal basis. As long as the position of individual members of a family in their own family was connected to their position in society, as long as it was directly connected, for example, to their access to higher society, to obtaining appropriate employment in the labour market, to being eligible for their inheritance, etc., marriage was an appealing prospect for everyone. And if reproduction was also viewed as something that is part of marriage, then the marriage rate had a direct influence on the fertility rate and it could be – and was – a significant factor co-determining the rate of reproduction in the population. This link gradually slackened, as the notion of consciously limiting the fertility rate, primarily in marriage, began to spread, beginning in the middle of the 19th century. That stage ended in the first half of the 20th century. It should be remembered that the marriage rate was also a reflection of the opportunities that were open to the population at a given time; almost every tenth woman and every fifteenth man did not want to or did not succeed in marrying, and this occurred for various different reasons. The annual number of marriages in this period certainly varied (as the crude marriage rate indicates), but the marriage rate did not change over the long term.

The following period, which could be described as the “golden age” of the family, but modified by the specific circumstances of society under the Protectorate and under state socialism, is a period in which the marriage and fertility rates were interdependent, but at a

somewhat different level. Marriage continued to be an important step connected with starting a family (probably mainly owing to a cultural tradition formed by Christianity), but because the view of premarital intimate relations became more relaxed, the high marriage rate was not just a reflection of the continued significance that the population assigned to marriage for starting a family, but also reflected the significance people assigned to the need for children to be born within a marriage, even though the legal code gradually accorded illegitimate children the same legal status. This occurred amidst an overall increase in the homogenisation of society, when there were no pronounced differences between people based on social background, and marriage was based on romantic love (in one-half of the cases owing to pregnancy). The marriage rate was thus again connected with the character of reproduction.

However, in the 1990s the situation changed dramatically. The characteristic feature of this period was that the demographic model that was established in the 1950s began to wane within just several years (even though it would continue to be reflected in the population structure for a long time), and demographic behaviour shows an evident trend toward “returning” to the previous (pre-war) situation. In this development there is a clear, gradual turn toward the contemporary method of reproduction in advanced European countries, which it resembled most in the pre-war period, and which now also includes new aspects of reproductive behaviour (the postponement of marriage to a later age, the increasing divorce rate, the postponement of childbearing to a later age and more frequent extramarital fertility, a low abortion rate, increased life expectancy).

This fully corresponds with the close connection between demographic behaviour and the external environment. The contemporary European population climate, and within it the Czech population climate, is to a large degree a reflection of the circumstances formed by the economic situation and by the wider developments in society under the increasingly significant effects of liberalism and individualism. This also indicates that for a part of the population marriage is a legal act that is of little interest or even represents an unacceptable option (even though the part of the population that still subscribes to Christian values does not question the significance of marriage).

If at the start of the 20th century nuptiality was regarded as a fact that can have a long-term effect on the fertility rate (and that is why demographers even devoted any attention to it), by the end it had become a significant indicator of changes in reproductive behaviour and all its concomitant phenomena – including the interest it began to receive in research.

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