

## **Fertility and the role of family strategies: family life in Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden (draft-version)**

Paper prepared for the *FFS Flagship Conference titled 'Partnership and fertility: a revolution?'*. Session 4: *Partnership and fertility behaviours as interdependent processes*, Brussels, Belgium, 29-31 May 2000

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### **ABSTRACT**

The strategy concept is defined as the tactics people use to balance their needs and wants within the characteristics of a macro-level opportunity structure (of a country) and characteristics of their individual life stages, to reach the best possible level of life satisfaction during the life course.

A between-country variation in life strategies is the result of differences in options people have in the various countries. The options someone has are the result of a complex relationship between individual behaviour and country-specific opportunities and constraints. The family strategies refer only to fertility and partner career specific characteristics. This means that people have to adjust their individual behaviour to their life stage, for instance a woman needs a partner before she give birth to a child. The kind of relationship she has with the partner, for example cohabitation or marriage, depends on the norms and values of the society she belongs to.

The concept of (family) strategies is used to refer to the complex relationship between individual behaviour and social context. It is a theoretical concept, in which the rationality of the strategies individuals apply remains a black box. Instead, the timing and sequence of events, as well as the relevant country-specific opportunity structures on the macro-level can be measured. These give us a picture of what the strategies might have been in the four countries.

The issue of the paper is to gain insight into the differences between countries (Hungary, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands) in fertility behaviour and the role of family strategies, for females in the period 1970-1992. The analysis focuses on a synthesis of the family strategies by combining two types of information. First, the country-specific contextual settings, concerning the characteristics relevant for the family life domain is described. Second, the life course trajectories women followed within the family life domain will be presented.

For the comparative analysis event history data on the fertility and partner career have been taken from the Standard Recode Files (SRF) of the Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) of three countries: Hungary, Italy and Sweden. The Dutch data are from the Fertility and Family survey 1993, directly from the Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics (NCBS). The case-based samples (each case contains information of one women) have been transformed to spell-files (months). In this way we have for each woman information about her life course month by month, starting at age 15 until the month of interview.

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## **Introduction**

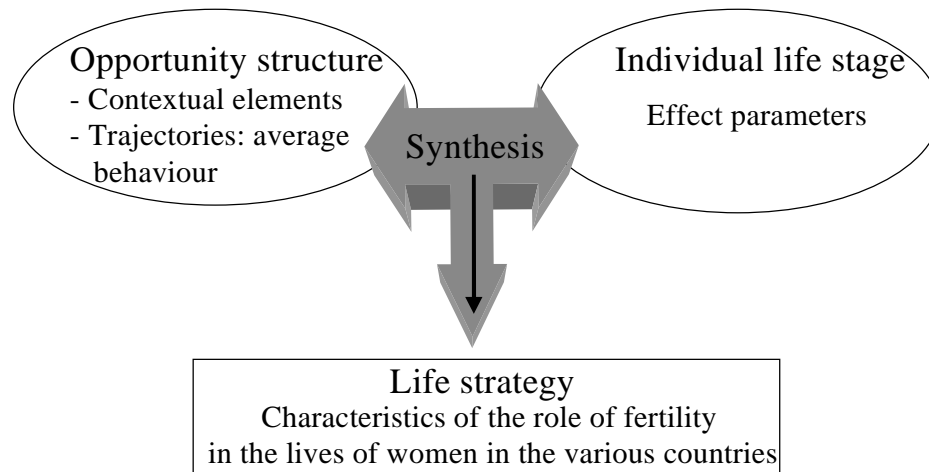
Research from the second half of the 1990s learn us that at that time a pluriformity of family types existed by an increasing number of options in the types of events and the timing of events. They describe and expected a great variation in family behaviour between people, social groups and countries (Kaufmann et al., 1997; Moors and Palomba, 1995; Prinz 1995). The trajectories women follow in the various countries with respect to their fertility and partner career and with respect to their contextual setting lead to between-country variations in fertility behaviour. The issue of the paper is to gain insight into the differences between countries (Hungary, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands) in fertility behaviour and the role of family strategies, for females between 15 and 40 years in the period 1970-1992.

An important tool in this study is the strategy concept. The strategy concept is defined as the tactics people use to balance their needs and wants within the characteristics of a macro-level opportunity structure (of a country) and characteristics of their individual life stages, to reach the best possible level of life satisfaction during the life course. A between-country variation in life strategies is the result of differences in options people have in the various countries. The options someone has are the result of a complex relationship between individual behaviour and country-specific opportunities and constraints.

The family strategies refer only to the life stage characteristics in the fertility and partner career and relevant contextual options. For instance, a person living alone has some options to change this status. He or she has the possibility to live together with other people by cohabitation, marriage or back to his or her parents. It means that people have to adjust their individual behaviour to their life stage, in this case living alone. The strategy this person will follow depends partly on the contextual setting. Is cohabitation an accepted behaviour or not? How do people view marriage, is it directly related to having children or is it the only possibility to have a sexual relationship? From a life course perspective a woman needs a partner before she give birth to a child, but the kind of relationship she has with the partner, for example cohabitation or marriage, depends on the norms and values of the society she belongs to.

The concept of (family) strategies is used to refer to the complex relationship between individual behaviour and social context. It is a theoretical concept, in which the rationality of the strategies individuals apply remains a black box (see also Bosveld, 1998; Lestheaghe,

1999; Moen and Wentington, 1992; Ni Brohlchian, 1993; Palomba and Sabadini, 1993). Instead, the timing and sequence of events, as well as the relevant country-specific opportunity structures on the macro-level can be measured. These give us a picture of what the strategies might have been in the four countries. I will explain this with the help of the next figure.



*Figure 1 The synthesis of life strategies*

Contextual elements and family trajectories are used to gain insight into the opportunity structure of each country. Some interesting contextual items are for instance policies, laws, norms and values, economic development and wealth, technical possibilities etc. The FFS surveys give us information on fertility and partner trajectories, meaning the events people experience during their lives and the durations of the various statuses they are in. In this way we have information on the average behaviour or most popular behaviour in the various countries. I use both types of information as a characteristic of the opportunity structure wherein people have to act in the various countries

On the other site we have the individual level, the individual life stages that we have to study in the various countries. The effect of some family events on fertility can be estimated with event history analysis. The effect parameters concern the options people can choose during their various life stages within the partner and fertility career. The effect parameters describe the effect of being in a certain status for a certain duration in a certain period and country on fertility behaviour.

Combining the various types of information give us the opportunity to describe the family strategies in the various countries by synthesis. Unfortunately, the study of effect parameters has to wait to a next article. In the paper I describe some contextual elements and family trajectories, to formulate some hypothesis about what the fertility related family strategies could be and what effect parameters has to be tested in the micro analysis.

## Data and methods

The Swedish, Italian and Hungarian data are from the Standard Recode Files (SRFs) containing *Fertility and Family Surveys* (FFS). These FFS-data were collected under auspices of the *Population Activities Unit* (PAU) of the *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* (ECE). The SRFs contains individual-level, depersonalised data on a wide range of topics, including event history data on union formation and dissolution, live births and other pregnancy outcomes, as well as education and work. The part of the survey to reconstruct the event history data is retrospective. In addition, each file also contains information on household composition, the parental home, contraception, fertility preferences, and various values and beliefs. A great advantage is the comparability of the SRFs. They have a standard structure, containing identical variable names and value labels, although sometimes variables are not filled for each country. The Dutch data are from the Fertility and Family survey 1993, directly from the Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics (NCBS).

The variations between countries in the age ranges of the respondents and the fieldwork dates are small, but still problems arise because of these between-country differences in right censoring. The period women had time to realise events was on average the longest for the Italian women (interview date 1996 and ages up to 49). The Swedish and Hungarian women had on average the shortest time to realise events, because of an early interview date and in Hungary combined with a relatively short age range. Therefore, a selected part of the female sample only is used, stipulated by the Hungarian and Swedish sample: cohort 1952 to cohort 1971, research period between January 1967 and September 1992, and ages between 15 and 40 years.

In the analysis the information about the women only is used. The case-based samples (each case contains information on one woman) have been transformed into spell-files (months). In this way, we have for each woman information about her life course month by month, starting at age 15 until September 1992. The information is organised in so-called event and status variables. Event information is for instance the month of the birth of a child or the month of marriage. Status information is for example the parity of a woman in every month or her civil state.

The analysis focuses on a synthesis of the family strategies by combining various types of information. First, the country-specific contextual settings, concerning the characteristics relevant for the family life domain will be described. Some indicators and other information are selected from the literature. Second, the life course trajectories women followed within the family life domain will be presented. Therefore sample distributions and information on duration about the fertility and partner careers will be described.

Information on duration will be studied by Kaplan-Meier estimates of median ages and durations. Because of the retrospective character of the surveys, I choose to use the median instead of the mean age or duration. For example, we have for all cohorts information about the women whom had their first child very young, but only for the oldest cohorts we know whether they did have a first child at an old age. In this way, relatively many first births from young women should contributed to the mean age at first birth.

Within the Kaplan-Meier procedure the median can be estimated in two ways, (1) the right-censored cases are included in the analysis and (2) only the women who had

experienced the event are included in the analysis. The first describes the duration until 50 per cent of the women under risk have experienced the event. A better name is the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. The second describe the middle value in the ordered age or duration range among women who ever had experienced the event, an ordinary median.

Both indicators will be used in result section. The proportions of right-censored cases vary between the countries and we can not be sure about the reason. Do they not want to experience the event or did they not have had enough time yet, because they postponed some life events? When we assume that relatively many women had not have enough time yet, because of the retrospective character of the survey as mentioned before, the best option is to use the duration until the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. A disadvantage is that if there are many right-censored cases the duration becomes very high and when more than 50 per cent of the cases is right-censored we can not estimate duration. If we assume that a large part of the right-censored cases are women who do not want to experience the event, the best option is to estimate the median duration.

### **The contextual setting of the family life domain**

In Europe, significant societal changes have taken place over the last few decades, resulting in changes in the way individuals fill their life courses. Changes in fertility, such as postponement of births, or increasing proportions remaining permanently childless, were not trends that stood alone. Technical, structural and cultural processes created influences changing individual behaviour through changing socially accepted preferences and macro-level constraints and opportunities.

Although these trends can be observed all over Europe, their timing and intensity vary between countries. Between-country differences in some crude indicators of the family life domain are presented in table 1, for the period 1970-1990. The indicators mentioned in the table are printed bold and cursive in the text. The period 1970-1990 represents the variation in the social context wherein the females of the FFS surveys formed relationships and have their children. Of course we have to realise that these 20 years are imbedded in a much larger historical period.

The four countries described in the table have low to very low *total period fertility rates (TFRs)*. The period 1970-1990, can be described as one of declining fertility levels. An exception is Sweden, with a TFR of 2.14 in 1990, although this high level occurred only for a few years (in 1995 the TFR was 1.74). In the Netherlands the decline was large until 1980, but during the 1980s the rates fluctuated at low levels between 1.5 and 1.6 (1990: 1.62) (see Bosveld, 1996).

In Hungary and Italy the TFRs decreased continuously. Especially in Italy the decline was fast, resulting in the lowest fertility level of all countries. In Hungary the decline was small, resulting in 1990 in a TFR of 1.84.

The fertility decline in the 1970s has been broad about by a reduction in family size. In the 1980s the decline has been associated with an increase in the prevalence of childlessness and with a change in the timing of birth, postponement. Delays in first births meant an increase in the *mean ages at first births*. The result was that women in Italy and

Sweden entered motherhood between ages 26 and 27 and in the Netherlands at age 27.6 on average in 1990. The Hungarian women had their children on average still when they were young in 1990: 22.5.

*Table 1 Some indicators of the family life domain, 1970 and 1990*

	Year	Hungary	Italy	Netherlands	Sweden
<b>Total fertility rate</b>	1970	2.07	2.37	2.58	1.92
	1980	1.90	1.66	1.60	1.68
	1990	1.84	1.29	1.62	2.14
<b>Mean age at first birth, women</b>	1970	22.1	25.1	24.3	-
	1980	22.4	25.1	25.6	25.5
	1990	22.5	26.9	27.6	26.3
<b>Total first marriage rate for women below the age of 50</b>	1970	0.97	1.00	1.06	0.62
	1980	0.90	0.77	0.68	0.53
	1990	0.77	0.67 (1989)	0.65	0.56 (1.51,1989)
<b>Mean age at first marriage, women</b>	1970	21.5	24.1	22.7	24.0
	1980	21.3	-	23.1	25.0
	1990	21.5	25.6	25.9	27.5
<b>Consensual unions (as a proportion of all unions by age of women)</b>	1985				
	all age	2.9	1.4	7.7	19.9
	20-24	3.3	2.1	36.3	77.1
	25-29	2.4	1.8	15.9	48.1
<b>Extra-marital births, per 100 birth</b>	1970	5.4	2.2	2.1	18.4
	1980	7.1	4.3	4.1	39.7
	1990	13.1	6.5	11.4	47.0
<b>Total divorce rate</b>	1970	0.25	0.05	0.11	0.18
	1980	0.29	0.03	0.25	0.42
	1990	0.31	0.08	0.28	0.44
<b>Remarriages (as a proportion of all marriages)</b>	1970	-	1.0	6.1	-
	1980	20.7	2.2	11.0	20.6
	1990	20.6(1989)	1.2	14.6	21.7 (1988)

Source: Council of Europe (1998) ([www.coe.fr](http://www.coe.fr)), Prinz, 1995, p.75

Prioux (1993) estimated proportions of ultimate childlessness for generations born between 1940 and 1960. In the Netherlands the expected proportion are high, just below 20 per cent for cohort 1960. In Sweden the expectations about ultimate childlessness are relatively low, 13 per cent for cohort 1960. In Italy it is expected that 14 per cent of the women born in 1955 will remain childless, which would be higher than in Sweden. In Hungary the expected level of childlessness is very low, 8 per cent for cohort 1960.

The *TFMR* is the number of first marriages that would occur to a hypothetical cohort of women when, during their life course, they experience the period first marriage rates observed in successive age groups. This indicator reflects the result of both the timing and prevalence of first marriage. The TFMRs of Hungary, the Netherlands and Italy were relatively high in the past: around 1.00 in 1970. Sweden is the only country with already in 1970 a very low rate (0.62). In the four countries, the rates declined after 1970. In Hungary the decline started late, a rate of 0.90 in 1980 (and 0.77 in 1990) was high compared to the other countries. Swedish TFMRs remained the lowest in comparison with the other countries until 1990. The reason is the early social acceptance in Sweden of non-marital cohabitation, with or without children, as a good alternative to marriage (Beets, 1991). An extreme incidental rise of TFMR occurred in Sweden in 1989 as a result of changes in legislation on retirement pay. People who had married before 1990 had financial benefits after retirement, especially when one of the partners had a low retirement pay, which cohabiters would lose (Beets, 1991; Council of Europe, 1993).

One basic reason for the decline in the TFMRs until 1985 was the postponement of marriage as part of the tendency of postponing family life. In many countries people marry just before entering parenthood. For instance, in the Netherlands one out of three cohabiting women marries when she is pregnant or expects to conceive soon (Manting, 1992). Consequently, we can expect a small difference in the *mean age at first marriage* and the mean age at first birth. In table 1 we see that the general trend was a delay in first marriage along with a delay in first birth. Hungary was an exception to that rule; there, these mean ages hardly changed. In 1990 the mean age at first marriage in Italy and the Netherlands was almost equal (resp. 25.6 and 25.9), while in the past the Dutch mean age (22.7) lagged much behind those of Italy (24.1). Note that in Sweden the mean age at first marriage was even higher than the mean age at first birth, because childbirth within a consensual union was very common.

Another major reason for these falls in TFMRs could be that fewer women wanted to marry. In all countries, the proportions of women ever-married aged 45-49 were between 90 and 95 per cent in 1989. For the future, Haskey (1993) expects a larger between-country variation in the proportions of ever-married women.

In the past, living together was restricted to marriage only, but nowadays there are many alternative living arrangements. Cohabitation has become an important life style next to marriage, especially in Sweden. In 1985 19.9 per cent of all unions was a *consensual union*. Of the Swedish women between 20 and 24 who lived in a union 77.1 per cent cohabited. And, although the percentages decreased with age, it is still very common to cohabit for the older women as well. In the Netherlands 7.7 per cent of all women in a union cohabited. In the Netherlands it were especially the younger women (20-24) who cohabited (36.3 per cent). In Hungary and Italy, unmarried cohabitation was very uncommon in 1985: the proportion of consensual unions among all unions was 2.9 per cent in Hungary and 1.4 per cent in Italy.

A result of raising levels of cohabitation is also reflected in the proportions of *extra-marital births*, especially in Sweden. Extended social protection of parents and children, in addition to egalitarian family and labour laws, made this possible. In the other countries it is

still more common to have children within marriage.

Prinz (1995, p.107-108) classified European countries with respect to the role and function of cohabitation in a country. The cohabitation typology distinguished four stages of development: (1) cohabitation as deviant behaviour, (2) cohabitation becomes socially accepted as a prelude to marriage (3) cohabitation becomes socially accepted as an alternative to marriage and (4) cohabitation becomes a type of marriage. In the 1990s, Hungary has not yet reached the first stage. Cohabitation is deviant phenomenon but not yet in the form as in the first stage. Cohabitation in Hungary, where larger proportions of the population are married than in the other countries, is to a large extent practised by who cannot get married for socio-economic reasons and not a free' choice. Italy is in the first stage: cohabitation emerges as a deviant phenomenon, practised by a very select group of people. The Netherlands is between phase 2 and 3. Cohabitation is accepted as a prelude to marriage, childbearing outside marriage has increased and accepted, but most people get marry when they planned children or are pregnant. In Sweden cohabitation has become a type of marriage.

Family dissolution became very common in most European countries, both for consensual unions and marriages (Hoem, 1986a; Manting, 1994). The increasing instability of unions has a direct effect on childbearing. For instance, divorce can result in a delay in entering motherhood. Or, a woman who already has children from a previous marriage/union may want to have another child in a new union. Relatively large birth intervals and childbearing at relatively high ages may arise.

During the past few decades the incidence of divorce has increased all over Europe. The between-country variation in the development of divorce legislation has resulted in differences in divorce rates. For instance, in Sweden the divorce law had already been liberalised in the 1920s; in the countries of Eastern Europe, divorce law was liberalised at an early stage, too. But the countries of Southern Europe did not liberalise their divorce laws until the 1980s (Festy, 1985; Council of Europe, 1993).

In most countries, one in three marriages ended in divorce in 1990 (table 1). In Sweden the **total divorce rates** were the highest: 0.44. Sweden has had even higher rates in the past: there, one in four marriages ended in a divorce in 1970. Divorce rates in Italy were always very low: 0.05 in 1970 was the lowest rate of all countries. The Netherlands followed in the rank order with 0.11. Italy had still the lowest divorce rates in 1990, although it had risen to 0.08.

One could assume that increasing divorce rates would lead to an increase in the numbers of women with the opportunity to start a new relationship. Table 1 shows the *proportions of remarriages per 100 marriages* in the four countries and that there is indeed a strong relationship with the divorce rates. It should be noted that a disrupted relationship need not be the result of divorce; a spouse could have died. Both divorced women and widows can remarry. In most countries, the proportions of remarriages increased after 1970, but we must consider that remarriage rates for woman have declined along with the decline in first marriage rates for women (Festy, 1985; Höpflinger, 1991). In the Netherlands and Sweden the



proportion re-marriages are relatively low if we compare them to the relatively high divorce rates. Probably many people choose to live alone or to live in a consensual union. New unions after a divorce or widowhood are not always legalised as a marriage. Particularly in the countries of Northern Europe, non-marital cohabitation is the most frequent type of second union (Höpflinger, 1991).

We can conclude that within the family life domain the number of options people have increased as well as the opportunities of putting choices into effect, thereby affecting changes in the fertility career and other careers, too. The result is that the complexity of a individual life course increased. The variation in the number of events someone can experience is large, as well as the variation in timing of the various events. And because there are so many options a pluralization of life styles occurred in many countries (Strohmeier and Kuijsten, 1995). For example, traditionally, living in a union was restricted to marriage, while now remaining single and cohabitation have become widespread as well. Together with a growing multiformity of partner careers, unions have become less stable.

We can also conclude that there is a great variation between countries in the options people have. In Sweden and the Netherlands people have indeed many options to fill in their life courses, in contrast to Italy and Hungary. For instance, a pluralization of living arrangements and polarisation between marriage and alternatives to marriage did not occur in Italy, changes occur mainly in the timing of marriage and childbirth (Mennity et al, 1995). In Hungary they have also few alternatives for marriage and having children, and moreover the changes in timing did not occur.

An important factor in explaining the between country variation in the number and kind of options people have are the family values. When traditional family values are still important, people are tied up with two very important life goals: getting married and having some children. They do not have the possibility or wish to substitute these life goals for other important things in life. In Moors and Palomba (1995) some attitudes towards marriage and children are presented for Italy, Hungary and the Netherlands. Compared to Italy and Hungary, are in the Netherlands relatively many people who considered alternative life goals for parenthood as money, a career, or enough leisure time as very important. In Italy and Hungary people seem more child-minded: More than 80 percent of the respondents between 20-39 are very positive about children and parenthood, while in the Netherlands this counts for less than 50 per cent. In the Netherlands many women in their late twenties doubt about having children (Den Bandt, 1982). Possibly, this is one of the major reasons of the high age women entered motherhood in this country.

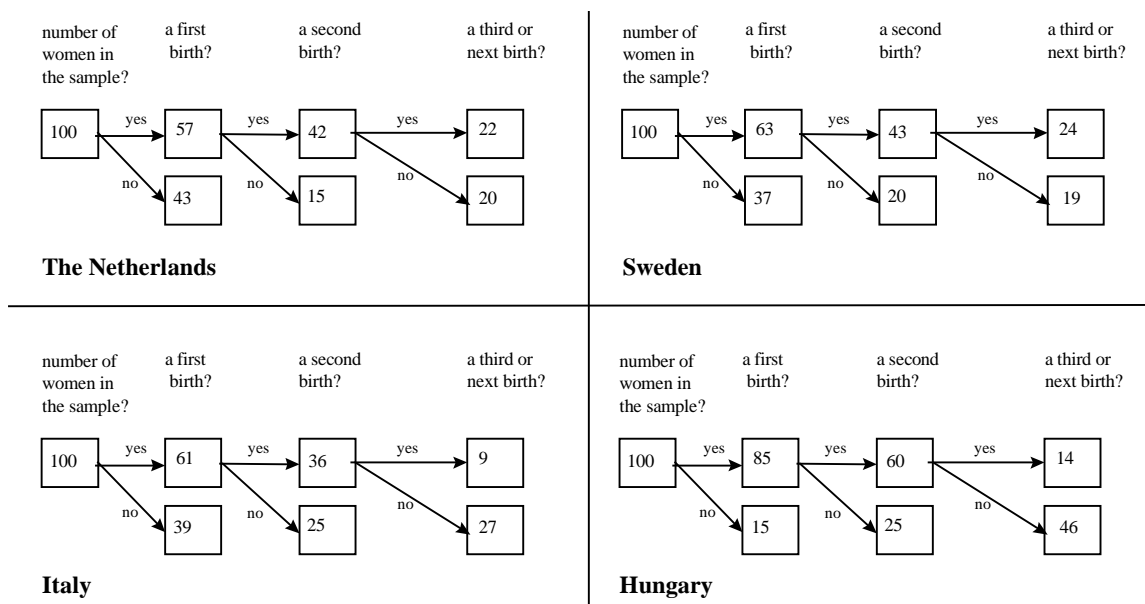
## **The life course trajectories**

### *The fertility career*

In many European countries a decrease in family size occurred in the 1960s, followed by a postponement of births and increasing levels of childlessness. Nowadays, the phenomenon of ageing of fertility has become a major factor in current fertility trends, because in most

European countries a compensation for delayed births has started. In this section I want to show the most important differences between the 4 countries with respect to the the fertility career.

Figure 1 gives information on the between-country variation in the proportions of women who had a (next) birth in the research period and the final distribution by family size in September 1992. Of the 4 countries, Italy has the lowest proportions of women who gave birth to a second or third child. Of the Italian women, 61 per cent have had a first birth, but only 36 per cent a second birth, and 9 per cent only has had a third birth. The result is that the proportion of women with exactly 1 child almost equals the proportion with exactly 2 children (respectively 25 and 27 per cent). In the Netherlands, the proportion of women with a first birth (57 per cent) is the lowest of all countries. Contrary to Italy, relatively many women have had a second or third child (respectively 42 and 22 per cent). The result is that among the women with a family, relatively few had exactly 1 child in September 1992 (15 per cent), and 20 per cent had exactly 2 children. The proportions for Sweden differ only little from those of the Netherlands, but in Sweden a larger part of the women has started a family, and thus there are relatively few childless women in the Swedish sample. In Hungary, most women have started a family: 85 per cent. A large part of these women went on to have a second and, as was the case for the Dutch and Swedish women, the family with exactly two children is more popular than that with only one child. The proportion of women who gave birth to a third child was relatively low, 14 per cent.



**Figure 1** Variations in the proportions of women having a (next) birth and family sizes in September 1992, selected countries

In table 2 some duration variables are presented about the age at entering motherhood, and the birth intervals when women enlarged their families. The Dutch women had the highest median age at first birth (25.50). They needed a relatively short time to have their (next) child. The median duration between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> birth was 29 months and between the

2nd and 3rd birth was 33 months. The Hungarian women had the youngest median age at the moment of first birth (21,33). They needed more time to have further children than the Dutch women did, 34 month until the second and 41 month until the third birth. The Swedish and Italian women take a position in the middle with a median age 23.8. The median durations between successive births were equal to Hungary. The Italian women took the longest time to give birth to following children: 39 month until the second birth and 46 until the third child.

**Table 2.** Median ages at first birth of female born between 1952-1971 (in brackets the 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles) and median durations in months between two birth orders (in brackets the 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles)

	1 <sup>st</sup> birth	1 <sup>st</sup> birth - 2 <sup>nd</sup> birth	2 <sup>nd</sup> birth - 3 <sup>rd</sup> birth
<b>The Netherlands</b>	25.50 (27.92)	29 (33)	33 (-)
<b>Sweden</b>	23.75 (26.42)	33 (39)	42 (96)
<b>Italy</b>	23.83 (26.83)	39 (56)	46 (-)
<b>Hungary</b>	21.58 (22.42)	34 (45)	41 (-)

The median is based on the women who have experienced the event. We have also information about the age or duration that 50 percent of the women at risk have experienced the event. The 50th percentile ages or durations measure taking into account the right-censored cases. It is obvious that the order in countries with respect to age and duration variables do not change, but what you can see is that sometimes it costs relatively (compared to the median) a lot of time until 50 % of the women have experienced the event. For instance, in the Netherlands it takes until age 28.17 before 50 % of the women had a first child. Because of this high age we can expect that in the survey we have relatively few information on births, because of the postponement of birth. This is also true for Italy and Sweden (respectively 26.83 and 26.42). In Hungary 50 per cent of the women have entered motherhood before the age of 20.92.

For Italy and Hungary table 2 shows that the difference between the median and 50<sup>th</sup> percentile duration between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> birth is relatively large. In Italy it took until 56 months since the births of the first child before 50 per cent of the women had a second child, and in Hungary this was 45 month.

### *The partner career*

The trajectories women follow within the partner career have changed. Living together is not anymore restricted to marriage only, but cohabitation before or instead of marriage is an option in many countries. Living together with only one life course partner became unsure, because the option of union dissolution for marriages and consensual unions. The number of partner career steps have increased, but with some differences between the countries.

Table 3 presents the between-country variation in the distributions by relation status in the last month included in the study, September 1992. Moreover, the proportional distribution by relation history that accounts for the various statuses is given up to one other relationship before the last one. The category ‘cohabitation-marriage’ describes women who have been married after a period of cohabitation with the same partner.

*Table 3 Proportional distribution by relation status in September 1992 and relation history for selected countries.*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Proportional distribution by relation status in September 1992</b>	<b>Relation history</b>
<b>Hungary</b>	24 % no partner	29 % never had a partner 25 % after a cohabitation 8 % after a marriage 38 % after cohabitation - marriage
	5 % cohabitation	17 % after a cohabitation 67 % after a marriage 17 % after cohabitation - marriage
	61% marriage	93 % first relationship 5 % after a cohabitation 2 % after a marriage
	10% cohabitation – marriage	70 % first relationship 10 % after a cohabitation 20 % after a marriage
<b>Italy</b>	29 % no partner	93 % never had a partner 7 % after marriage
	3 % cohabitation	67 % first relationship 33 % after a marriage
	64 % marriage	100 % first relationship
	4 % cohabitation – marriage	75 % first relationship 25 % after a cohabitation
<b>The Netherlands</b>	27 % no partner	74 % never had a partner 15 % cohabitation 7 % marriage 4 % after cohabitation - marriage
	13 % cohabitation	77 % first relationship 15 % after a cohabitation 8 % after a marriage
	35 % marriage	97 % first relationship 3 % after a cohabitation
	25 % cohabitation- marriage	84 % first relationship 12 % after a cohabitation 4 % after a marriage
<b>Sweden</b>	27 % no partner	41 % never had a partner 48 % after cohabitation 4 % after marriage 7 % after cohabitation - marriage
	30 % cohabitation	70 % first relationship 23 % after a cohabitation 7 % after cohabitation - marriage
	7 % marriage	86 % first relationship 14 % after a cohabitation
	36 % cohabitation – marriage	75 % first relationship 22 % after a cohabitation 3 % after cohabitation - marriage

The category ‘no partner’ contains women who never lived with a partner and women who lived alone after a separation or divorce. In the four countries the proportions vary between 24 and 29 per cent. In Hungary and Sweden most of these women have had a relationship in the past. In Hungary 46 per cent have had a marriage before (8 per cent had a direct marriage and 38 per cent had a marriage after cohabitation). In Sweden most of the lone women lived before in a consensual union (48 per cent). In Italy and the Netherlands the contribution of divorced or separated women to the proportion lone women is importantly lower, respectively 26 and 7 per cent. In the Netherlands the separated women contribute seriously to the lone women, 15 per cent lived in a consensual union before.

In 1992, most women in the four countries lived within marriage (direct marriage or marriage after cohabitation with the same partner). In Italy and Hungary most of these women married directly respectively 64 and 61 per cent, while the proportions of women who started the relationship with a cohabitation before they married is relatively low, 4 per cent in Italy and 10 per cent in Hungary. In Sweden and the Netherlands the proportions of women who married after a period of cohabitation was much higher. The proportions in the category ‘cohabitation-marriage’ are 36 per cent for Sweden and 25 per cent for the Netherlands. Moreover, in the Netherlands the categories ‘marriage’ and ‘cohabitation-marriage’ are almost equal, but in Sweden the category ‘marriage’ is very small, only 7 per cent.

The percentages of women who lived unmarried together with a partner was very low in Italy and Hungary, respectively 3 and 5 per cent. The proportion of Dutch women in a consensual union was little higher, 13 per cent. Sweden had the highest proportion cohabiting women of all countries, 30 per cent. In all countries most of these women are in the first relationship (between 67 and 77 per cent), but in Hungary it were especially the divorced women who are cohabiting (67 per cent).

**Table 4** Median ages at partner career transitions of female born between 1952-1971 (in brackets the 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles) and median durations in months between start of cohabitation and marriage (in brackets the 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles)

	1 <sup>st</sup> partnership	1 <sup>st</sup> marriage	start coh. - start mar.
<b>The Netherlands</b>	22.75 (23.00)	22.58 (24.08)	23 (33)
<b>Sweden</b>	22.42 (22.67)	25.25 (30.00)	40 (62)
<b>Italy</b>	22.83 (24.42)	22.50 (24.42)	17 (36)
<b>Hungary</b>	21.33 (21.58)	20.50 (20.92)	13 (23)

In table 4 some duration variables are presented about the age women started their first relationship or first marriage. Someone could expect that cohabitation is a prelude to marriage. Then it is confusing that in Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands the median ages at first marriage are lower than the median ages at first partnership. For Hungary, Prinz (1995) suggested that women experienced cohabitation at later ages, because cohabitation is an alternative for marriage when people can not afford a marriage, for instance after a divorce. In Italy and the Netherlands possibly the cohabiting women postponed living with a partner more than the directly married women did. In this case the cohabiting women have a

positive effect on the median age at first partnership. Contrary, in Italy the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile age of the start of first partnership is equal to those of first marriage and the Netherlands the start of first partnership is lower. In the Netherlands it took until age 23.00 that 50 percent of the women lived together with a partner and until 24.08 that were married.

A marriage after a some years of living in a consensual union with the husband was very common in Sweden (36 %) and the Netherlands (25 %), and uncommon in Hungary (10 %) and in Italy (4 %). I can agree with the suggestion of Prinz (1995) about the phases with respect to the role of cohabitation in the early 1990s, if we take also into account the duration between the start of cohabitation and marriage (table 4). The more common cohabitation is, the longer the duration between the start of cohabitation and marriage. In Hungary the median duration between the start of cohabitation and marriage was only 13 month. It took only 23 month before 50 per cent of the cohabiting women married. Possibly, the idea that cohabitation is more economical driven than a socially accepted behaviour is reflected by these relatively short durations. In Italy the durations are relatively short as well. In Sweden the median period between the start of cohabitation and marriage was the longest of all countries.

*The adjusting the fertility and partner careers*

In most countries it is still very common that children are born within marriage, except in Sweden (table 5). At entry into motherhood, most women were married in the Netherlands, Italy and Hungary, respectively 90, 92 and 88 per cent. In Sweden it is more popular to live together then, only 34 per cent were married. When women gave birth to a child of birth order 2 or 3, even a larger part is married. In Italy, the Netherlands and Hungary most women were married then, percentages were not below 90 per cent. In Sweden the proportions of married women at the moment the second or third child was born increased with parity, but still a relatively large part of the women lived together instead of being married.

**Table 5** Proportions of married women at live birth by birth order, and (in brackets) probabilities that a married women got married after the previous birth, selected countries

	<b>b.o. 1</b>	<b>b.o. 2</b>	<b>b.o. 3</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	90	94 (0.03)	96 (0.01)
<b>Sweden</b>	34	56 (0.38)	74 (0.25)
<b>Italy</b>	92	97 (0.04)	96 (0.02)
<b>Hungary</b>	88	93 (0.05)	90 (0.07)

A part of the unmarried women married when they were already mother. In table 5, in brackets, the probability that a married woman had married after the previous birth is given for the selected countries. Especially in Sweden many women married when there were already one or more children. For example, for a woman who was married at the moment the second child was born, the probability was 0.38 that she had entered the married status between the first and second birth. In the Netherlands and Italy the probabilities of marrying

during the fertility career were low. Among the Hungarian women, a somewhat larger part had married late in the fertility career, compared to Italy and the Netherlands.

**Table 6** Median durations in months between selected partner career transitions of female born between 1952-1971 and 1st birth (in brackets the 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles)

	partnership - 1 <sup>st</sup> birth	marriage - 1 <sup>st</sup> birth
<b>The Netherlands</b>	39 (51)	29 (35)
<b>Sweden</b>	30 (38)	15 (18)
<b>Italy</b>	16 (19)	16 (18)
<b>Hungary</b>	15 (16)	14 (15)

Since in many countries it is no longer necessary to marry if partners want to live together, it is interesting to compare between countries the duration until the first birth after marriage with the duration of living with the same partner (table 6). In Italy and Hungary, the countries where cohabitation was relatively uncommon, the median duration till the first birth by living with the same partner was almost equal to the median duration of marriage. The Italian and Hungarian couples waited relatively a short time until the first child was born, median durations between 14 and 16 months. Probably, in Hungary and Italy there is a strong connection between marriage and starting a family, and this seemed an important option relatively early in the life course.

In Sweden and the Netherlands, where cohabitation is very common, the median duration within marriage lagged much behind the duration of living with the same partner. For the Swedish women the median duration of living with the same partner before they had a first child was 30 months, while this was even 39 months for the Dutch women. A part of the cohabiting women married before the first child was born. In the Netherlands the median duration was 29 months before the first birth, and in Sweden 15 months.

The Dutch and Swedish women had the opportunity to spend a relatively long period with the father of their first child before they entered motherhood. It is remarkable that in the Netherlands the median duration (and 50<sup>th</sup> percentile duration) of the marriage until the first birth is relatively long compared with Sweden. A possible explanation for this difference is that the disconnection between marriage and fertility is much more accepted in Sweden than in the Netherlands. In Sweden, most women did not marry before the birth of the first child. Another point is that still a large part of the Dutch women wanted to live together in marriage only. Instead of cohabitation, they had a relatively early marriage.

The increasing instability of unions has a direct effect on childbearing. For instance, divorce can result in a delay in entering motherhood. Or, a woman who has already children from a previous marriage or consensual union wants another child in a new union. In table 7 the relationship between partnership dissolution and the fertility career is depicted by the probability of dissolution when the couple was childless or had already one or more children and the probability of having a (next) child after a break-up. In Italy, the instability of unions was small. The probability that a childless Italian woman left her partner was only 0.02. The probability that she left her partner when there were children was the same. Moreover, the probability that she would have any children after a dissolution was

relatively small too (0.24). In the Netherlands, the childless woman had a relatively high probability of leaving her partner (0.14). But once there were children in the relation, the probability was relatively low (0.05). The probability that she would have a (next) child after dissolution was moderate (0.35). For a childless Hungarian woman in a relation, the probability of dissolution was 0.05, but when she had children the probability was relatively high (0.09). The Hungarian women had a 0.41 chance to have a (next) child after a union dissolution. The instability of unions was largest in Sweden both for childless women and women with children: 0.15 and 0.13, respectively. Moreover, to have a (next) child after dissolution was very common (the probability was 0.57).

**Table 7** Probability of partnership dissolution when (1) childless or (2) having children and (3) the probability of having a (next) birth after a union dissolution, selected countries

	childless	with children	prob. Of a (next) birth after a union dissolution
<b>The Netherlands</b>	0.14	0.05	0.35
<b>Sweden</b>	0.15	0.13	0.57
<b>Italy</b>	0.02	0.02	0.24
<b>Hungary</b>	0.05	0.09	0.41

### Conclusions: the synthesis of life strategies

The most interesting finding for the period 1970-1990 is the between-country variation in the number of options women have to fill their fertility and partner career in. Family strategies in Italy are the result of a limited set of options: cohabitation is very uncommon and divorce laws were not legalised until the 1980s. Within these bounded family strategies the role of having children is very important, relatively few people found alternative live goals important. Almost all children are born within marriage. When children not fit in the strategy the postponement of motherhood was partly an option. Other options were childlessness or have only one child.

In the Netherlands people have more options to construct their family strategies compared to Italy. Cohabitation is an important option within the partner career, but when the birth of the first child is expected most people get married. Moreover, relatively many relationships ended in a divorce or separation. The probability to experience partnership dissolution is relatively high when women are childless and the probability on a birth after dissolution is importantly higher than in Italy. Moreover, for relatively many Dutch men and women having a family with children is not the most important life goal, they have many alternative life goals. In the Netherlands many women in their late twenties doubt about having children or not and the question ‘how late is too late’. These together with the large range of options within the partner career possibly explain that Dutch women entered motherhood at a very late age or remain childless. If the Dutch women finally decided to become a mother, for most of them a second will follow relatively soon.

In Sweden the family strategies are very diverse because people have many options and seemed really free in their choices concerning family matters. Many children are born



within a consensual union. A birth after breaking up a previous union is not uncommon at all. The expected levels of childlessness were relatively low. Women postponed childbirth to higher ages, but the age women entered motherhood was not as high as in the Netherlands.

In Hungary someone can not speak about free choice or 'modern' family strategies. The most common family strategy is one of getting married and having children in the early twenties. Some Hungarian women lived together with a partner in a consensual union, but in a country where most of the people are married, cohabitation is only a solution in some bad socio-economic circumstances. Often, it were the divorced women who lived in a consensual union at the end of 1992

A life course analysis is still needed to understand how the various options in the family strategies affect fertility behaviour. For instance, is there a relationship between cohabitation and childbirth? And is such a relationship the same in all countries, or does it matter if cohabitation is a deviant way of living or a broadly societal accepted behaviour?

Of course, the family strategies are not the only factors affecting fertility behaviour. We can expect that an important part of the family strategies are economically driven in the four countries. Later in the study the economical life domain will be incorporated, concerning the educational and working career and facilities to make it possible to combine motherhood with a working career. Possibly then we can understand how a growing number of options in the life course affect fertility behaviour.

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