

STALLED DE-STANDARDIZATION OF PARTNERSHIPS – CASE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA²

Zaustavljena destandardizacija partnerstva – slučaj mladih u Srbiji

ABSTRACT *The paper tackles reasons for the delay of family formation in contemporary Serbia in the cultural context of pro-familism and standardized life course. Life course perspective is applied as the most suitable one because it fruitfully reconciles structure and agency, demography and sociology. Young people's transition to adulthood in Serbia is assessed as protracted, somewhat like in Mediterranean and CEE countries (e.g. Slovenia). The empirical evidence is based on various sources of data, combining quantitative (surveys and demographics) and qualitative approaches. The main conclusion is that structural barriers mostly hamper individualization and emancipation of young people from the family of origin, although personal reasons are not negligible (lack of a "proper partner"). Entry into marriage and start of childbearing are tightly related and compressed processes in a life course of young people in Serbia, thus identifying markers of adulthood. If we expect these groups of population to be the forerunners of (post)modernization, then more social, political support and action is needed for the sake of fostering: empowerment (employment, housing, and development of welfare state), services aimed at institutionalization of parenthood and care work, as well as gender equality in everyday life.*

KEY WORDS *family formation, life course perspective, young people, transition to adulthood, Serbia, individualization*

APSTRAKT *U radu se propituju razlozi odlaganja formiranja unija u savremenom društvu Srbije u kontekstu profamilizma i standardizovanog životnog toka. Perspektiva životnog toka upotrebljena je kao najpogodnija jer na plodan način povezuje strukturu i akciju, demografiju i sociologiju. Konstatuje se da je tranzicija mladih u odraslost u Srbiji produžena, nešto poput mediteranskih i zemalja Centralne i Istočne Evrope (n.pr, Slovenije). Kao empirijska podloga radu poslužili su raznovrsni izvori podataka, nastali kombinovanjem kvantitativnih (statistika i ankete) i kvalitativnih pristupa. Osnovni zaključak je da strukturalne prepreke u najvećoj meri otežavaju individualizaciju i emancipaciju mladih od porodice porekla, mada ne treba zanemariti ni lične razloge (odsustvo „pogodnog partnera“). Pri tome ulazak u brak i rađanje su tesno međusobno povezani i uslovljeni procesi i oni predstavljaju markere prelaska u odraslost mladih u Srbiji. Ukoliko se očekuje*

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da ovi slojevi stanovništva budu nosioci (post)modernizacijskih promena, onda je potrebno više socijalne, političke podrške i delovanja koje će podstaći njihovo osnaživanje (zapošljavanje, stanovanje i druge mere iz domena države blagostanja), zatim razvijanje usluga namenjenih institucionalizaciji roditeljstva i poslova nege, kao i rodne ravnopravnosti u svakodnevnom životu.

KLJUČNE REČI formiranje porodice, perspektiva životnog toka, mladi, tranzicija u odraslost, Srbija, individualizacija

Introduction

The salient decline in fertility accompanied by postponement of marriage is the dominant feature of union formation in Serbia today³. These trends go hand in hand with rare cohabitation and divorce on the one hand, but also with the significant rise in extramarital births ever since the 1990s, on the other. Public and political discourse of different social actors (right wing political parties, church, media, various social groups) are rather concerned with ‘moral panic’ about the ‘white plague’⁴, therefore raising debates on women’s responsibility for insufficient natural reproduction, ‘Serbian nation’s survival’, right to abortion, etc.

However, young people in Serbia still opt for marriage and parenthood as the terminal values, perceiving them as the markers of transition to adulthood and a solid coping strategy in the society undergoing harmful economic transformation, with low living standards, high unemployment and the overall impoverishment.

Authors usually distinguish between two main reasons for the delay of unions: structural (lack of employment, housing and material instability, insecure future, etc) and personal ones (immaturity, lack of stable partnerships and readiness to devote oneself to the family, quality of personal life, perceived uneven distribution of housework, etc), (Ule and Kuhar, 2008). In the case of Slovenian young people, personal factors are actually prevailing, though structural ones are also playing a role, whereas, for example, in Lithuania, the latter is prevailing “...work would be in the first place and family in the second” (Reiter, 2009:531). But what about Serbia?

In this paper, I will try to cast some light on the Serbian reality. More specifically, this article represents an endeavor to: 1) describe the specific Serbian model of the postponement of family formation, by way of presenting relevant demographic indicators and survey findings on living arrangements; 2) track the position of the country on the ‘second demographic transition’ trajectory, and 3) explore the transformation of intimacy by way of interpreting field results for the selected dimensions (sexuality, gender roles and interactions and practice) and normative profiles (traditionalism vs. modernism).

³ Excluding Kosovo and Metohija, throughout the paper.

⁴ This is a common sense notion referring to very low fertility in Serbia, among the major, Serbian nation.

The empirical evidence is based on two types of data: quantitative (demographics and survey findings) and the qualitative ones (case study of cohabitation). Before proceeding to the analysis, we will first adopt an analytical framework that takes into account relevant theoretical viewpoints and focuses on the sociological perspective of ‘life course’ as an integrative paradigm. The final section reconsiders the overall argument in relation to the analytical paradigm.

Analytical framework

Except for still low divorce rates, a trend towards postponement of union formation in Serbia is similar to other developed European societies, Mediterranean countries in particular, and those in post-socialistic transition (Ule and Kuhar, 2008, Reiter, 2009, 2010, Kuhar, 2009). Therefore, the authors treat demographic tendencies as a sign of convergence towards western market economies.

Demography addressed ‘immediate (biological) factors’ of fertility: sexual intercourse, conception and delivery. As for sexuality, several dimensions are of relevance (age of entry into a union, celibacy, and interruption of a reproductive period due to divorce, death of a spouse or separation) (Davis and Blake, 1964, cf. Blagojevic, 1997:55). When speaking about social factors related to the delay of union formation, sociology offers its explanations (Reiter, 2009). ‘Life-course sociology’ emphasizes the historical institutionalization of the tripartite life trajectory (youth, adulthood and old age) organized basically around employment and family (Reiter: 2009: 239) “Life-course approach integrates the investigation of individual agency representing the tension at the intersection between institutions and biographies” (ibidem: 239). Life-course transitions, in this case to adulthood, are the ideal field for researching this intersection of structure and agency that is at the core of sociological research, because they ‘link institutions and actors by defining time tables and entry as well as exit markers for transitions between social statuses configurations’ (Heinz 1996, cf. Reiter, op cit: 239).

Transition to adulthood might, however, take different paths depending on contextual and institutional settings across the societies, social strata, familial background, and historical times (among generations). Main markers of transition to adulthood are: leaving school, entry into labor market, leaving parental home, getting married and having the first child. Social welfare system, organization of public services, transfer payments, employment opportunities related to age and social stratification, make profound distinctions between these varying trajectories. Universalistic civil rights and diversified benefits with high employment opportunities facilitate standardization and institutionalization of biographies, while shrinking of a social state, economic crisis and/or residual type of welfare capitalism

ensure individualized biographies and permanent risk coping in a life course (Esping-Anderson, 1990)⁵.

‘Life course paradigm’ applied to the post socialistic context might be decomposed into three main dimensions: *materialistic*, *normative* (idealistic) and *institutionalistic* ones.

The *materialistic* one highlights socioeconomic crisis that has followed the collapse of the state socialism with shrinking of a welfare state, rise of unemployment, difficulties in establishing a ‘working mother’ biography, scarce housing conditions, prolonged education of young people and their strong dependence on a family of origin⁶. Besides, in neo-liberal economies, where the majority of transitional economies are heading - the child is a costly good, while both women and men have to accept full responsibility for their individual life. Changes in the welfare system, housing and labor market instigate major shifts in gender roles and patterns of family formation (Reiter, 2009). The ‘idealistic’ dimension refers to the ‘second demographic transition’ (second modernization). The normative shifts related to the post-industrialization are reflected in diversification of living arrangements other than the nuclear family and traditional household all over the West. At a micro level, within the family - the basic transformation has shifted the pillar of the whole system from parenthood to partnership. This major change was set in motion thanks to the contraceptive revolution and therefore released sexuality, female emancipation and ‘life politics’ (Ule and Kuhar, 2008, Reiter, 2009, Leastheaghe, 2010). Recently adopted *institutionalist* perspective in the demography underlines the impact of a massive change of the political and economic systems of CEE countries from 1990s onwards (Reiter, 2009). The ‘root cause’ of the postponement of motherhood is the abandonment of former life course policies (education, old age pensions and social security) (Reiter, 2009:240). The emergence of unemployment that was unknown before transformed substantially social integration and solidarity with dramatic consequences for everyday life. Therefore “the emerging of biographical perspectives has become difficult because the whole framework of productively

⁵ Authors distinguish three main types of family formation: Nordic model (Scandinavian countries and Netherlands), Southern (Mediterranean countries) and Northern ones (EU-15 countries added later), (Ule and Kuhar, 2008:159) In the first model young people leave parental home early, living alone is common and cohabitation is popular among childless couples, while parenthood is linked to partnership. Southern countries are characterized by protracted living with parents, whereas getting married and having the first child are the markers of adulthood (Tomanović i Ignjatović, 2004). Needless to say, the link between marriage and parenthood is strong. The intermediate group of Northern countries encompasses those from both liberal and conservative welfare states: early departure from parental home is accompanied by diverse types of living arrangements, which are leading to marriage and family (Ule and Kuhar, 2008, ibidem, Shannan, 2000, Ignjatović, 2009).

⁶ The paper of D. Mojic offers more detailed information on vulnerability of global life situation of young people in Serbia in terms of the material standard, education opportunities, labor market, housing, social support, and restricted social promotion.

turning experiences into expectations has become uncertain” (ibidem: 240). Similar to this is the fruitful perspective of ‘semiperiphery’ that is developed when reflecting on the processes of social regression, de-development and anomie of the CEE countries (Blagojevic, 2010). Semiperiphery is placed in between the core countries (advanced market economies) and the underdeveloped (periphery), therefore making a social hybrid. “...it is in its essence transitional, in a process of transition from one set of structures to another set of structures, and therefore it is unstable, and often has characteristics of the void, chaos and structurelessness” (Blagojevic, 2010: 34).

Finally, the sociological paradigm of transformation of intimacy is also relevant to our study. Its emphasis is on the changed meaning of marriage from the social institution to individualized partnership that has been taking place all over the Western market societies. Postmodern unions are detached from social and moral obligations of biosocial reproduction of traditional, patriarchal families. In the age of late modernity with its core ideology of reflexive biography (“do it yourself”), (pre)modern unions are replaced by ‘pure relationships’ of equal parties, aimed at emotional disclosure, exchange of pleasure and practice of negotiation in everyday lives, but permanently open to queries and therefore fragile (Giddens, 1992, Mills, 2000). One of the major consequences of transformation of intimacy is de-standardization of life course and proliferation of living arrangements (Tomanović, 2010, Mills, 2000, Fokkema and Liefbroer, 2008).

Research methodology

Official statistics in Serbia offer evidence on the decrease in marriage universality⁷. It points to a collection of somewhat specific features, such as a declining marriage rate, an increased mean age of marriage and childbearing, but still low divorce rates, although rising with an almost total lack of remarriage (serial monogamy). There are particularly large portions of people who never married and who are widowed, the first relating to rising share of singles among young adults, while the second refers to the increased mortality of an aged population. Furthermore, data on families and households confirm the lack of diversified living arrangements (in census 2002, the share of non-familial households was around 2%), although there are some signs of de-standardization reflected in the relatively high and increasing ratios of extramarital childbearing, particularly since the start of transition in 90s⁸. Based on the demographics, the postmodern transformation of partnerships in Serbia could be assessed as slow, albeit ongoing. If we compare trends of union formation among European economies including the ones which

⁷ Detailed data on marriage, divorce and fertility trends are not presented here due to the lack of space. However, more information could be found elsewhere (Bobić and Vukelić, 2011, Bobić, 2010a, 2010b).

⁸ In 1960 it was only 8%, until 1990 it rose to 13,1% while in 2009 it peaked to 23,2% (Penev i Stanković (2010).

have recently joined (Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, etc), it turns out that Serbia can be identified as a 'late starter' on the second demographic transition trajectory (Leastheaghe, 2010, Jones, 2007).

Another source of evidence tackles two complex surveys in 2003 and 2008. These were carried out by the Institute for Sociological Research of the Faculty of Philosophy⁹. The fieldwork conducted in 2003 focused on capturing transformational strategies of households in Serbia. The sample was nationally representative for the central part of Serbia and Vojvodina and included 1636 households (Milić, eds, 2004). The investigation conducted in 2008 included two representative samples of 'younger' and 'older' couples (those who had entered unions five years and 15-20 years prior to the survey). The sample consisted of 1212 households (Milić, 2010). The main topics of the questionnaire related to the social position of the families and its capital (economic, social and cultural), familial dynamics (partnership, intergenerational relations, parenthood) and value profiles. Our objective was to reach a deeper understanding of the 'pure relationship' by way of investigating sexuality, gender practice, emotional disclosure, sources of conflicts and values of 'younger' and 'older' marital partners.

Besides the above-mentioned surveys, it should also be stated that we undertook a qualitative study of cohabitation in 2002. The main idea was to explore whether cohabitations have been indicating an alternative behavior in partnerships. The metropolitan city was selected because we hypothesized that young adults living in Belgrade represent 'forerunners' of ideational shift and social change, which will afterwards become more widely accepted by the rest of the population. Respondents were selected using the methodological concept of saturation deploying snowball sampling. Living arrangements of 30 young adults were studied. All were childless, aged 20-35, so called "urban intelligentsia", i.e. university students and professionals, both employed and unemployed.

Results: Diversification of unions – major shifts delayed

Field research on transformation strategies of households in Serbia in 2003 was focused on (extra) marital behavior and comparative analysis of both survey and census data. Our intention was to dismantle the variety of living arrangements of couples in Serbia. Besides, the idea was to fill the gap created by the official statistics, which only document the traditional marital statuses (unmarried, married, divorced and widowed), (Table 1). We have however introduced three additional

⁹ Besides these, in this paper we also refer to the fieldwork of: M. Babović (2009) and Bobić i Sekulić (2010).

unions: 1) LAT ('steady, intimate relationships of young adults')¹⁰, 2) cohabitations¹¹ and 3) extramarital families¹² (Table 2).

Empirical findings revealed that marriage is still the absolute and predominant living arrangement. It remains the standard for bio-social reproduction despite the trend of its decline and postponement.

Table 1 Population of Serbia, by marital status, 2003

	Never married	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Other	Total
%	17.6	63.3	5.4	12.3	1.3	100.0

Source: Survey from 2003.

As many as 63.3% of respondents were married, followed by people who have not married so far (17.6%) and widowed (12.3%), while the divorcees were the fewest (5.4%)¹³.

Table 2 Unmarried population by partnership status, Serbia, 2003

	LAT	Cohabitations		Extramarital families	Total
		Pre-marital	Post-marital		
%	1.9	0.8	0.6	0.8	4.1

Source: as for the table 3.

On the basis of the empirical findings on partnership status (tables 1 and 2), it is obvious that as few as 4% of respondents reported living in alternative unions. When we put this figure against the one from the table 1, it is obvious that the 'genuine' singles are somewhat fewer though still predominant (13.5%). In the case of Serbia, LAT is the most widespread and obviously increasing due to a postponement and delay in union formation at least up to thirties. These findings are similar to those pertaining to young Slovenes (Ule and Kuhar, 2008). Still, the share

¹⁰ The term LAT applies to two heterosexual individuals, affectively attached to one another on the basis of a romantic complex (sexual attraction and mutual feelings of love, closeness etc) for a period of at least six months).

¹¹ This refers to co-resident unions of unmarried heterosexual partners, who live on their own, without children

¹² Extramarital families encompass cohabitations with children born into these unions or before.

¹³ These findings are very close to census data from 2002 with small discrepancy in figures that derive from the difference in methodology applied. Namely the sample selection of the survey in 2003 was grounded on a familial household concept, so all the persons living alone and/or in other types of communal homes have been excluded. Nevertheless the prevalence of each marital status remained unchanged.

of extramarital births in Slovenia is twice the Serbian one (Slovenia, 2005- 47%, Serbia, 2009-23%)¹⁴.

When asked about the reasons for not getting married or postponing marriage, most of our respondents claimed that these were the lack of *material conditions* and housing as well as the absence of a 'proper' partner. Almost no one opted for non-marriage as a permanent lifestyle choice (0.5%). Based on the detailed statistical analysis¹⁵ it turned out that alternative unions were overwhelmingly popular among the younger and more educated persons from middle and higher classes, thus confirming the thesis on 'urban intelligentsia as trendsetters' (Prinz, 1995, Bobic, 2003, Salvini S, and D, Vignoli, 2011).

Interpretation of the results of a case study on cohabitation in Belgrade (Bobic, 2003) showed that they were mostly a transitory or premarital phenomenon, with a tendency to evolve into traditional, patriarchal marriage, once a couple decides to start childbearing. Due to the fact that all couples were childless, we assumed that cohabitations were not precursors to births out of wedlock. Thus in the case of Serbia, extramarital unions are not an indicator of alternative partnerships. Some shifts toward self realization were documented in the statements, behaviors and orientations of partners, but a 'pure relationship' could not be fully put into practice due to high structural and institutional constraints. The difficulty of balancing work and (future) family is perceived even more difficult when faced with other structural hindrance such as weak social support and great social inequalities. Despite the fact that one or sometimes both of the cohabiting partners had a job, they still had to rely heavily on their families of origin. Thus, social and economic barriers were preventing stronger shifts in behavior or at least restraining new postmodern values from being put into practice.

Gender practices

Having come to the conclusion that family ties were being compulsively fostered and compressed rather than deinstitutionalized through the diffusion of modern values of divergence and plurality, we decided to undertake a thorough investigation of gender strategies. If a transformation of marital union is being stalled because of strong constraints and multiple risks coming from the public sphere, the implication was that partners were overwhelmingly occupied in all kinds of paid and unpaid work in order to preserve as much as possible the quality of everyday life and to bear the ever rising costs of: housing, personal consumption, education, health care, transportation, etc. Both the field research conducted in 2003

¹⁴ It might be the case that young women do not want to accept gender practice of previous generations with dual burden of being a working mother and engaging fully in parenthood and household.

¹⁵ Due to the lack of space, we could not present a thorough analysis on socio-demographic features, gender practice and coping strategies of extramarital unions. For more detailed information see Bobić (2005).

and the one in 2007 showed that men were, on average, more dedicated to multiple paid and unpaid jobs on a daily basis, while women were relatively more absorbed in care work (Babović, 2009). This relates to the fact that the employment rate of men is significantly higher than that of women and that women were the first to be fired in the process of privatization¹⁶. Furthermore, women were highly burdened with familial and emotional caretaking not only for children but for the sick, disabled and elderly, both in their own household and in those of the aged living separately (parents, in-laws and relatives, 61%).

Still, the comparative analysis of the field researches 2003-2007 showed a slight shift in men's behavior (Babovic, *ibidem*). Over time, men have undertaken a more active role mainly in household chores (cooking, washing, cleaning, and ironing), while their wives have retained responsibility for the care of minors and their upbringing. Although the changes were not so significant, they prove that gender attitudes are changing and that patriarchal ideology is slowly fading away. By the same token, further investigation of budget creation also indicates some meaningful shifts. Over the period 2003-2007 the incidence of the 'pooling system' of one's revenues diminished while the 'partially centralized' and 'independent' types increased (where partners retain either a part or all of their finances and agree upon common expenditure). At the same time, women have become more empowered in distributing household resources as well as in deciding on major issues of consumption and investments (Babović, 2009)¹⁷.

On the basis of our analysis on the dominant strategies in decision-making among younger and older couples, two main forms can be distinguished. These are the authority shared among partners and/or all the adult members of a household, as opposed to patriarchal or matriarchal power. As regards everyday expenditures, shared authority has been found in as many as 80.5% cases of both sub groups. It has also dominated decisions on savings for major investments (77.9%) home renovations (72.2%) and the purchase of clothes and shoes (63.1%). Patriarchal or matriarchal power has been far less practiced. It has been found in as few as 15% of younger and older couples concerning budget distribution, and even to a lesser extent (13%) regarding other important issues such as major purchases (car and furniture). Individualization comes into greater force when deciding on personal belongings (clothes and shoes). On these occasions, either the woman or the man acted without getting permission from another party, which is understandable if we bear in mind that these items are more affordable. At the same time, we treated this as an early and a concrete sign of individualized behavioral acts. Regrettably, in as

¹⁶ The employment rate in Serbia was 44,4% in 2008, with the women's rate lower by 17% in comparison to men's. Thus, in 2008 it was 53,2% for men and 36,5% for women. At the same time, the official unemployment rate was 13,6% (for men 11,9% and 15,8% for women), (Matković, Mijatović i Petrović, 2010) Unofficially, social exclusion is much stronger in terms of work, estimated to be around 30%.

¹⁷ The same shifts were documented in the survey on gender attitudes (Bobić i Sekulić, 2010).

many as seven out of 10 families, spending on summer or winter holidays has not been discussed. This was obviously due to the household's economic restrictions.

Household chores analysis brought about results very similar to the above-mentioned and other researches conducted in Serbia (Babović, *ibidem*, Bobić i Sekulić, 2010). Wives and mothers were overwhelmingly burdened¹⁸. The next category were also women, either a wife's or husband's mother residing in the household (11% on average)¹⁹. Their assistance is needed due to the insufficient state support and a lack of relevant social services, and the informalization of (global) economy (Blagojevic, 2010). This leaves no choice to families here and all over the developed world but to rely heavily on the social capital of relatives (informal) and other resources (economic, emotional, and psychological) in all the major domains and stages of familial biography. One of the most significant results demonstrated an almost total absence of adult children's participation (only 26.3% do the cleaning of their rooms). Not only are the Serbian young people delaying entry into adulthood, but they are also overwhelmingly protected and dependent. On the other hand, husbands and male partners (both younger and older ones) mostly do the everyday shopping (22.7%)²⁰.

Transformation of intimacy

Findings of the survey conducted in 2008 also confirmed shifts in everyday practice concerning gender role performance, but they also reaffirmed that there is still a low emotional disclosure among both young and older couples (the 'pure relationship')²¹.

Intimacy has been researched in great detail through questioning dimensions of sexuality, interactions, communication, authority and marital conflicts.

Sexuality has been examined through indicators of frequency and quality of intercourse (its various meanings for partners). In both sub-samples of younger and older couples, sexual intercourses were occurring often, almost on a daily basis, with a slightly higher frequency found among the younger (86,7%) than among the senior

¹⁸ As many as 77.2% of both younger and older wives do the cooking, 78.2 % of them do the dishes, 87.6% do the washing, 78.3% do the cleaning and 100% of them do the ironing.

¹⁹ If we put these finding against the data derived from statistics (table 1) as well as against our empirical surveys, which demonstrate high share of extended households, it turns out that the interviewed wives should have expected to receive greater help from relatives.

²⁰ These findings are similar to Slovenia (Ule and Kuhar, 2008).

²¹ It should however be stressed that we are fully aware that the survey methodology was not the best option to inquire into intimacy, thus the qualitative research would have been much more appropriate. Notwithstanding this fact, we wanted to obtain an initial view of this topic, which will be thoroughly investigated in our upcoming field research.

ones (61,2%)²². Still, only one out of four older couples have reported on the rare intercourse (once in 2-3 months), while the same was the case for one out of 10 young pairs. The vast majority of all couples took pleasure in having sex (64.1% of young and 48.8% of older unions). The postmodern quality of closeness, mutuality, exchange of pleasure and joy has been reported by one third of all couples. Still, every sixth older couple (17.2%) stuck to having sex as a marital obligation. On the basis of these results, we concluded that there was a shift in the meaning of intercourse, from traditional task to (individual) pleasure, while the postmodern transformation towards openness to mutual communication is still pending.

Interactions were measured by way of frequency of communication about: personal moods, sentiments and desires in two directions: 1) from husband to wife and 2) in the opposite direction (from wife to husband). The results showed that communication was generally very intensive, both at the level of the sample as a whole and the relevant direction (82.5%). Rare communication was found in every sixth household (13.9%) and an absence of communication in as few as 4% of couples. When these results were compared with the age of respondents, it turned out that communication was livelier if the couple was younger and vice versa. Some age and gender differences were still preserved, so even younger men were less ready to open up to their wives (22.8), while their older counterparts were almost three times less open with their partners (61.9%). Generally speaking, wives were more willing to reveal their sentiments, with younger cohorts prevailing (75%).

The money shortage has been the most prominent cause of conflict in both subsamples (34.2%), followed by the care for children and overall parental responsibilities (21.8%)²³. When it came to power features, we examined these through a set of 11 questions about decision-making on: household budget, savings, investments (adaptation of home etc), then parenthood (schooling, care for minors, children's going out, extracurricular activities, choice of secondary and tertiary education) and care for the elderly and the disabled (parents, relatives, etc). The budget was overwhelmingly created by pooling all the revenues (77.6% in total) with a slightly larger share among older generations, (41.1%) compared to younger couples (36,5%). Still, in every fifth household, some sort of individualized budget existed. Obviously, younger couples were more prevalent in individualized types of budget creating: one out of 10 retained the entire sum or a part of her/his own income with an agreement on common expenses. These findings resemble the

²² Here, the methodological comment is applicable. The question is whether the respondents were honest, particularly concerning sexual habits, disorders, etc. Individuals with traditional value profiles are not inclined to talk about sexuality and private affairs in front of others.

²³ Finances happen to be the most prominent reason for disagreement of a couple. This has been detected in all the surveys conducted during 2000s by the Institute for Sociological Research. It is worth mentioning that the researches have not shown that the care for the elderly provoked any conflicts, maybe due to the research focus on the daily life of the nuclear family.

above-mentioned (Babović, 2009), though Babović found that the economic and labor indicators of individualization and economic emancipation are even greater and convincingly on the rise.

In order to get a better insight into the ideational causes as highlighted in the analytical framework, we investigated couple's value profiles²⁴. The analysis showed that almost equal portions of respondents could be called 'traditionalists with features of modernism' (47.1%) and 'modernists with traditionalistic remnants' (47.3%). Clearly, a lot of respondents were torn between pre- and post- modernism. There were quite a few 'core' pre-modernists (2.1%) but also 'pure' post-modernists (3.6%). These findings could be understood as if greater acceptance of post-modern attitudes among citizens would be beneficial for faster economic improvement, stabilization of market economy, democracy, and vice versa. Besides, it should be stressed that the collectivist sentiments are inherited from the recent socialist past, the historical and cultural background and the national memories. Therefore, the family and the household remain the core values in the Western Balkans and sites of the social reproduction of patriarchy.

By way of illuminating the findings above, we will explain some of the research controversies more precisely. Here, once again, there were not any significant differences between the two subsamples, so we shall present the results which comprise the entire sample.

Pre-modern preferences are reflected in respondents' ideals of a complete conjugal family and femininity. The vast majority of interviewees claimed that living with both parents is a precondition for happy childhood (2/3). More than half of them believed that 'women are fulfilled only once they become mothers' (56.7%) and just as many of them disagreed with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution (59%). Furthermore, when reflecting on employment opportunities, most of the interviewees advocated a model of male breadwinner as preferable (56.8%). As many as 85.6% of the surveyed population agreed with the statement 'unity and solidarity of the family is more important than individual interests and needs'! This is a crucial argument in favor of greater group cohesion at the expense of individual freedoms. We argue that such attitudes are reflecting the anomie related to social transformation, while an individual's freedom of choice is still pending.

On the other hand, modern preferences have been expressed through attitudes toward unions, gender roles and contraception. The vast majority of respondents did not share the opinion that 'generally speaking, married couples are happier in comparison to the unmarried ones' (54.2%). Still, one out of five was irresolute about it (20.6%). Furthermore, cohabitations were overwhelmingly accepted (71.1%), while divorce was approved of to a much lesser extent (49.3%). Although

²⁴ Respondents were given a list of statements about the family, masculinity, femininity and the child well-being and they had to reply using one of the 5 options from Lickert type scale, ranging from agreement to disagreement.

one third of respondents accepted dissolution of unions when it becomes impossible for partners to solve their problems, it is evident that such dissolutions are not that widespread.

Modern orientations were also reflected in the high acceptance of men's baby sitting (76.8%). Therefore, the majority disagrees that the care is predominantly a female task (52.1%). This is evidently connected with the current state of affairs, where women frequently hold positions in paid employment while their partners have been either fired or are unemployed. Not only are women sustaining the living standard of all members of the household, but it is also common for them to combine several jobs in the informal economy (cleaning, ironing, cooking, shopping, etc. for others). By the same token, more than half of the interviewees opposed more or less strongly the statement that 'the child will suffer if his/her mother is employed' (59.1%). Still, one out of five agreed about the above attitude (2.2%) and almost four out of ten believed that men cannot be as successful in caretaking as mothers are (38.8%). Modern values were also reflected in changing attitudes towards sexuality, contraception and power relations. The majority does not approve of more sexual freedom for men (65.5%), nor of them having the last word at home (63%). Still, one out of five approved of less sexual freedom for women (20%) and even more advocated patriarchal authority (26.8%). Slightly more than half of the respondents supported the abortion (55.4%), while as many as 26.7% backed up its prohibition!

Discussion

By way of interpreting the above findings, we intended to explore reasons underlying the actual behavior of young people in Serbia in relation to union formation. It seems evident that major shifts are taking place more in the timing of entry into unions than in their content, therefore producing a delay in the otherwise standardized life course inherited from the former state socialism. Due to the prolonged post-socialistic transformation, its huge institutional change and shrinking of the state policies, the transition to adulthood is protracted, instigating uncertainties of biographies and hence very low fertility. However, although when asked about the reasons for postponement of family formation, the vast majority of young adults in Serbia stated the structural and institutional barriers, the fact is that personal reasons also play a role, somewhat like in the case of their counterparts in Slovenia (lack of the 'right partner'), but to a lesser extent. We can only suppose that the latter will be more accentuated with the stabilization of society based on market economy and the overall well-being. Then the de-standardization, stark individualization and pluralization of living arrangements might be further unfolded as the markers of acceleration of Western type modernization.

For the time being, we arrive at a conclusion that the transformation of the modern conjugal family is taking place at a very slow pace and with difficulty. Obviously, this is related to the household coping strategies, which bolster traditional complementary roles and strengthen the solidarity within the family. At the same time, weak social support measures, absence of political and social strategy and of actions which would bolster youth emancipation, shrinking of the labor market, economic crisis, etc. – all these put extreme pressure on parents and relatives to support the young for a long time – ‘*in toto*’.

The surveys confirmed a low inclination towards individualization and emancipation of the vast majority of young couples. Instead, a mismatch between traditionalism and modernism, i.e. between needs for security and safety, altogether with autonomy and self-realization go hand in hand and slow down the process of (familial) change. Gender inequality in Serbia exists like in other CEE countries driven by ‘the patriarchally-biased socio-political systems’ (Stankuniene V, and A, Maslauskaitė, 2008: 135). Nevertheless, a minor but still ongoing shift towards post-traditionalism might be indicative of ideational shifts which could trigger a ‘catching-up’ with the European modernization and social integration.

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