



**Doctoral School of
Social Communication**

SUMMARY OF THESIS

Barbara Sólyom

Marital mobility

**A study of Swabian-Hungarian marital mobility through three generations
in Dunabogdány**

Ph.D. Thesis

Consultant:

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professor

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Institute of Behavioural Sciences and Communication Theory

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1. Preliminary considerations and relevance of the topic

The decision to marry or not, or getting into permanent cohabitation instead of staying single has a profound influence on plans about child rearing, job carrier, material existence, plans about investing, as well as way of thinking, attitudes, and values in general, identity, forecasts concerning future, everyday routines. In addition to this individual level, overall societal effects are also important, since economic and political decisions are also influenced by the institution of marriage.

The relationship between identity and communication, identity as a communicative phenomenon takes a central role – explicitly as well as implicitly – in the thesis. Identity, i.e., belonging to a social group, can be interpreted as a category, and as such as an indispensable part of social communication. Why, identity itself can be regarded as communication, it is expressed via communication, and groups communicate in intergroup relationships to express their identity.

The thesis is about social mobility, and in particular marital mobility. Social structure, social stratification and mobility between social strata is a wide ranging, multidimensional research area in the social sciences. Theories and research of this area are relevant for marital mobility, as well. Marital mobility is not a frequented research area in particular, so it offers several white spots waiting for discovery. The main results so far were reviewed and catalogued. Social mobility and stratification might be more thoroughly understood this way. The thesis has as its departure point the available marital mobility research, and tries to apply a new approach. The fundamental factors determining social mobility via marital mobility were considered, and the focus of the research was on new, additional, yet not explicitly studied factors. Such salient factors were discovered in a Swabian village¹ of Pest county, Dunabogdány. Factors worth systematically studied and reported were found.

Hungarian social research studies the factors influencing the selection of partner. According to one view this selection is determined by the notion of the ideal spouse. Others rely on individual needs and characteristics when explaining partner selection patterns: one such consideration may be similarity of characteristics, another regards the complementary differences as motivating factors (homogamy versus heterogamy). There are approaches that

¹ In the meantime the village was given a rank of township, but since it is indifferent from the viewpoint of my research I insist on talking about village. It is in accordance with the perception and language of the villagers, as well.

explain marriages based on a kind of internal development of the couple, on a process of getting the couple more and more similar to each other. The thesis presents and analyses through several generations the effects of ethnicity, religion and material status as mutually interacting factors on marital choice and social mobility in the framework of an empirical study.

2. Methods

The research was built on a variety of techniques: in depth interviews, narrative interviews, and life course interviews were conducted and analysed, historical documents were processed, statistical and secondary data analyses were conducted. Social mobility studies and social history studies were reviewed; demographical data were included in the study. The main focus was on attitudes, ways of thinking, norms, value systems and affective stance; the dominant research methods for these interests were various kinds of interview techniques.

Let us define the three generations involved in the study. Ten respondents' recollections were recorded per cohort as interviews, life course interviews and narrative interviews. The division of the population into cohorts was based on the work of the cultural anthropologist Györgyi Bindorffer (1997; 2001). The three cohorts are as follows:

1. Those born between 1920-1933, now 94-81 year old residents, who were over 14 years during relocations, and this is one of the most important experience of their generation.
2. Those born between 1934-1953, now 80-61 years of age, who were either younger than 13 year at the time of relocation, or even yet to be born. The fundamental experience among them is the gradual opening up of the closed community following World War Second, and the increased potential for mobility.
3. Those born between 1954-1973, now 60-41 years of age. Continuous social changes (e.g., higher level of education, acquiring Hungarian language as mother tongue, work mobility, improvement of local potential for entrepreneurship) affected their life.

The criteria of forming groups were motivated by several factors. It was inevitably necessary to grasp a life span, except for childhood. Since the thesis is about marital mobility, people from marital choice until old age were relevant. The question was how habits change with time within a rather closed community of a village? Whether ways of thinking changes, too; if

not, how it can be achieved, are there any consequences of such changes, if there are, are generations necessary for the changes? What is the interaction between individual and community, individual and his/her group, group and community is like, which one is more deterministic? Another important point of orientation is the historical event that shocked the village: the 1947 relocation of Swabians, and setting of “strangers” in their place. Although this is only one aspect, and there can be others, too, but the thesis concentrates on this one, because it is a turning point in the life of the village, affecting decisively community relationships. This event of relocation/setting interferes with the research, because it had/had consequences which could not have been among “normal” circumstances. For instance, the marital market – i.e., the proportion of young men and girls would have been different were it not for the relocation/setting, which distorted the marital market, radically changing the value system and habits of marital choice. Such a strong influence seldom occurs. Yet, it is difficult to compare Dunabogdány to other Swabian villages, since there was and are considerable differences between them. Although the relocation program was countrywide, the experiences varied from location to location. And, of course, where there was no relocation, processes were much different in the given community.

At the beginning of the research the notion of ethnicity was determined: those were regarded as Swabian or Hungarian, who claimed to be so.

The empirical results are relevant only for Dunabogdány, therefore the conclusions cannot be generalized to the whole Swabian minority. The results obtained here in this village cannot be compared to other Swabian villages due to different village history, different social establishment, “majority” decisions influencing the everyday life of a village, and the subsequently developing different norms, traditions, mentality, value system. The choice of the study fell on Dunabogdány because the crucial factors determining marital choice – ethnicity, religious commitment, existential status – were relatively easy to grasp, marital mobility itself, and in general social mobility was relatively easy to study.

3. Main results

3.1. Hypotheses

The thesis focussed on one dimension of social mobility: marital mobility. Associated to this topic an empirical research was conducted about the intermarital mobility among Swabians

and Hungarians in a longitudinal study, in Dunabogdány. The general framework of the study was the relationship between social identity and communication.

To start with the empirical research four hypotheses were formulated. They were as follows:

1. It was supposed that marriage customs of the first generation was regulated strongly by the norms and traditions of the Swabian community implying the custom of marrying among each other within the community. The research results supported this hypothesis: in Dunabogdány people married almost without exception within the community, taking also into account religious commitment and social status based on property.
2. It was supposed that Swabian marital customs, formal or informal norms and rules changed as a result of certain social changes (such as political changes, more widespread secondary education, increased diversity in potential jobs, commutation getting easier). In the case of Dunabogdány relocation had special significance in changing marital customs, making mixed marriages more frequent. According to the results of the study, the relocation/setting of families was the most significant social change effecting marital customs. After this historical event the number of mixed marriages (i.e., marital mobility) gradually increased affecting marital customs of the whole village both at community and individual level. This crucial event was accompanied by another important historical event, the Second World War. Although it can be regarded as an antecedent of relocations, yet it was also crucial in opening up the possibilities of mixed marriages. Increased possibilities of mobility in commutation also contributed to the spreading of mixed marriages in the village.
3. It was supposed that as a consequence of all these factors and changes in the recent decades marital choice between Swabians and non Swabians became more liberal, sovereign and independent, less bound by the norms of previous generations. This hypothesis is also supported by the results. Marital choice between Swabians and non Swabians in the third generation (born between 1954-1973, now 60-41 years of age) is more liberal, indeed, and the old (first generation) norms, rules and traditions of marital choice and marriage do not hold anymore. Everyday life of spouses is much more independent, parents, relatives and the community of the village do not have a say in their lives anymore. Norms of the first and second generation became weaker, in fact, ceased to exist in certain issues.

4. It was supposed that the fact that Swabians were the majority in the village had an influence on the norms of marriages between each other. In Dunabogdány Swabian identity did have an influence on the norms of within group marriages, indeed, it determined these norms – this hypothesis is supported. However, this influence did not originate from the fact that Swabians were the majority in the village. The influence stemmed from the group identity, it was group identity that mediated the norms of within group marriages. In the case of the first generation we cannot actually talk about marital market, since at that time the community of the village was so closed that marital choice could not work on a “market basis”. What could be witnessed was a kind of endogamy. This means that hypothesis 4 is supported only partially.

3.2. Summary of the thesis

First part of the thesis reviews the theoretical background and research concerning marital mobility.

- First the concept of social mobility is defined, the factors affecting social mobility, the processes of social mobility, as well as its consequences. The review is based both on Hungarian and international mobility studies. It is established that social mobility is affected by an interaction of structural constraints and individual acts. Mobility provides relationships between macro-structure and micro-structure. The structure consists of homophile and heterophile relationships. Secondly, it was considered what aspects are taken into account by the various theories when it comes to interpreting marital choice, marriages and family as social institution.
- Next, main characteristics, research frameworks and dimensions of domestic and international mobility studies were reviewed. The main determining factors of marital choice were discussed. According to certain views marital choice is guided by a notion of the ideal spouse. Others explain patterns of marital choice by basic individual demands and features: the reason for selecting a spouse is either similarity or complementarity of personal traits. Finally, there are approaches that explain marriages by a process of internal development of a relationship as the couple assimilate to each other.
- Three dimensions of marital homogamy and heterogamy (i.e., marriage between persons of similar or different social characteristics) were analysed: preferences

(socioeconomical resources), “influence of third party” (cultural features), and marital market. These factors together determine who marries with whom, or, as a matter of fact, who does not marry with whom. In the dimension of preferences the men and women with intention to marry on the one hand ‘present’ their own resources that may make them attractive as potential partners. On the other hand, they evaluate the various characteristics of persons of the opposite sex that may be the criteria to choose their future mate. Though the values and characteristics to be presented can be variegated, sociology of social stratification focuses mainly on various economical and cultural resources such as social background, level of education, job status, and economic status. According to the results of the study these resources contribute preferentially to homogamic marriages. As “third party” groups of rather different size and cohesion can serve such as ethnic communities, religious denominations, as well as the parental family itself. The stronger the group identity, the more internalized group norms are, the more probable marital homogamy, or avoidance marriage from outside of the group is. Realization of such preferences is restricted by the objective limits of marital market. That is, marriage proportions depend on the age or other (e.g., education) composition of the male and female population.

- Since the present research is an interethnic one, concepts of group identity, and ethnic and national identity were discussed, too. Group identity on the one hand may be expressed by shared history, shared values, “shared fate”, on the other hand it can mean the subjective feeling of distinction, of being different. Three kinds of group awareness were distinguished: mass group awareness, reflective group awareness, and collective consciousness. The factors were determined that establish group identity. The one, the self-categorization, when we categorize ourselves as a member of the group, the other, social categorization, when other people categorize us as members of a certain group. Significance of intergroup competition and conflict was highlighted as a source of stereotypes and prejudices.
- Two concept of social psychology seemed to be important to be included into the thesis, because these proved to be inevitable for the interpretation of the empirical findings. One of these concepts is identity threat, i.e., a threat to our social identity. This sense of identity threat can be derived from the concept of stereotype threat, when we are afraid of negative evaluation as a consequence of being a member of a certain group. This phenomenon can be pregnant in interactions among minority

groups, or minority and majority groups. Such phenomenon was demonstrated by examples from Dunabogdány.

- The other social psychological concept is the so called contact hypothesis. According to contact hypothesis under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. Conditions for the success of social contact between groups are equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, support by authorities, law, or customs, and finally personal interaction. These conditions fulfilled in the case of Dunabogdány, furthermore, the peaceful coexistence between Swabians and Hungarians was facilitated by shared religion (predominantly Roman Catholic), and obligatory learning of German language in Kindergarten as well as elementary school. Swabian assimilation in the village is characterised by a double identity: they regard themselves at the same time Swabian and Hungarian.
- The development of the marriage movement was reviewed including the antecedents of its empirical investigation, historical changes and trends. In analysing the results of the most recent empirical studies the life history characteristics determining marital choice – level of education, social background and marital market – were taken into account. According to these results
 - now the time of getting married is postponed because of secondary and tertiary education, and establishing a firm existence, yet the prestige of marriage is still alive
 - people of same or similar level of education get married most of the time
 - besides educationally based homogamy, occupational homogamy is also strong
 - family background and the couple's own resources are added, and this value is taken into account to decide about a marital partner
 - marital market influences marital choice mainly for people in the middle of the educational hierarchy
 - motivation to get married declined mainly on the two ends of the educational hierarchy: those with collage, or university degree, and those with not more than elementary school education. In case of the former group marriage is postponed because of the long time of education and the following search for employment, while the latter are less and less competitive on the marital market.

- During the recent two decades there was a pattern of change in the behaviour leading to marriage and forming a family. We witness a diversity of various forms of family, along with a decline of the number of marriages, the postponement of getting married, and an increase of divorces. In parallel, premarital cohabitations, cohabitations, single parent families, and patchwork families appeared on the marital scene. Less children are born, and they are born at later time of the marriage; what is more, some families deliberately remain childless. Life strategies have changed, as well as life preferences for young couples. There can be various explanations of such developments, from demographic approaches through economical theory to the system of values and norms. For the time being, there is not one factor that can explain the causes underlying these changes.

The theoretical part was considered in the light of the empirical work conducted in Dunabogdány. The second part of the thesis consists of this research:

- Marital choice, marital customs, norms and informal rules of the Swabian-Hungarian ethnic groups were investigated in this village with an emphasis on the differences between generations in these respects. In addition to age groups ethnic identity as a variable was studied. If there are differences according to age and ethnic identity, what might have been the causal factors, what phenomena, events contributed to the change in marital customs? If there is marital mobility, what kind of factors may guide this process?
- The development of the cohorts, the three generations can be related to a particular historical event: relocation of Swabians from the village (1947). This event seriously affected and changed the customs, values, mentality, and relationships of the villagers. As a consequence of the Second World War and the relocation the social and economic structure of the village underwent radical change:
 - an emotional gap developed (Swabian—Hungarian animosity)
 - soil ceased to be a resource of existence
 - regular commutation became possible, and it became a necessity to find job outside the village
 - further education after elementary school became accessible
 - it became possible to widen the circle of acquaintances and friends

- marital market was not confined anymore to the village, that is, the village became more open, which at the same time led to the weakening of customs and norms.
- Until Second World War and the 1947 relocation of Swabians Dunabogdány was a rather closed Swabian village, where the ethnic minority was the majority. This closed state was maintained by customs of marriage and inheritance, community norms, strong traditions, Swabian language, Swabian feasts, religion, and obtrusive assimilation attempts on the one hand, and ostracism from the Hungarian community life, and Swabian mentality, a kind of internal focus on the other. Poor conditions of commutation cut off the village from the capital city. Lack of social mobility to some extent eliminated the effects of modernity, of globalization.
- Swabians falling into the cohorts studied can be characterized by a double identity. They are Hungarians and Swabians at the same time. The research discovered that people belonging to the first generation and older members of the second generation constitute the ethnic group that is based on Swabian origin and traditions. In the second generation Swabian identity is modified to a kind of German identity, this provides a higher social status for them. Swabian people who claim to be Hungarian also adapt to the minority. The third generation claims mainly Hungarian values and norms. Along with historical events the strength of identity changes. As a consequence of relocation attachment to the Swabian identity became more intense, and the Hungarian ethnicity became despised (within the village). Advancing from the first generation towards the third generation Hungarian identity was getting stronger.
- In the village the role of religion is an inseparable part of life, with an influence changing through ages, historical events. Sometimes it has a segregating effect, sometimes it is integrating, sometimes serves as a strategy of survival. It satisfies communal and individual needs at the same time, providing a kind of balance and cohesion within the ethnic group, and the closedness of the village. The Swabian minority is Roman Catholic. An important part of the Hungarians are Reformists. Roman Catholic religion not only separated Hungarians and Swabians, but connected them, too. Ethnic distance was increased from Reformist Hungarians, but decreased from Catholic Hungarians.
- There was a stratification based on wealth between Swabians and Hungarians, but it was a status creating factor within the Swabian community, as well, which at the same time contributed to the closedness of the community.

- In the time of the first generation religion, ethnic origin and wealth had an equal role in influencing marital choice. These three dimensions were intertwined in determining human relationships in the community. A Swabian could marry with another Swabian, a Catholic on with another Catholic. Marriages deviating from this norm were prohibited at the beginning, later “only” despised. For the third generation such prescriptions have lost their legitimacy. Overall mobility, modernization, and the consequence of historical events made the village more open. The first generation yielded to the transformation of norms, though in some remarks, wishes or hints the nostalgic longing for the old norms sometimes comes to the surface. In the second generation a norm of “diploma to diploma” pops up, but it is limited in its effect on marital choice, because the “market” does not make it possible.
- The research found the influence of mixed marriages both at community, and at individual level. This means that along with mixed marriages becoming more common, the customs, norms, traditions and expectations concerning marital choice became more lenient. Regulations weakened, and previously prohibited behaviours (e.g., at a wedding) became accepted.
- Social changes following the Second World War can be observed in the life of the village, as well, for example: number of children reduced from an average of 4-6-8 to 2-3. Active church going is characteristic only of the first generation, younger generation visit the church only on week-ends perhaps, or at Christmas or Easter. This can be related to diminishing strength of religion, jobs outside the village, commutation, higher work load, as well as mixed marriages. Number of cohabitation without marriage has increased in the village, but nowadays it is accepted. Fifty years ago only a church wedding counted as authentic, any other form was regarded as concubinage and was despised in the village. Divorce was unimaginable in the first generation, today it is not very rare.
- There were significant changes in the way of life, too. Traditional Swabian dishes are cooked only by older people, and even they do so less and less frequently. Their offspring are ignorant about them. Traditional Swabian dishes are not even served in weddings anymore. Traditional agriculture exists no more in the village. Swabian dialect is used only by the oldest, children understand only some words, but they do not speak. Even older villagers mix Swabian phrases with Hungarian ones, sometimes in one and the same sentence. However, it is important for the community to teach

German language, it starts at Kindergarten, and the village has a Grund- und Hauptschul with extra German language classes.

3.3. Conclusions

According to classic family theories increase of the educational level of women and their presence on the labour market leads to the erosion of the traditional family structure and division of labour, which in turn leads to the decline of the family as a social institution. This can be seen in the decrease of inclination to marry. However, results of empirical studies in Hungary do not support this hypothesis. The data support instead the role combination approach, i.e., decisions about marital choice and marriage are the result of an interaction of different resources. Opportunities of lowly educated people and those on the margins of labour market decline gradually, thus they are forced to choose from their own status. On the other hand, people with high qualification with attractive carrier prospects seek partners in their own status, as well. This results in both groups in the strengthening of homogamy.

The risk society approach focuses on higher risks and lower trust accompanying modernization and globalization, which has its effect on the development of partnerships. According to the risk society approach alternative cohabitation forms will gain in importance against traditional marriage, especially in social groups most susceptible to uncertainties concerning their carrier and existence. Research supports these hypotheses. As early as in the 1990s number of cohabitations was increasing and number of traditional marriages was declining. However, the cohabitation can be associated only with certain social groups and social situations. It is chosen most typically by the “extreme” groups of the society (i.e., those with the best and the worst opportunities). The one because of their existential uncertainties, the other because of the developing prospects in their carrier. If stability is assured, the cohabitation is fixed in a marriage. That is, cohabitation does not replace the institution of marriage, because it is only a temporary situation related to existential uncertainty. If it is overcome, marriage is the end; if not (in the case of those living on the periphery) the couples may stuck in the cohabitation as a substitute for marriage.

A couple’s own resources are still dependent a lot on social background, that is, on those values, norms, capital and attitude obtained from the parental family. The strength of such influence is varying according to social groups, level of education, gender, age group and personal lot, but it still has a significant influence on marital choice and marriage. According

to modernization approaches partner selection should be determined predominantly by education instead of family background. However, both Hungarian and international research from the 1990s on shows that individuals are inclined to marry within their in-group both regarding their social background and their level of education. This kind of homogamy seems to gain strength. Yet, social background remains a dominant factor.

The chance and timing of marriage is strongly influenced by the proportion of gender, but if we take the education-specific gender proportions, then the influence is less strong. Since the marriage motivation of those at the ends of the educational hierarchy is almost totally unaffected by the gender proportions. That is, the least educated are not selected even in case of oversupply. The most important marital market is education; this is the place where potential partners meet with the highest probability, this is the factor that has the dominant effect on development of partnerships.

Marital mobility studies leave a number of undiscovered areas, mainly because of lack of reliable databases.

This research concerning Dunabogdány is only a segment of a process in social history and sociology, in particular of social mobility. Radical changes in customs and norms of marital choice were evoked by changes in other dimensions of social mobility following World War Second. Nationwide changes influenced the marital mobility in Dunabogdány in addition to local factors.

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