

Pluralisation of marital and family arrangements in Poland: a sociological and demographic perspective

1. Sociological bases of family change

When analyzing family transformations in Poland in the context of pluralisation of the forms of family arrangements we should point to those theories which are most often employed in explanations of this phenomenon and serve as a basis for the assumptions which I make concerning its development. Therefore, we can distinguish the following concepts:

- The theory of convergence which points to a uniformity of ongoing changes in the marriage and family area in different cultural contexts (the size, structure, forms and functions of family and households are becoming similar to each other, particularly in Europe; Duch-Krzysztozek 1995, Szukalski 2004:23 -156). It is assumed that all these transformations are taking one direction (e.g the theory of the first and the second demographic transition (Okólski 2004: 212-220, van de Kaa 1987), and that transition from one stage of development to another is inescapable. It is emphasized in this theory that there exists plurality and variety of families. Post-modernity, with its pluralism of normative systems, is conducive to this pluralism, to multiplication of various forms of marriage and family (called “proliferation” in Western publications) (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2002, Mandell, Duffy 2000). New factors are being discussed in research such as: gender, sexual orientation, race and class, which have a bearing on the so-called alternative lifestyles (Giddens 2001, Baker 2001).

- Classical and universalistic approach, emphasizing universal, primary and basic, everlasting qualities of family. This theory refers to the universality of this form of life among the whole humankind, its mission, structural qualities and internal relations on the axis: marriage-family-children-relatives (p.ex.. Adamski 2002, Kocik 2002, Dyczewski 1994). It belittles the significance of alternative forms of family arrangements and treats them rather in terms of pathologies. Thereby, family is rooted in a traditional paradigm of analyses carried out by family researchers.

The first approach emphasizes an intensification of irreversible trends characterized by a diversification of various forms of family and married life, and profound changes taking place within them, which are oriented towards individualism and transformation – in all forms of relationships – of patriarchal relations into egalitarian ones, based on partnership. Thanks to a unidirectional, irreversible process of family transformations a new, re-organized space of family life is gradually emerging in which post-traditional forms of family arrangements are finding their “social citizenship”. Both approaches broadly analyze exogenous and endogenous factors which have a bearing on the family change. The second theory, as I have mentioned, ignores the significance and the role of alternative lifestyles and tends to analyze them as dysfunctional to the social order. The first aforementioned perspective describing the “family sector” does not question the role and importance of family as a fundamental social group despite its growing heterogeneity; moreover, it documents that family is still treated as a reference group for other types of relationships in comparative and normative sense.

Discussing the issue of alternative lifestyles in Poland I make the following assumptions:

- Alternative forms will be developing in Poland, similarly to Western countries, resulting in a departure from a homogenous model of family. It follows from this assumption (based on the first approach) that unidirectional changes are inescapable. At the basis of intensive and fast changes of family lie the experiences of the systemic transformation period: multi-range, social, economic and cultural, both global and macro-structural. The period of systemic transformation is considered a fundamental and the most important exogenous factor imposing family changes, resulting in the emergence of various alternative

forms. On the other hand, global and macro-structural determinants have a very strong impact on the phenomena and processes on the level of social micro-structures and on the very individuals.

- Conducive to the heterogenization of family arrangements will be (similarly to Western countries) further, intensive development of civil society, orientated e.g. towards the development of associations, institutions, organizations supporting the existence and functioning of an individual. These extra-family types of organizations and institutions organize the goals and the course of individuals' life, frequently competing with the family. They enable life outside the traditionally understood framework of the household. The association-type of society has an individualistic orientation rather than a communal one.
- The importance of marriage and family changes not only over time, but varies also in individual cohorts (defined here as mental cohorts, namely groups of people sharing a common outlook on life; after Szukalski 2004: 144-145). Natural exchange of older generations (of collectivist orientation) for younger ones, inclining towards individualism, more liberal and open, will be conducive to alternative lifestyles.
- The pressure of new demands on the part of the capitalist society, generating deep economic and class differences between citizens is reflected both in diverse axiological choices and in different demographic behaviour. There are at least three models of axiological choices which may be useful in the analysis of the ongoing changes, of which two, namely *an individualized model of axiological choices* and *a model of diverse environmental axiological choices* become fundamental for these explanations. It may also be assumed that a new nationwide *model* is emerging (opposed to the traditional one) *of unified axiological choices* (Slany, Kluzowa 2005).
- A relatively short observation period for alternative lifestyles does not allow for an unequivocal assessment of their impact on the destruction of social ties nor on disintegration of wider social structures. Nevertheless, the basic micro-structure which family constitutes – owing to society's family-related traditions, its role in creating love and the scope of functions fulfilled by it so far – is irreplaceable (Mariański 2000).

As it is emphasized in the literature on the subject, since the 1960s a view has become popular pointing to the crisis of a monolithic, invariable institution of marriage and family which does not respond to the new needs of individuals – especially individual needs – in the quickly changing world (Beck, Beck – Gernsheim 2002, Kocik 2002, Slany 2002, 2004a, Kwak 1994; 2005, Poleszczuk 2002). A response to this institutional crisis of family is a growth of alternative lifestyles, namely such which involve a variety of non-traditional forms of family arrangements and possibility to arrange one's life e.g. by choosing singlehood, cohabitation, lone-parenthood, non-heterosexual relationship, commune, etc. I consider alternative forms as actual arrangements of which many are socially approved and legalized – usually after some time, *ex post facto* – by the law. Owing to the fact that they are accepted and legalized they become institutionalized patterns of life, giving individuals a sense of satisfaction and self-fulfilment (Slany 2002:82).

2. Changes of marriage and family in the demographic perspective

When considering hard demographic indicators documenting Poles' marital and reproductive behaviour one must state that on the national scale, taking into consideration also territorial division (cities/rural areas) of the country we can talk about a convergence of behaviour in the sphere of marriage and family with those in Western countries. Their direction is towards an increasing complexity and variety of forms. The pace and dynamics of demographic changes taking place since 1990 corresponds, as it has already been mentioned, with the dynamics of radical social, economic and political transformations which began at that time. It should be emphasized that Western countries were undergoing intensive changes of family gradually and during times of prosperity, whereas in Poland and in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe they are happening fast and during systemic transformation generating numerous crises, e.g. economic, political, cultural (Szukalski 2004:143-156). Therefore, radical changes in this area are caused both by a high standard of living and by a state of crisis.

In this part of the article I will show, on the one hand, profound demographic changes in the "family sector" in the whole country, and certain regional differences which make it possible to talk about "multi-Poland". A point of reference for the analysis is the beginning of systemic transformation.

Based on the data of the GNC (General National Census) 2002 we can say that out of 100 families in Poland 56 are married couples with children, 23 – married couples without children, 17 – single mothers with children, 2 – single fathers with children, 1,1 – cohabiting partners with children and almost 1 – cohabiting partners without children (Gospodarstwa domowe... 2003).

On the other hand, census data from 1988 showed that out of 100 families 62 were married couples with children, 23 – married couples without children, 14 – single mothers with children, 1 – single father with children. This census does not provide any detailed data about cohabiting couples.

In 2005 out of 100 dissolved marriages 52 broke up because of husband's death, 18 because of wife's death and 30 because of divorce. At the beginning of the transformation period (1990) this data looks as follows: 60 marriages were dissolved owing to husband's death, 21 by wife's death and 19 by divorce (Rocznik Demograficzny 2006). A sudden "epidemics" of divorces in Poland is reflected in numbers; in 2006 the number of divorces (73 thousand) grew by 70 per cent compared to 1990 (43 thousand). Out of 100 newly wed couples in 2006 as many as 33 were getting divorced, whereas in 1990 only 17 (Rocznik Demograficzny 1991, 2006, data of the Central Statistical Office).

The most radical changes are occurring in the sphere of married life and reproduction. Demographic analyses point to disturbances in the marriage formation process and reduced propensity to get married among young people. Poland is in a serious demographic depression and so far no signs can be seen that it is going to end.

In 2001, for the first time after the war the number of marriages fell below 200 thousand (195,1 thousand). However, since 2003 there has been a small increase and in 2006 their number was 226 thousand, and the rate of marriages was 5,9 per mill (in 2001 – 5,1 per mill). The main cause of a decrease in the number of marriages is a decline in the intensity of their formation in the age group 20-29. In 2005 only 34 per cent of men entered into marriage before the age of 24, whereas in 1990 the corresponding percentage was 54. For women, these percentages are respectively 56 and 74. The average age of entering into marriage is rising fast (the same as in other countries of the West) and amounts to 27 years of age for men, and 25 for women.

Since 1993 the number of births fell below 500 thousand and since 1998 below 400 thousand. In the recent years 2005 and 2006 it rose a little bit (up to about 374 thousand), no optimistic forecasts though for the demographic development of Poland may be built

based on this. The number of births is alarmingly small despite one of the richest in Europe biological capitals formed by the population boom of the 1970s and “baby boom” at the beginning of 1980s. An average Polish woman gives birth to only 1,24 child (TFR – total fertility rate), which implies a fall compared to the TFR from 1990 (2,04) by 40 per cent. The observed decline in fertility results from radical and deep changes in the fertility pattern manifesting itself in: a) a fall in the number of births by women in all age groups, b) varied dynamics of decline in fertility in different age groups, c) levelling of the fertility rate in the age groups with the highest fertility (20-24 and 25-29 years), d) a growth of the share of the age groups 25-29 and 30-34 in the value of the total fertility rate (Sytuacja demograficzna.... 2003). An average age of women who gave birth to a child in 2005 was 27,4 years, and the age of birth of the first child was 25,4 years.

In 2005 out of 100 births almost every 5th child was born outside a formal relationship (extramarital birth), whereas in 1990 it was the case for only every 16th child. Hence a clear jump can be observed in the percentage of extramarital births which amounted to 18,5 per cent in 2005, and only 6,2 per cent in 1990 (Rocznik Demograficzny 1991, 2006).

Compared to 1988, in 2002 there has been an increase in the percentage of single women and men over 50 in every age group; at the age of over 50 it grew from 4,3 per cent to 6,5 per cent. It does not mean though that these people are “pure singles”, as they may in fact remain in common-law relationships. Taking into account the nowadays key age of 30-34 for defining the marital status, it should be indicated that in 2002 almost 14 per cent of women in this age group were single *de iure*, whereas in 1988 – there were 9 per cent of such women. The corresponding percentage for men is: 25 and 18 per cent (Ludność.....2003).

According to the estimates of Lesław Bolesławski (after: Szukalski 2004:92), who carries out longitudinal research on childlessness, childlessness has been slowly on the rise in all younger generations. For example in the generations of 1951-1955 the percentage of childless women was 8,9 per cent, and of 1956-1960 – 9,8 per cent. On the other hand, hypothetical values for the generation 1961-1965 are 10,5 per cent and for the generation 1966-1970 – 10,7 per cent.

The presented data are a proof of deeply advanced changes in the course of marriage and family life cycle and a transformation in the marriage and reproductive pattern. They seem to testify to the appearance of a *model of individualized axiological choices* and

departure from traditional values depicted by the former *model of unified axiological choices*. It can be assumed that the ongoing changes are a harbinger of a new model of unified axiological choices, far though from the content of the traditional model. The observable changes in the types of families, namely a visible increase in the number of lone-parent families, mostly mothers with children (irrespective of the volitional aspect), a decline in the number of married couples with children and formal appearance of common-law families for the first time among all their types points to a transition from a homogenous to heterogeneous model of family in Poland.

In the GNC 2002 family was defined for the first time as “two or a larger number of people who are bound as husband and wife, cohabiting partners living together – persons of opposite sex or as parent and child. Therefore, a family comprises a couple without children or a couple with one or more children or a single parent with one or more children” (Gospodarstwa domowe i rodziny 2003:19). This way of understanding family is a novelty compared to previously employed definitions as it extends the category of people deemed its members, including also people who are not in a formal marriage, namely common-law partners¹.

Nowadays, these are precisely common-law unions which are being studied in-depth and which are a popular form of family life in all countries. What does its “practice” look like in Poland?

Although the GNC 2002 did not reveal a significant scope of common-law relationships in Poland nor that they are an alternative for marriage, numerous sociologists and demographers are of the view that this data is only a tip of the iceberg (Slany 2002, Frątczak 2003). There is no tradition of this type of research and in the existing research there are no questions about preceding marriage by cohabitation (a norm in censuses in the USA or in Canada), as well as reluctance – owing to religious, moral and customary reasons – on the part of society to reveal the fact of being in a common-law union results in the fact that its prevalence is underestimated. It should also be noted that a significant number of people living in such relationships is unaware of the fact that their relations may be defined as common-law. This situation can be described as a kind of an alexithymia (a form of social blindness). For many young people it is undeniably an introduction to

¹ In previous censuses common-law couples were reported together with married couples. In GNC 2002 for the first time the legal marital status was studied, defined as marital status according to the national law, and actual marital status, defined derivatively, based on the type of relationship in which a given person lives. Partners were distinguished within the same household, irrespective of their legal marital status.

marriage or a test of life in a relationship. The rate of marriages declines, it does not mean though that intimate life does not exist in other types of relationships. As many researchers proved, the popularity of common-law relationships grows precisely when the rates of marriages are falling (Duvander 1999:698).

According to the census data of 2002 the number of people living in common-law relationships was 396 thousand and increased by 48 per cent compared to 1978², while the largest number of such relationships are formed by single men (about 52 per cent) and single women (49 per cent), followed by divorced people (m-34 per cent, w-30 per cent), married (m-8 per cent, w-6 per cent) and relatively rarely widowed (m-5 per cent, w-14 per cent)(Ludność i gospodarstwa.... 2003).

An important demographic variable characterizing cohabiting partners is their age as it makes it possible to define the phase of the life course in which they are. Research carried out in Western countries shows explicitly that these are most often young people up to 30 years of age who live in such relationships, although clear is also an increase in common-law relationships among the divorced and widowed. A new tendency which can be observed in many countries, conducive to common-law unions, is prolongation of the stay in the parents' home much beyond 30 years of age. This phenomenon is called a "crowded nest" (Slany 2002). The new census data reveals an important change, namely a clear "rejuvenation" of common-law relationships compared to the micro-census data of 1995. In 1995 young people (up to 29 years) comprised only 18,9 per cent of the total number of cohabiting partners (Slany 2002:187), whereas in 2002 there was a rise up to 29 per cent (Slany 2004a). An increase of the number of common-law relationships in this age group in which marriage was traditionally formed leads to the conclusion that this form is slowly becoming if not an alternative for marriage, then at least a stage preceding a formal relationship, a new kind of "engagement period", "going out together". If we take into account the percentage of common-law partners in the overall number of people living together (marriages and informal relationships) it will turn out that it is also higher in younger age groups than in older ones (Slany 2004a).

Compared to the data from 1995 (about 30 per cent), in 2002 a clear increase in the level of education of cohabiting partners can be observed. One half of them (50,1 per cent) have at least secondary education, including 12 per cent with higher education. There are clear differences between the rural areas and the cities (these percentages are 5,6 and 14,7

² According to the GNC data from: 1978 it was 189 thousand, 1988 -250 thousand and from the Micro-census data from 1995 over 310 thousand.

per cent respectively). Secondary education has 38,1 per cent of common-law partners, including 28 per cent in the rural areas and 42,3 per cent in the cities.

In the GNC 2002 there were 197,4 thousand couples recorded forming common-law relationships, whereas in 1988 there were 125 thousand of such couples. Most people in common-law relationships (56,1 per cent) had children and lived in towns (75 per cent). In towns cohabiting partners with children comprised 52,8 per cent, and in the country 66 per cent of all common-law relationships. The share of cohabiting partners in the total number of families in Poland was 1,9 per cent (2,3 per cent in towns, 1,3 per cent in the rural areas). In informal relationships 173 019 children are being brought up; including 131 870 (66,3 per cent) in towns, and 67 140 (33,7 per cent) in the country. Among all the families with children common-law families constitute 1,4 per cent. The average number of dependent children is 1,75, whereas in the country it is a bit higher (1,98) than in the city (1,65)(Gospodarstwa domowe...2003).

In order to illustrate territorial diversity in the “advancement” (intensity) of the so-called post-modern changes of family I have created a “a synthetic index of post-traditional behaviour” for regions and voivodeships. This index was constructed taking into account: percentage of population of 15 years of age and more in common-law relationships, percentage of common-law families, percentage of single mothers with children, percentage of extra-marital births, the level of divorce and separations. For every voivodeship the following economic and social indices were deployed: GNP per one inhabitant in PLN, unemployment rate and percentage of population with at least secondary education.

Fig. 1 Post-traditional behaviour on the map of Poland (according to the index)

If – based on this map - one ventured to create a continuum of intensity of post-traditional behaviour, then on one end, characterized by the lowest intensity of such phenomena, there would be voivodeships of the Eastern part of Poland, whereas on the other end, characterized by the highest intensity of these phenomena – voivodeships belonging to the Northern and North-Western part. Analyzing respective data there is no simple way of finding connections between atypical post-traditional behaviour and such social indicators as income, level of education and unemployment rate, as not all non-traditional behaviours are linked with the economic indicators. For example in

voivodeships with the highest level of income, relatively low unemployment rate, but also high level of divorce, a high percentage of single mothers with children can be found, as well as a relatively low percentage of common-law families. In the poorest voivodeships (Eastern region), characterized by an average level of education, a moderately high in comparison with other voivodeships unemployment rate is accompanied by a lower than in other parts of Poland average level of the analyzed indicator. There is no doubt that this behaviour should be **carefully studied taking into account Polish axio-normative specificity (which is reflected also in political choices), defined by tradition and history of the region.**

Examining common-law relationships we can see that their highest level (the GNC 2002 data) can be found not in the most urbanized, the richest regions, but in Northern and South-Western Poland, less urbanized, although not the poorest but characterized by a medium standing taking into account income per one inhabitant and the percentage of persons holding at least secondary education. The North-Western region has the highest (apart from the Wielkopolskie voivodeship) rate of extramarital births and the highest percentage of common-law families which may mean that births take place in informal relationships. Voivodeships in the central region are also characterized by a high percentage of single mothers, which is connected with high divorce rates.

Based on research results observed in other countries it must be emphasized that the higher is the level of divorce, level of education and affluence, the higher the level of cohabitation. Polish data does not point directly to this inter-dependency, which, I think, is connected with the fact that inhabitants of voivodeships do not admit to being in common-law relationships.

Conclusions

The presented results of demographic and sociological data point to advanced changes in the “family sector”. We are observing a gradual move from a homogenous, to a heterogeneous model of a family, as well as increasing prevalence of the model of individualized axiological choices and the model of diverse environmental axiological choices. Most behaviours of Poles in the area under study are not a sociological novelty, although basically the predominance of some forms, such as cohabitation and single

parenthood, is changing. The last form is becoming a more complex fact than in the past, as it may be prompted not only by the partner's death or divorce, but also by common-law relationship (when the fact of having a partner may not be admitted to) and being a single mother by choice. What attracts attention are a growth in the number of divorce, extra-marital births, increase in the percentage of single (*de iure*) persons aged 25-34, at which no longer than a dozen or so years ago most people in Poland stabilized their family life. The "delay syndrome", so socially and economically acute in Western countries, has become a problem also in Poland.

Despite fast and deep changes in the area of marriage and family happening nationwide, there is a characteristic variation in the intensity of post-traditional behaviours on the regional scale. The regional mosaic reflects, therefore, peculiar cultural and social capitals of Poland. The changes which are taking place make it possible to study both the uniformity of changes happening in Poland, and its regional characteristics pointing also to the phenomenon of "multi-Poland".

Sociological and demographic research based on an axiological foundation and focusing on studying and discovering of changes in the family-related attitudes and behaviours of Poles of different social classes should be a priority. Such research will make it possible to discover what types of behaviours are characteristic of various social classes, as well as what is their specificity with respect to sex, age, education and place of residence. Such research, both quantitative and qualitative is still scanty, which is caused by the fact that there is no tradition in Poland of doing research departing from classical and universalistic concepts. This gap generates a lot of ignorance and leaves many questions unanswered.

Studying alternative forms one should answer e.g. the following questions: is the newly-created "John Paul II generation" capable of returning to the traditional, homogeneous family, under the pressure of civilizational impacts and complexities of the globalization process bringing about axio-normative pluralism, the carrier of which are powerful mass media; are mass foreign migrations of young people conducive to the maintenance of the traditional image of family, to its formation, or do they rather precipitate disintegration of family, "impose" cohabitation, creation of polyamorous relationships, singlehood – in general, are they conducive to alternative styles of family life? How to persuade young inhabitants of large Polish cities to form families and have at least two children considering the unfavourable situation on the labour market,

pressure of individualistic orientation and lack of systemic support for families with children by the social policy of the state?

Studies of the changing family in Poland should not only be multidisciplinary, multi-sectional, connected with the social structure, but should also be carried out considering all paradigms of research provided by sociology and demography.

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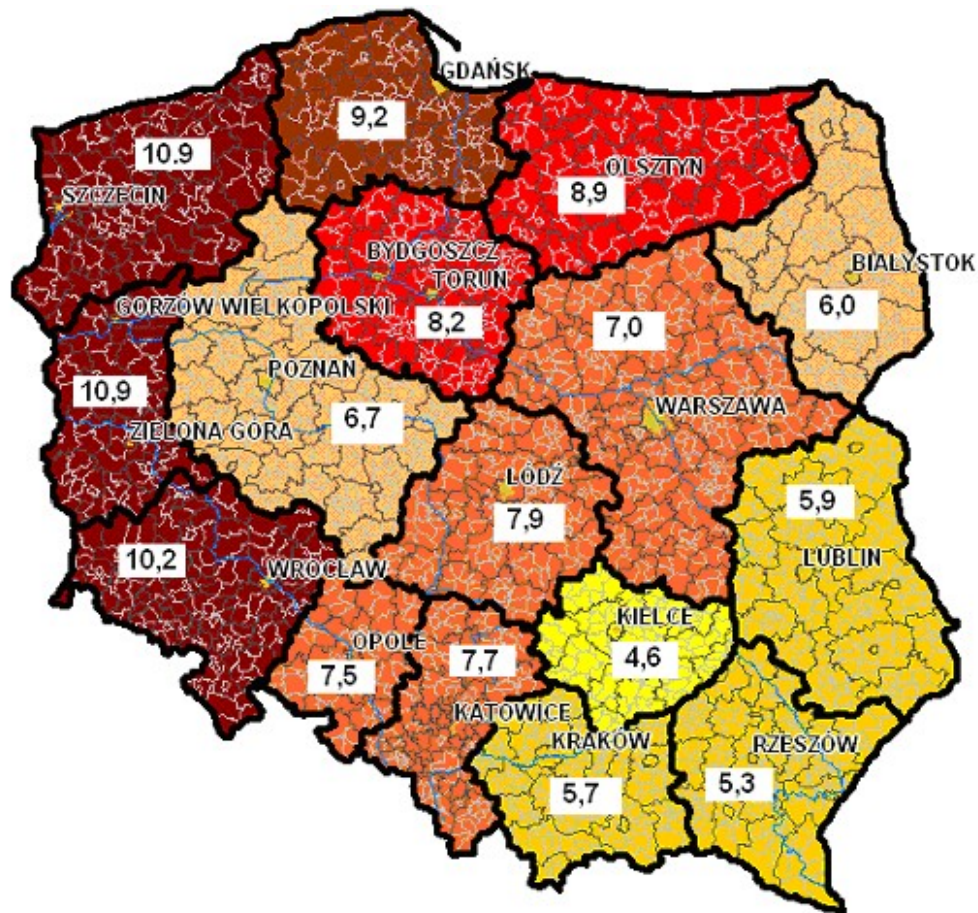


Fig. 1 Post-traditional behaviour on the map of Poland (according to the index)