

REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN “ONE-CHILD” REGIONS

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Historical and demographic literature saw the issue of birth control in Hungary in the early decades of the 19th century. Ethnological research processes information on the phenomenon in general (Filová, 1975) and in some specific cultural expressions (Botiková, 1997). By carrying out repeated investigations we have obtained material of biographical narratives, which present a more detailed context of a partnership, pregnancy, childbirth, care for the woman and child in the family in the villages, which for decades continuously (statistically) recorded birth control. We expect the single-child system is manifested in several aspects of life. The analysis is going to help in understanding the causes and functioning of this phenomenon.

Key words: demographics, Slovakia, Hungary, reproductive behaviour, single-child system

INTRODUCTION

Reproductive behaviour is studied, analysed and interpreted in many disciplines, such as human geography, demography, economics, but also from the point of history, historical demography, and last but not least ethnology.

The largest part of ethnological research topics penetrates the intimate sphere of the life of individuals or groups, and this is also the case with reproductive behaviour. Birth control is literally a matter of “the body”. At the same time, this issue is also a social, political and demographic issue which is directly related to economic, social and cultural manifestations in the lives of people.

In the following text, which presents material and is based on data derived from primary sources as well as secondary literature, we take into consideration the historical context of simple (or reduced) reproduction among peasants in the historical and geographical conditions of the Kingdom of Hungary, and particularly in the region of today's southern central Slovakia. In addition, we present how the phenomenon has been explained and interpreted in ethnological literature. Finally, we present the field

data gathered in recent decades, which serve as evidence of how reduced reproduction influenced the lives of families, households, and individuals (mainly women). We assume that women's lives were determined in gender-specific contexts.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE ORIGINS OF SIMPLE (REDUCED) REPRODUCTION

Changes in the reproductive behaviour of the population of developed countries over the last 200 years are usually referred to as a demographic revolution or a demographic transition, referring to a significant drop in mortality and population growth. Subsequently, there has been a decline in the birth rate and in population stability. In the population development of Slovakia, these processes have not been present in statistics in large numbers (Šprocha, Tišliar 2008: 10–15) and sometimes they can hardly be traced. However, these trends have occurred at a regional or local level, as we shall show in the following material.

Gradual changes in economic conditions after the abolition of serfdom in the Kingdom of Hungary, along with the custom of dividing family property among all the sons in each generation and among all descendants since 1840, in addition to finite resources, threatened the population with impoverishment. It was difficult to prevent this situation. However, there were several ways in which the impacts of the system could be mitigated, for example, by finding new sources of livelihood outside the extensive peasant economy. Job opportunities were developed thanks to modernization, which was associated with urbanization, industrial development, and the possibility of labour migration (often overseas). It was mainly men who migrated, particularly in the early stages of these processes, which resulted in a decrease in the number of births in the family and helped to ensure fewer heirs. Historians, however, portray the specific situation of the Kingdom of Hungary as one where the economy was tied to extensive farming and the enduring ownership of land by the nobility. This meant that buying or acquiring new property was practically impossible for most of the peasantry. The question of birth control as a function of the onset of modernity is also a current and provocative one, because the processes of modernization, metaphorically speaking, has not had an impact on the region where the one-child system of birth control was found.

One of the motivations to ensure fewer siblings was to overcome the principles of the “Hungarian law” (Kadlec, 1902 cited in Tárkány Szűcs, 1981: 710 and also in Švecová, 1989: 214, 220) of inheriting and dividing property. The law of a “single heir”, which was applied in the Czech lands from the mid-17th century, was never applied in Hungary. In Slovakia having one heir was actually written into a law passed in 1947 (Zb.139/1947) which defined the smallest possible area of land which could not then be subdivided into farms in different agro-technical areas (Botíková, 1997: 105). However, at the time when this law was adopted many farms were already divided (sometimes secretly) into smaller plots than were prescribed by law. Furthermore, having one legal heir actually started to apply only when it was losing practical significance because of the emergence of collective farming. This fact indicates that, given the existing ownership and inheritance system, the most rational solution was to ensure fewer children in families.

In the Kingdom of Hungary, the abolition of serfdom took a lengthy and difficult economic form. Problems were rooted in land ownership and in the lack of funds for

the purchase of land by former subjects, whose own plots were just too small and on the border of “survival” (see also Holec, 2003: 222). We agree with I. Vasary (1989: 447), who, unlike previous authors, suggested that birth control did not necessarily result from the wealth that peasant households wanted to reproduce and expand. Such an interpretation, full of scandal over the accumulation of property, prevailed thanks to the authors of moralizing and socially oriented Hungarian writing from the first half of the 20th century. Interestingly, a later Marxist interpretation was also inclined to this point of view in its own interpretation (Filová, 1975: 976). References to the development of the capitalist principle according to Weber were also very similar (Sigmundová, 1983: 562). When looking for the reasons for birth control in some regions of the Kingdom of Hungary, it is certainly worth simply considering panic, which reflected the economic uncertainty following the abolition of serfdom. Birth control could have been motivated not only by a desire to reproduce wealth but also by the threat of impoverishment (Vasary, 1989, Botíková, 1997).

Interpreting the motivation for birth control as being associated with the influences of modernization is also rather controversial. The manifestation of modernity is usually connected with labour migration. An author in the early 20th century stated that “where there is a railway, there is no one-child system” (Buday, 1909, quoted by Vasary, 1989: 447); that is, where the movement of labour and goods is possible, birth control is not needed. During the modernization of the Kingdom of Hungary, there were some counties that were seen as more prominent than others (Holec, 2003: 223) and they had a better railway network. However, none of them form the scope of the present study; Hont and Gemer (on the territory of Slovakia) and Baranya and Ormánság (which Andorka, Faragó and Vasary have written about in relation to regulating birth) seem to fulfil the characteristics of backward regions not touched by modernization.

The regions where birth control was proven to exist remain mainly cereal and wine-growing areas. From the late 19th century, there were communities in Hont which were linked by rail in a north-south direction between the important cities of Budapest and Zvolen. Therefore, we can already assume some type of modernization there. The railway helped to take away those whose labour was surplus to the region and allowed the development of a commodity economy related to products which were transported for sale on the market. This assumption also corresponds with the theory of ecotypes by M. Mitterauer, which states that the labour needs of cereal and wine-growing areas could not be covered by family members and that because of the nature of this type of agricultural production (the grain and grape harvest), families had to hire workers (Botíková, 1997: 19). On the one hand there was significant agricultural production which was able to bring profit; on the other hand it was obvious that this production needed a hired workforce. Hiring was more effective than filling all the labour needs with family members. However, opinions concerning reproductive behaviour stated that profitable properties were best left in the hands of an only child as its heir.

Early ethnological works show that this was a unique solution. Birth control statistics from the 19th century have practically no mention of the phenomenon except in some isolated reports by local pastors or observers. Samuel Kollár, who served as a pastor in the village of Čerenčany in the early 19th century, writes in his monograph on the village that his church members “did not enjoy many children, and having a child in the first year after marriage was not considered to be appropriate” (Urban-

cová 1970: 237). From the same period there is another description of delaying a first pregnancy, which indicates the control of conception. This is described in Ján Čaplovič's book about Slovakia and the Slovaks: "They explain chastity and sexual purity in such a wrong way that women feel ashamed of becoming pregnant in the first or even the second year of marriage. In the Gemer region, they pay so much attention to this that they rarely become pregnant before the sixth or seventh year of marriage" (Čaplovič, cited in Urbancová, 1970: 304).

It is not clear whether Čaplovič took this information from Kollár, but due to the fact that Čaplovič's information is wider and more general, it might have been acquired from different sources. However, if reduced reproduction in the Kingdom of Hungary was applied in the 18th century, as stated by Kollár and Čaplovič regarding Gemer, and as evidenced by onsite work in Baranya (the Ormánság area in the south-west of Hungary) (Andorka, 1981; Andorka, Faragó, 1984; Vasary, 1989), our previous "economic" explanations lose the power of argument and the contradiction remains open. According to Svetoň, the first generation after the abolition of serfdom witnessed an increase in the number of peasant families which were facing a lack of land for subsistence under the continuing landowning system (Svetoň, 1958: 246). Meanwhile, in some areas of what is today Slovakia, the Hungarian and Slovak population model of simple reproduction increased in the 1870s and then in the 1930s at such a rate that socially-minded and moralizing authors described the local peasant population as "suicidal" (Bónis, 1941).

Another way of locating the causes of birth control might point to the sphere of spirituality and values, namely Protestantism and specifically its Helvetic/Calvinist and Augsburg/Lutheran variants. A possible dichotomous explanation is offered for the behaviour of select population patterns in the differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant populations. It is beyond doubt that the phenomenon was more frequent among Protestants, which would explain a certain amount of rationality and pragmatic thinking in this form of faith during early capitalism. The dogmas of Protestantism do not prohibit birth control, but nor do they command it. There were other Protestant areas (e.g., towns and other settlements of the Myjava Hills, the Uhrovec Valley, and the villages of the upper Liptov region), where reproductive behaviour favouring only children failed to happen (map EAS, 1990: 66). A detailed study on the economic power of the population would likely prove that these were less economically prosperous regions focusing on mountain farming, protoindustrial production, and labour migration, where birth control was not able to bring an improvement in the economic situation of peasant families.

In many indicators, the demographic and cultural phenomenon which determined the lives of people in some of the villages and among the peasantry in southern central Slovakia did not show a clear causality between modernization and the reduction of population growth. Forms of modernization and its specific effects vary according to each regional context. Ethnological research in communities where the model of simple and reduced reproduction was applied shows some social and cultural implications of reproductive behaviour. We will concentrate precisely on these findings in the following text.

PROBLEMS OF REDUCED REPRODUCTION IN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN THE 20th CENTURY

The theme of reduced reproduction has been a subject of ethnographic research since the 1960s. The problem of birth control appeared in research into the family and community by B. Filová and S. Švecová as well as in research into rituals by E. Horváthová in some villages of southern central Slovakia.

Filová's research remained in manuscript form. She did not include reduced reproduction in her synthetic work on family in Slovakia (Filová, 1975: 976). In 2015 Filová's archival research was made available, and the results of it were assessed by Ľ. Voľanská and J. Majo (Voľanská, Majo, 2016). Švecová wrote about reproductive issues within the family in the context of her work on succession and the division of peasant property (Švecová, 1974). She examined material from Gemer and Hont from the late 1980s, and she offered analytical tools to grasp the basic problem: the typological diversity of family structure and family life in the traditional peasant environment in today's Czech Republic and Slovakia (Švecová, 1986; Švecová, 1989). In her analytical study, Švecová showed that the motivation to reduce reproduction could have been supported by lasting inheritance patterns which were maintained as traditional forms of division and inheritance of family property in Hungary and Slovakia but which were no longer progressive or convenient in certain contexts.

Research materials and data which show the social and cultural implications of birth control were gathered in several ways. In 1976 I undertook ethnological research using non-standardized interviews where I included birth control questions in the research issues of family structure. This was done in the villages of Dačov Lom and Čelovce (Veľký Krtíš district) and the village of Senohrad (Krupina district). I then undertook long-term ethnological research from 1981 to 1985 in the villages of Lišov (Krupina district), Šalov, Sikenica and Mochovce (all in Levice district), where thanks to my long-term stay I managed to work using the method of in-depth interviews. In 2015 I decided to repeat the research on the topic in other villages in the area: Hontianske Moravce, Terany, Hontianske Tesáre, and Sudince (all in Krupina district) as well as in the village of Hrušov (Veľký Krtíš district). This time I used data mining from narratives, especially biographical interviews, in a particular way. In this research, I specifically looked for visual documents (e.g., family photographs) which served as starters in discussions as well as evidence within the interpretation of the context of reproductive behaviour.

It should be noted that the material offered as a source of findings consists predominantly of female narratives. It is known from the literature (Kiczková, 2006: 22) and from field experience that women prefer to confide in women and that questions on motherhood and its different circumstances primarily address women. They were usually willing to tell their own stories or the stories of their mothers and grandmothers. In interviews with men I usually received more information on the economic context, and I was not able to get to deeper and more intimate questions.

In addition to all the ethnographic interviews, which provided soft data, I was able to collect and partially analyse census data from 1930. Census data provide significant evidence of the status of households at a given time (Herzánová, 2002). Examining this information closely reveals many details, such as a person's age at first marriage and whether pregnancies were postponed if the age difference between siblings would have been too close. All of these are indicators referring to reduced reproduc-

tion practices applied in families within the community. The economic status of families can also be read from the census data in terms of employment and house or apartment ownership. The census data did not register the land owned by families. An analysis of statistical material combined with qualitative research pointed to family relationships and reproductive behaviour thanks to the stated age at marriage and the number of child births and deaths. Definitive fertility could also be assumed to correlate with a woman's age.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL MANIFESTATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Family structure was very underdeveloped in families which followed the reduced reproduction pattern and developed vertically. If reduced reproduction was applied over several generations, it reduced the number of side-branch relatives. If the only child was female, her parents would not want her to leave home and would rather take in her husband (their son-in-law) as an "added" member of the family (*prístupník, prístavok*). This son-in-law did not even have to be (and often was not) from the same village or social class. Homogamy was not the most important requirement in these cases. Grooms came from neighbouring villages; informants also mentioned cases of matchmaking when the groom was brought in from distant locations: "Yes, she (mother) was an only child, and Dad, he was from the town of Štiavnica and one of eight children" (Hontianske Tesáre; describing the situation in 1931). For the need of increasing the wealth of the family farm, the groom had to be a young man trained to work, and he was expected to work on the farm's future prosperity. Having a groom or bride from another location could occur in a family for several generations in a row. Even if the social and geographical origin was not considered important in these cases, the religious affiliation of partners in marriage remained important in determining choice, as will be stated further below.

The son-in-law was a very important source of labour in the family. Partially due to natural conditions as well as inheritance and property division arrangements under Hungarian law and customs, which survived thanks to tradition and the absence of statutory regulation in the first half of the 20th century, the peasant economy was primarily based on the unpaid work of family members for a long time. Peasants worked hard and exploited their family members (Chayanov, 1966: 73). The reward for the family members' work was their inclusion in inheritances. The son-in-law's relationship to his new family was consolidated by a contract to ensure that in the case of an inheritance he would be treated as an heir and as a member of the family (Lišov, Hontianske Tesáre): "My mother went to ask my future husband's parents to let him come as a son-in-law into our house. And his mother asked: 'Are you going to take him in as a son-in-law, or are you going to take him in as your own son? Because we will not let him go as a son-in-law'" (Lišov; describing the situation around 1948). The fact that the status of accepting a son-in-law into the family was not entirely clear is confirmed by a quote from a man in his old age who was recollecting his past: "There were [a fair number of men] for brandishing a scythe. But they took me in so that they would not have to pay a farmhand" (Lišov; describing the situation around 1929). When the only child was a female, parents looked for a suitable husband for her from the village or from the nearby region and engaged in matchmaking: "My mother was an only child and Dad came from a family of several children. Well, they needed each

other, as you know.” Finding a groom or bride through matchmaking was repeated in one family in at least three generations (Hontianske Tesáre; describing the situation before and around 1935).

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND HOMOGAMY

As a norm, religious affiliation and homogamy was also associated with reduced reproduction. Although the population in the second half of the 20th century largely stopped practising religion, cultural values attributed to the Protestant environment seemed to continue. Heavily stressed values included those of “hard work and modesty in consumption”. The rules of homogamy were expressed in a statement by one informant born in 1934: “Even Tesáre was a purely Protestant village; there were very few Catholics. When we grew up, it was not that we were divided, I cannot say that. With those children at school and when we were young ... Just now I can say that we knew from where to where the boundary was. That we did not think we would, for example, marry a Catholic.” Religious homogamy was strongly desired, but as examples have shown, there were cases of not obeying the norm, especially in marriages in the 1950s and later on, when, due to ideological pressure and perhaps modernization (e.g., higher education and a loosening of social control) religious practices gradually faded out, particularly in Protestant locations.

A PLACE FOR NEWLYWEDS

In municipalities where a system of reduced reproduction was established, an uxorial residence was a “normal” solution. We also found an exceptional case where both the groom and bride were the only children of wealthy households; especially at the beginning of their marriage and at the time of peak agricultural work, they spent alternate weeks with each other’s parents because there was a lot of work on both farmsteads (Mochovce; the situation around 1925).

Reduced or simple reproduction presented an easy way of passing down an inheritance and dividing up property. The son and his wife (the daughter-in-law) or the daughter and her husband (the son-in-law) would remain with the parents, and the whole family would farm together. Prior to the time when cooperative farming started, there was family property. Later on there was a common household which remained in the family’s possession and family members were expected to work on it and improve it all the time. Being separated from one’s parents was perceived as undesirable, despite the fact that the manifestations of the power of ownership by the parent’s generation was disruptive to the lives of spouses until their old age: “It goes without saying that [parents] kept the [family] property in their own name. The transfer was only done when the father died” (Lišov; an informant born in 1907). We saw an example where an 80-year-old father was talking to his 60-year-old son: “You are nothing; I’m the *gazda* (the head of the household) here” (Šalov; an informant born in 1907).

Recent repeated research has shown that if there were two children in the family, it was usually anticipated that the first-born would remain on the property, whereas the second-born was expected to learn some craft or work in services, or continue study-

ing and receive a higher education. Second children were considered to have taken their share of inheritance by having the family support them during their studies; an education was provided for them which would secure a livelihood and employment (usually) in the city. This was definitely taken into consideration when dividing property among siblings.

THE WORK OF YOUNG WOMEN AND CHILD CARE

During and just after the Second World War, the period when our oldest informants became mothers, there was a common formula of children being brought up by grandmothers while the young women worked on the farm. After the changes in the social system as a result of collectivization, families did not own any fields, only a few vineyards. An informant from the village of Lišov (born in 1940) said: "Even then we worked in the vineyards. We went with B. [a neighbour of the same age] to Sudince, and also to Súdovce, where there were wine cellars. And there were also vineyards at home. In our vineyard ... I had to fry meat overnight, and in the morning I went to the vintage. Once we did this, we had to. Now, there is nobody to do the work."

Young women also had to work on the farm in the presence of their children. A woman (born in 1910) from the village of Dačov Lom offered the following narrative. She had just nursed her youngest child and her own mother stood in the doorway and told her in an angry voice: "Well, my dear, what fun. If it wasn't for you, I would have to work." Even more surprising was the information about a mother telling her adult and married daughter (born in 1926), who had her first child in July, that "even a Roma woman would not want to give birth in July!" (i.e., during the harvest). This also expressed the idea that having a child was considered to be a form of leisure and a sign of a woman's laziness. As was already mentioned, all working hands, especially those of young women, were precious and wanted on the family farm.

My informants were surprised when asked about possible relief from farm work during menstruation. Monthly bleeding did not mean "liberation" from work in the fields or in vineyards for young women. The only women who remained at home during field work were elderly women, who were the housekeepers. They stayed at home not due to their physical situation but rather due to their role; they had to cook for all of the family members who were working outdoors. If necessary, the housekeeper took care of those children who stayed at home. Mothers did not take their children with them, except for those who were physically bound to their mothers for breast-feeding.

AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Age at first marriage is part of a strategy of reproductive behaviour which includes reduced reproduction. In order to gain a workforce as soon as possible, the economy required early marriages in the past. The opposite strategy applied to marriages later in life so that the workforce would stay under parental control for as long as possible. According to oral information gained by Švecová, no community would have applied the two solutions at once. While a higher age at first marriage corresponds to the Western European model of family and the home, early marriages in Central Euro-

pean conditions were usual even when applying reduced reproduction. Both of these strategies were associated with restraint in sexual life and a functioning protection from pregnancy. A low marriage age was not specific to a reduced reproduction pattern in regions in Slovakia. It was associated with traditional family structure and its operation. Interestingly, reduced reproduction substituted the absence of property succession of the Western European type, and it took on the specifics of Eastern European family structures. The evidence of a low marriage age (especially among women) has been preserved in marriage certificates and marriage registers. According to a closely studied marriage register book for the parish and village of Lišov, the average age of women at their first marriage was fifteen years in 1935! The average age of men at the same time was twenty-five years, probably thanks to compulsory military service and (mathematically) some bachelors who got married later in life for various reasons. It would seem more effective to follow the median instead of the average age and thus eliminate distortions which might be a result caused by the unusual case of an older bridegroom. The low age at first marriage was confirmed by data reporting for the 1930 census, which documented several fifteen- to sixteen-year-old brides.

Protection from pregnancy was practised in regions where both symbolic and practical results were required. Practices had a rational basis and were required to be effective (Sigmundová, 1983). Knowledge and use of contraceptive practices could have affected marital and extramarital relationships. In municipalities where detailed research of the registers was done, the number of illegitimate children was significantly low in the researched period. One and at most two illegitimate children were baptized in these places from 1900 to 1940. Within a family, even though the first child was born, there were efforts to delay its arrival so as not to distract the mother from work. Abortions were provided by "old women" (including infusions, baths, and deliberate injuries) and often represented a high risk to women and their physical health. If these practices did not "help", women underwent a more standard abortion, which was similarly dangerous. This was usually done unprofessionally and in an infectious environment; it was an intervention which often ended with the woman's death: "My sister-in-law died very young. She already had a child and would have had a second one, but her mother-in-law wanted her to get rid of it, and she died" (Šalov; the informant is describing the situation around 1930). In more recent and repeated research, similar stories were revealed. The oldest informants gave birth in the 1950s, when male forms of contraception and female intrauterine contraception were both already accessible. According to my informants, it was a very unpleasant experience to appear in front of an abortion commission, which was the official way to terminate a pregnancy in the Czechoslovak healthcare system during the socialist regime. Apparently women gave priority to traditional and new forms of contraception over pregnancy, as it was desirable to continue the model of simple reproduction.

CHILDREN'S DEATH

Reproductive behaviour towards reduced or simple reproduction never involved the whole community, but it was an ideal model which families tended to follow. The one-child system did not refer to the number of births as such, but accounted for the number of children raised in the family. Research based on material collected in the last third

of the 20th century found that, „The child as a future heir and successor of the family gave meaning to the daily efforts to maintain the property and was the focus of future plans,“ (Horváthová, 1988: 472). This is also confirmed by our findings. Nonetheless, on the normative level it was declared that a second child would only be born if the first child died, or when a woman was widowed or divorced and subsequently entered into a second marriage. This was the case concerning war-time births: “My wife and I were extra children. We were born because my brother died and my wife’s did too” (Lišov; describing the situation in the 1940s).

ADOPTION

Improper abortion practices and child mortality led to some couples remaining childless. One possible solution was to bring up a child adopted from one’s kin. Under certain conditions, peasants took orphans in to work as farmhands on a seasonal basis. They would come from the orphanage in Rimavská Sobota and were thus colloquially called *rimančatá*. A state-run orphanage in Rimavská Sobota existed from 1897 to 1918 and was continued after the First World War under the Czechoslovak administration. An article based on information from the local press (Pavlíková, 2013) shows that the Protestant church was also involved in the activities of the orphanage in the first half of the 20th century. It helped with distributing children to families throughout the country. This was the responsibility of “orphan fathers”. This function was usually held by a general authority: e.g., a pastor, teacher, or mayor of a village. The children had various destinies. According to the narratives collected from the region, many children stayed in contact with their stepparents for the whole of their lives.

BREACHING THE NORM

Even in the villages where it was desirable to have an only child, there were families with more children. As already mentioned, children were considered a form of entertainment for the mother; this was especially reiterated by her mother-in-law and possibly by her own mother too. A child’s first name might have been symbolic: “It was the best when it was a boy; his name would be Jano (John). If it was a girl, it was Anka (Ann). The second would have to be Juro (George); this was already a bit pejorative. They have two children because they were in such a difficult situation, getting married, because in such a case they have to share [a child] with a brother or sister. But when there was an only child, this was the best. But if there came a third [child], he had to be Palo (Paul), and the fourth one, that was Ondrej (Andrew). It was a great shame when they had to have an Ondrej in the family” (Dačov Lom; describing the situation around 1930).

THE PRESENTATION OF WEALTH: CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

In applying the model of reduced and simple reproduction, one of its main aims – enrichment – was certainly achieved for some families. This was highlighted by the elegance of some housing and in women’s clothing. These items were the main kind of

presentation for the family in showing others the strength of their financial situation. Opulent clothing richly decorated with embroidery, or in later years manufactured from expensive materials purchased in nearby towns, became a sign of prestige. An interesting finding is that even after leaving the “folk-costume” style of clothing, mostly in the second half of the 20th century, girls’ and women’s apparel was still an important part of how a family was represented. This is shown in photos of ceremonial and everyday occasions where it is clear that families had invested money in high-quality materials and trendy designs in women’s clothing. Another type of investment presenting the financial situation of families was investing in children’s education. Even though exact statistical data are not available, it seems that sons were advantaged in being given training. For daughters, a good career was considered to beckon after graduation from a business academy, agricultural school, or teachers’ college. Several informants proudly described how they used this opportunity.

HEALTH EDUCATION AND CARE

In the surveyed villages, I also asked my informants about health education and health awareness, as far as I assumed those were connected with women’s decision making concerning their maternity as a whole. The information obtained is linked to the 1950s and later on, when my current informants were young women who were giving birth and raising children. Even women who were teachers by profession did not remember if any special attention was paid to health and personal hygiene at school. The nearest maternity clinics in the studied area were in the towns of Krupina and Šahy. Several informants described the situation in the 1950s and 1960s in the following way: “The care was very good. The doctors, and the midwives ... everything here was in order. We had a dentist and a general practitioner; the gynaecologist came regularly, and we had an advisory service with the paediatrician.”

LIVING TOGETHER AND TAKING CARE OF ELDERLY PARENTS

If the only child was female and moved to her husband’s house, the solution of caregiving remained open. One informant (born in 1940) stated: “I came out here and [my father] also little by little used to come [to my husband’s house].” The situation of “returning” back to one’s own parents’ house was also mentioned as a solution for ageing parents, who would look after children even when they were already at an advanced age. The generations were close to each other; the age difference between them was not large; around twenty years in communities where reduced reproduction was the norm. In one of the examples already mentioned above, an unmarried retired daughter in her seventies took care of her mother, a widow, who was almost ninety, while the other two economically active siblings and their families took care of or visited the mother only on festive occasions. This was a pragmatic arrangement among siblings which was very probably also reflected in the way the inherited property was divided.

Repeated research has shown that due to changes in property ownership and cooperative farming, only children born after 1930 often had the opportunity to leave home to study. Whether these people ever returned to take care of their elderly parents was usually determined by individual circumstances. Adult children already

had skilled jobs which were not available in rural areas. The question for them was how to provide for the needs of their own new family. A solution might have been found thanks to the increase and accessibility of cars from 1960, and the “day off on Saturday”, i.e., the five-day working week established in Czechoslovakia at approximately the same time. The huge amount of commuting between towns and villages also started thanks to fuel being relatively inexpensive and due to family support. However, according to informants from that period’s generation of parents, mutual support was never equal: “Have you ever seen a young sparrow feed an old one?”

New circumstances of returning to the parental family have presented themselves in recent years as a possible solution to solving the problem of unemployment. Many of the larger houses in villages have stayed vacant since the 1980s. Firstly, the young people left to study, and later they left for jobs, leaving only a few families with children behind in the village. Therefore, it is an interesting signal that the current situation of mostly expensive and even inaccessible housing in the cities has opened up a potential change for the better, at least for those few attractive village locations where commuting by car could be a solution to settling there and still being able to get a job. However, this possibility has been quite rarely used so far. One reason might be that the old houses in the villages were built several decades ago and would need some investment to be modernized. Additionally, it is a great responsibility to look after older parents and grandparents, and the price of fuel is always increasing. Time-demanding jobs do not allow for this kind of management to be employed in a general sense. Recently, descendants (and not only those who were brought up as only children) have been asking and queueing up for space in nursing homes to solve the situation of elderly family members.

CONCLUSION

The monitored demographic and cultural phenomenon was based on a number of causes, their momentary interaction over time, and the historical context. Reproductive behaviour determined the way of life of people in rural areas in southern central Slovakia in many ways. Nonetheless, it does not seem to be possible to establish a clear causality between modernization and the reduction in population growth. Specific effects at modernization vary in each regional economic context. Ethnological research in communities where the model of reduced reproduction was applied shows some common social and cultural implications of this reproductive behaviour.

Repeated research has shown that in the model of reduced reproduction we are dealing with a rather persistent phenomenon, which established itself as a model of modernity in spite of the absence of the economic conditions which are characteristic for modernity’s existence. Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising that this population model did not change significantly with the advent of modernity in the 20th century, especially in those communities where it was deeply rooted. The experience of prosperous farms, the possibilities of family income and expenses control as well as other factors seemed to be advantages which appeared attractive and reasonable. Certainly, there might have also been a connection and coincidence with the starting of cooperative farming in this region in the second half of the 20th century, but to prove this is a task for future research.

Reduced and simple reproduction had negative consequences as well. These included the depopulation of the villages and problems in organizing the care of elderly parents. At the same time, non-integrated Roma communities emerged in abandoned houses. These problems, however, stopped being seen as consequences of the traditional model of reduced reproduction. These problems might also have been gradually seen in other parts of the country. Population development and its social and cultural consequences in regions of Slovakia is a matter still waiting for a detailed ethnological analysis in the near future.

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