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Changes in family structure in transition of Romania. A lifestyle approach

Dr. Mihaela-Cornelia DAN*, Simona VASILACHE**

Abstract

The study investigates the relationship between family structure and lifestyle changes in contemporary Romania, on the social-political background of transition. The objectives of the paper include the theoretical, methodological and empirical characterization of Romanian family lifestyle, and the classification of Romanian families, by their particular ways of living. The superficial relationships create a new need of stability. The individuals select their relationships by the profit possibility and giving an effect of anchorage. So, we may speak not only about career anchorages, but also about lifestyle anchorages. Traditionally, one of these anchorages is the family. But in the last century, the family suffered transformations affecting its stability and diversity. The post-traditional social structures, which promote the success by yourself, favors the appearance of new types of families. The influence of mutations in the system of social values on lifestyles and family environments is traced, in this paper, through a variety of quantitative methods, including factor analysis and multivariate regression. The conclusions of the study are starting points for psycho-sociological analyzes dedicated to lifestyle and for consumer behavior studies.

Keywords: *lifestyle; family structure; transition; Romania; habitus.*

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Literature review

Back in 1987, Rybczynsky pointed out that the replacement of the names given to houses (the name of the builders, usually) with numbers, which is characteristic to the 20th century, unbinds the link between family and its space. Nowadays, this cooperation with the environment tends to take a rest. But the “content” of the environment is very different from the traditional structures that exist in a home (in the sense of *household*). From the so-called “cereal packet family” (Abercrombie et al., 1994), a stereotype kept alive by TV adds and the mythologizing perception of society, we speak now about: (1) persons who live alone; (2) consensual unions (cohabitation); (3) family life lived separately (*LAT relationships – living apart together* – Levin, 2004, *cohabitation intermittente* – Caradec, 1996, *Partnerschaften mit getrennten Haushalten* – Schneider, 1996); (4) life in common, the so-called *Wohngemeinschaft*, *collocation* – the case of student hostels or low class people working abroad, especially in agriculture; (5) gay families; (6) families where both partners have careers, usually in different cities – *commuter-marriage* (Winfield and Waller, 1985; Anderson and Spruill, 1993; Kiefer, 2000; Tessina, 2008); (7) Double families – *dual membership*, where divorced parents, possibly remarried, and especially their children divide between two families.

The so-called reconstituted, or blended, families (Brown and Mann, 1990), in which both partners were married before, and live with their step children, or with both their step and joint children, which are more and more frequent, further complicate the map of contemporary family. Kaufmann’s (1997) research outlines that, at the European level, the percentage of married women decreases in the young group, of persons aged 25 to 29, while it increases in the “empty nest” group, of women aged 45-49, who are divorced, whose children have left parental home, etc. What has been as isolated phenomenon (Cheal, 2002), reserved to crisis or war periods, expands nowadays on a global scale, and is regarded more permissively.

The dissolution of the patriarchal power, in the form of the so called *vaterlose Gesellschaft*, a society without father (Mitscherlich, in Hurson, 2002) makes the world today an horizontal retort of the Thélème monastery (Maffesoli, 2007). The famous call of Rabelais utopia, live and do what you want, can be found in the return to *Lebenswelt*, the world as it is (Husserl, in Garfinkel and Liberman, 2007), to the renegotiation of the social rules from the perspective of the individual good, in an ethical sense. At the intersection of these concepts, the individual good is defined through the adoption of a convenient lifestyle based on an equilibrium system: between work and entertainment, between the individual time and the social time.

Demographic trends, like an obvious decline in fertility, which is confronting Eastern Europe, in particular (Bradatan and Firebaugh, 2007), leading to an increasing number of childless women, ageing population, which may be seen as an effect of the previous phenomenon, the shift in values which diminishes, more and more, the guilt of illegitimacy, which kept the families together, all contribute to a changing pattern of family. Socio-economic instability, characteristic to post-1990 Eastern Europe, poverty, liberalization of abortion, after a long period of interdiction, during communist regime, lead to postponing childbearing, increased cohabitation, as well as tolerance for divorce. The totalitarian pressure on family (Mitrea, 1993), by aberrant planning policies, the corruption of the private, intimate space – living in common, especially in old family houses, a symbol of united generations, which were overwhelmed with tenants, usually from the low classes; being invaded by informers (Tanase, 2002), and replacing trust in neighbors by a permanent suspicion – destroyed the myth of the family, as inherited from the past. Secondly, poor economic conditions transformed the full-time employment of both husband and wife into a necessity. The reality of not being able to support a family alone was stronger, in this part of the world, than the emancipation of women, in the sense of career-making. Thus, the working mothers were more an economic necessity than a sign of modernization in mentalities. This situation resisted the fall of the communist regime, being characteristic to the transition period, as well. Muresan (2007) discusses Romanian families' dynamics in the framework of the second demographic transition (SDT). If the first demographic transition took place as an effect of modernization, which lowered the mortality rate, and the fertility rate as well – change of priorities, better access to education, etc., the second demographic transition, in the late 80s, which undermines the stabilization line estimated for the first process, further lowers the two rates, up to no predictable end-point, and multiplies the existing types of family, other than traditional. A research by Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004) links the second demographic transition with values orientation and with lifestyle choices, using data from the *European Values Survey*, 1999.

Lifestyle, from a sociological perspective (as there exists, as well, a healthcare-oriented “confiscation” of the topic (Prejmerean and Vasilache, 2008), is related to experientialism (Smith and Lutz, 1996), to collecting experiences, rather than material possessions, to values and attitudes (the VALS model – values, attitudes and lifestyle, Mitchell, 1983; the LOV – list of values, Kahle, 1983), to time allocation. The economic understanding of time has evolved, from regarding time as a commodity (*time is money*, Franklin's old advice to a young tradesman), and, therefore, discussing how time could be better used (“invested”), to regarding time as a constraint (Szalai, 1972), and performing allocation studies, which called for a prioritizing of activities and distributing a more generous time to the most important, or the most emotionally significant ones. Graham (1981) spoke of a cultural time, by underlining the culture-dependent differences in time

perception, and their importance for consumer behaviour. Ancona et al. (2001) in Usunier and Valette-Florence (2007), identify three categories of time: conceptions of time, which are dependent on culture, activities placed in time, according to various diagrams, and the way individuals relate to time. In other words, there is a general external environment, vaguely delimited, that of the culture, which can be *slower* or *faster*, in relation to time, may live the *culte de l'urgence* or, on the contrary, may be rather contemplative. There is, then, an external pressure, of the deadlines, of the sequence of tasks and activities that the social individual can hardly escape, or at least, can not escape without suffering some costs of delay, or costs of rapid reaction. Finally, there is an inner relationship with time, connected with the way the individual places in time, with the *quality time*, with the *psychological time*, the way it is perceived. This last category is, obviously, the most lifestyle-dependent. Bergadaà (2007) brings into discussion two axes, synchrony-diachronic perspective, and instant-duration. People, points out the same researcher, see themselves as either actors or reactors in time. Reactors are achievers, while actors want to *become*, but do not make plans. Some people live a perpetual present, while others live a fragmented time. The demonstration that Bergadaà makes on theatre-going as compared to museum-going connects time frames, as perceived by the individuals, with cultural attitudes and lifestyles.

Second, stemming also from time allocation principles, the relationship between emotional status and career decision-making is largely researched in literature (Cohen et al., 1995, Kelly and Lee, 2005, Santos, 2001). Job satisfaction is, as well, influenced by personality traits (Sullivan and Hansen, 2004; Walsh and Eggerth, 2005). Saka and Gati (2007) developed taxonomy of influencers of career decision-making, where they included *pessimistic views, anxiety, self-concept and identity*. In other words, an external and internal influence, which resembles the inner-outer determination of lifestyle, is to be held responsible for good or bad career choices, for uncertainty, for difficulties in decision-making. In Schein's (1997) typology, lifestyle itself is a career anchor. Holland's model of interests (1997), together with the Big Five model of personality (Costa and McCrae, 1992) are instruments which investigate the complex links between certain personality traits, resulting in lifestyle choices, and workplace measures of fit. As career decisions limit the freedom in lifestyle choices, and create emotional effects, which, like a feed-back mechanism, affect career choices, the three components form a cycle whose starting sequence is impossible to indicate. The "initial" lifestyle configuration, of the recently graduates, may be a conventional starting point for motivating and understanding further decisions, until an equilibrium lifestyle, corresponding to the emotional traits of an age-personality conjuncture, is reached. The theories of happiness, or subjective well-being, states which, once profiled, are not subject to change, during adult life, attempt to explain this equilibrium point in lifestyle. The works of Headey (2006), or Huppert (2005), can serve as reviews of the theory.

Third, and most important, from the management and marketing point of view, lifestyle has a significant influence on consumer choices. Smith and Lutz (1996) speak of experientialism, as the anti-materialistic doctrine of the people who collect experiences. Their philosophy stems from the need to satisfy their experiential or hedonic needs (Park et al., 1986). Experientialism has three axes: centrality, which places experiences in a central position in the individual's life, happiness, which treats experiences as being essential to happiness, and success (experiences reflect success). These persons, who pursue experiences which make them happy, want to live as many experiences as possible. The others, which are more extrinsically driven, by combining the experientialist perspective with a functionalist one, seek social status by experiences, and will selectively buy those products/ services they perceive as representing the desirable social status. Campbell's (1987) *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* bridges cultural values and hedonistic impulses in what he thinks to be the essence of consumerism.

Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of *taste* and *habitus* add to this the idea of feeling pleasure because you are able to satisfy some exquisite needs and, thus, acquire social distinction. Brown et al. (1998: 8) consider, discussing Campbell's thesis, that this age of consumerism is characterised by a merry-go-round of consumption in which the pleasure of the purpose is replaced by the pleasure of the act: "Campbell's romantic ethic helps us comprehend why consumers are consumed with consumption, take pleasure from pleasure, desire to desire and want to want". Modern hedonism, unlike the traditional one, is more connected with the intrinsic pleasure of emotions, which are generated for their own sake. The modern consumer as a "dream artist" (1987:78) is the profile that Campbell advances. Thus, the presets of the consumer mind, the values, which are refined or corrupted, as the case may be, by education, which dictates the socializing patterns, gain importance for estimating the degree of satisfaction the consumer is likely to find in a certain product or service, and understanding the prerequisites of the buying decision.

We will examine, in this paper, the time allocation patterns – time spent at work, time spent with family, time spent with friends, the relationship between the amount of time spent with family and the strength of family ties, the relationship between non-conformism and marital status/ number of children, and the relationship between lifestyle clusters and family structures, based on data from the *European Social Survey*, round 3, 2006/2007.

Methodology

The sample included 2139 Romanian respondents, 1020 (47.7%) males, and 1119 (52.3%) females, aged 15 to 90, participating in the second edition of *European Social Survey*, round 3.

The variables investigated are grouped in several modules:

- a) overall life satisfaction – *stflife* (how satisfied with life as a whole);
- b) time allocation – *sclmeet* (how often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues), *stffbot* (satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other activities);
- c) marital status – *evlvptn* (ever lived with a spouse or partner for 3 months or more), *evmar* (are or ever been married), *lvgtptne* (ever lived with a partner without being married), *dvrdev* (ever been divorced);
- d) children – *bthcld* (ever gave birth/ fathered a child), *nbthcld* (number of children given birth to/ fathered);
- e) attitudes to adulthood – *adllvhm* (to be considered an adult, how important to have left parental home), *adftjob* (to be considered an adult, how important to have full-time job), *adlvptn* (to be considered an adult, how important to have lived with spouse/ partner), *adpnt* (to be considered an adult, how important to become mother/ father);
- f) family behaviour – *iagpnt* (become mother/ farther, ideal age), *fmlenj* (how much time spent with immediate family is enjoyable), *fmlstrs* (how much time spent with immediate family is stressful);
- g) non-conformism – *ipertiv* (important to think new ideas and be creative), *impdiff* (important to try new and different things in life), *impfree* (important to make own decisions and to be free), *ipadvnt* (important to seek adventures and have an exciting life);
- h) educational profile – *edulvl* (highest level of education), *edulvlp* (partner's highest level of education).

For these selected variables, we employed, in SPSS 16: (1) cross-tabulation; (2) Pearson correlation; (3) multivariate analysis (factor analysis), in order to identify the links between time allocation, education, marital and family behaviour, life priorities, and the overall level of satisfaction with one's life. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

Results

The cross-tabulation for time allocation is presented in Table 1:

How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues * Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects													
		Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects											Total
		Extremely dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Extremely satisfied	
How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues	Never	0	4	0	3	0	6	1	2	3	3	0	22
	Less than once a month	4	7	12	20	15	52	17	23	16	5	2	173
	Once a month	1	3	12	13	16	32	15	14	9	2	0	117
	Several times a month	7	7	14	17	18	33	18	12	10	3	0	139
	Once a week	7	9	15	14	24	38	23	21	13	5	2	171
	Several times a week	4	8	8	7	13	23	11	11	9	3	1	98
	Every day	8	5	8	2	9	12	5	8	3	1	2	63
Total		31	43	69	76	95	196	90	91	63	22	7	783

Table 1. Cross-tabulation for time allocation

It can be seen that a lower frequency of socializing induces a feeling that the time spent on the job and personal time are not fairly balanced, impression stemming from a social frustration, while the vice-versa influence is not valid, as people highly socializing do not necessarily consider that their time is properly split. The correlation between being satisfied with time allocation and living with a partner is outlined in Table 2:

<i>Correlations</i>			
		Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects	Currently living with partner
Satisfied with balance	Pearson Correlation	1	-.135*
between time on job and	Sig. (2-tailed)		.043
time on other aspects	N	793	227
Currently living with	Pearson Correlation	-.135*	1
partner	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	
	N	227	822
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Table 2. Correlation between time allocation satisfaction and marital status

Persons involved in a relationship are rather dissatisfied with the way in which their time is allocated, considering that the balance is unfair. The correlation is not significant, in the case of married persons, signaling that informal relationships are more sensitive to time allocation than formal ones. The lack of information concerning the age of the informal relationship, which does not allow for a more sensitive analysis (it is presumable that, in time, informal relationships begin to resemble formal ones) is, in this case, a practical limitation.

The frequencies for the possible marital statuses are presented in Table 3:

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Are or ever been married	1634	505
Ever lived with a partner for three months or more	1653	486
Currently living with partner	90	732
Ever been divorced	95	1344

Table 3. Frequencies of marital statuses

The traditional family model is still prevalent, with most of the stable relationships resulting in marriage, low rate of divorces, and low number of persons currently living with partner, without being married. The distribution on age groups, of persons living with partner and persons being married is shown in Tables 4 and 5:

	<i>Currently living with partner</i>	
	Yes	No
	Mean	Mean
<i>Age of respondent, calculated</i>	38.38	41.13

Table 4. Correspondence between age and living with partner

The age of living with a partner without being married has increased, and there is no significant generation gap between the two categories. The gap between those living with a partner, and those being legally married, in the context of a general increase of the age at which a family is formed, is seen in Table 5:

	<i>Currently living with husband/wife</i>	
	Yes	No
	Mean	Mean
<i>Age of respondent, calculated</i>	49.70	48.58

Table 5. Correspondence between age and marriage

When asked which would be the ideal age to start a family, the majority of the respondents (526) indicate the age of 25, which looks more like a stereotype of the “cereal package” family age, than like a reality. The majority of the people in the sample (1476, corresponding to 69 percents) are parents of at least one child. One third of the people in the sample have two children. The factorial analysis of life perception is shown in Table 6:

Items	Loadings
<i>Factor 1: attitudes to adulthood ($\alpha = 0.887$)</i>	
To be considered as adult, how important to have left parental home	.658
To be considered as adult, how important to have a first job	.758
To be considered as adult, how important to live with a partner	.808
To be considered as adult, how important to become parent	.758
<i>Factor 2: marital status ($\alpha = 0.909$)</i>	
Ever lived with a partner for more than 3 months	.803
Are or ever been married	.860
<i>Factor 3: non-conformism ($\alpha = 0.716$)</i>	
Important to follow own rules and to be free	.631
Important to seek adventure and have an exciting life	.682

Table 6. Factors of life perception

The LISREL model of the correlations between observed variables and latent variables, in terms of configuring life perception, is shown in Figure 1 below:

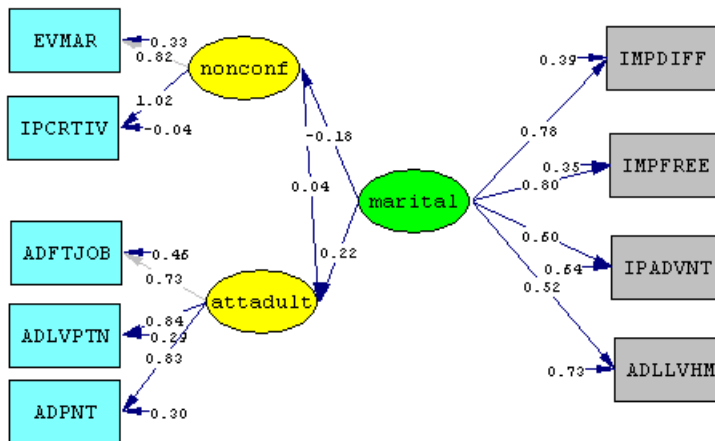


Figure 1. LISREL model of life perception

The observed variables are rearranged, in such a way that the decision to get married, together with inclination towards creativity, are influencers of non-conformism, while a lust for adventure and excitement, interest in freedom and difference are, in their turn, leading to one marital status or another. Predictably, the decision to leave parental home, in order to start an adult life, is included in the latent variable *marital*. The latent variable *attitudes towards adulthood* are the most consistent, including, after the model is run, the variables presumed from the beginning.

The way persons in the sample perceive life is mainly conditioned by their attitudes to adulthood, by their marital status, and by their degree of non-conformism. In the sample's opinion, all the four potential indicators of adulthood seem to be important, still, the most important indicator of adulthood, judging by the number of persons opting for it (956 of the total of 2139), is having a full-time job, which accounts for the degree of responsibility attached to job, as compared with living separately (632 choices), or becoming a parent (799 choices). Still, 1018 (47.6%) of the persons in the sample consider that all the time they spend with their families is enjoyable, while only 180 (8.41%) find their job interesting and enjoyable. Most persons (540) work, on average, 40 hours per week, and their partners work the same. For most of the respondents (1074), these hours are worked in the main job, pleading for a traditional employment model. Most of the respondents (1647) are employees, and so are their partners (519).

Still, 942 people in the sample think it is very important, or important, to be different, which indicates that there exists a latent non-conformist model, which is not manifest, in the current job and familial context.

Conclusions

Our analysis indicated the correlations between marital status, attitudes towards child bearing, views on adulthood and non-conformist behaviors, integrated into a model of life perception, outlining the connection between family choices and time allocation, as a component of lifestyle.

In terms of opinions held about family, the transition is not clear, as most of the questioned persons tend to adhere to the traditional family, with legally married partners becoming parents in their 20s. Still, an emergent non-conformist behavior pleads for a change in this perception, together with a time allocation pattern which seems to favor work, although time spent with immediate family is perceived as enjoyable.

People included in the sample tend to be non-conformist in their intimate opinions but, as many of them are hard workers, employees spending 40 hours per week, or more, in their jobs, and considering job as very important for adult life,

they take the conformist approach when playing their social roles. Still, this non-conformist latent behavior is likely to have significant effects on their particular lifestyle, whose spread and importance is to be more thoroughly investigated.

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