

Research Seminar by TLU Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Lifecourse Studies:

Partnership dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Background: Remarkable changes in partnership formation and dissolution have occurred in the last decades across Europe – marriage is being postponed or even replaced by cohabitation (as an alternative living arrangement for unmarried adults), divorce is increasing, and more individuals now re-enter the partner market and eventually re-partner. Prior research has noted that levels of union formation and dissolution have not been increasing uniformly across countries and instead appear to be diverging. This divergence in behaviors across countries underscores the importance of the socio-economic, socio-cultural, policy, and institutional context for understanding changes in partnership formation and dissolution. However, only few comparative studies examine how partnership formation and dissolution patterns differ across countries. And if they do, studies tend to focus more strongly on the United States and Western European countries than on Central and Eastern European countries. **Objective:** Against this background, I will first examine holistic partnership trajectories between ages 15 and 45 using cohabitation and marriage histories for 117,571 respondents in 10 Central and Eastern European countries. This approach allows examining the complexity of relationship transitions across the life-course by simultaneously investigating the timing and sequencing of partnership formation, as well as union dissolution and re-partnering. Second, I will examine cross-national differences in the timing and duration of the partnerships and whether or not the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and partnership formation, as well as union dissolution and re-partnering are similar or different across countries. **Methods:** Using the Harmonized Histories database (<https://www.ggp-i.org/data/>) and selecting all available Central and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Russia), I apply sequence analysis to identify typical and atypical patterns in partnership histories, as well as discrete-time hazard models to investigate the timing and duration of partnerships. **Preliminary results:** There are considerable differences in levels of re-partnering across the Central and Eastern European countries in the sample, at the same time however, associations between socio-demographic characteristics and partnership formation (of first or higher order partnerships) are similar. Age at union dissolution is negatively associated with re-partnering in almost all countries. **Next steps:** I will conduct sensitivity analyses regarding the categorization of partnership trajectories and investigate further to what extent both country context and individual-level characteristics play a role in union formation and dissolution across Central and Eastern European countries. Prospectively, this study will contrast with findings for the United States and Western Europe and provide insights into whether the underlying reasons for family change are universal.