**The Development of Period Nuptiality in Europe and the USA: A comparative Analysis (1950-2010)**

**Byron Kotzamanis,** *University of Thessaly*
**Anastasia Kostaki,** *Athens University of Economics and Business*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Second World War, most developed countries have experienced considerable socio-economic changes that affected every aspect of family life. These changes have been reflected on the various demographic indices, and also had a major impact on the marriage patterns. In most developed countries, marriage rates have declined, whilst the prevalence of cohabitation has risen. In recent decades, the tendency to leave together out of marriage is constantly increasing in the majority of countries and consequently nuptiality is depressed or delayed. However in a group of countries cohabitation out of marriage, though increasing is still extremely limited.

Nevertheless the rates of these changes vary considerably between countries. Therefore an examination of two key indicators i.e. the Total First Marriage Rate for females (hereafter TFMR) and the mean age at first marriage, for females, allows us to highlight the various nuptiality patterns throughout the seven postwar decades, as a direct result of differential socio-economic development, as well as of differences in the cultural characteristics of populations. Based on empirical data, collected from various sources, the values of TFMR and the mean age at marriage for females are calculated, for each year during the time period considered, for the majority of European countries, as well as for the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Based on the evolution through time of the two indicators considered, homogeneous groups of countries were created, in relation to their nuptiality levels and patterns.

### A. Classification according to the values for TFMR

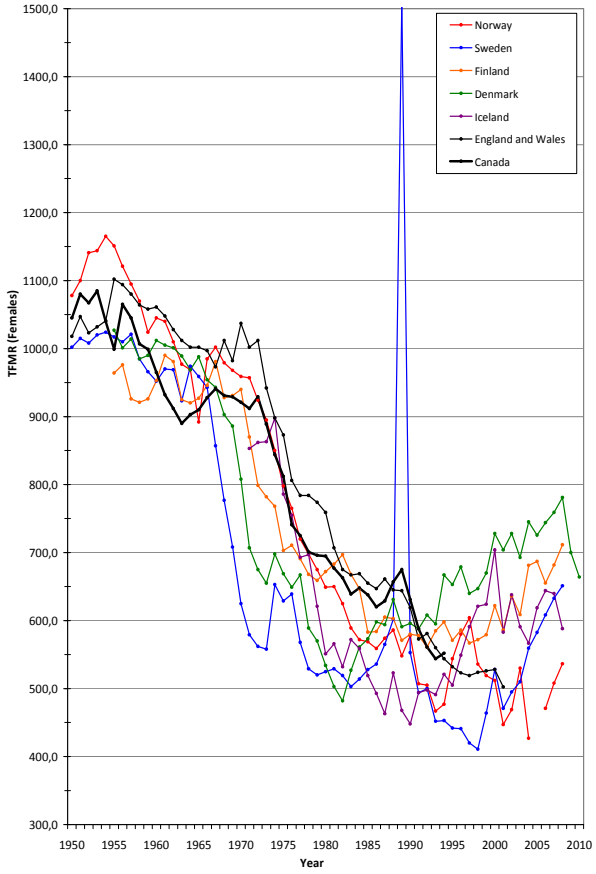
In the majority of countries, until 1950, the values of TFMR were extremely high corresponding 900-1100 first marriages per 1000 women. These high values reflect the high levels of nuptiality of the cohorts involved, as well as, the decline of the average age at first marriage. Exceptions are the southern European countries and Ireland where the values of TFMR, though relatively high, they are below the limit of 900 first marriages per 1000 women. In the middle of the current decade, the values of TFMR have halved and in none of these countries exceed 650 first marriages per 1000 women.

These extremely low values correspond to different realities. Though these values are mainly due to the rise of the average age of the generations involved, in these countries (Northern Europe) where new partnership models tend to emerge (especially the cohabitation out of marriage), low values of TFMR not necessarily mean a significant increase in the rates of younger generations of women who will stay until late in life without a partner. In contrast, in countries where the institution of marriage remains strong and dominant (ie. in Southern European countries), the fall of TFMR and its low values for a long time period will inevitably lead to the rapid increase in the proportion of unmarried women in the younger generations (> 1970).

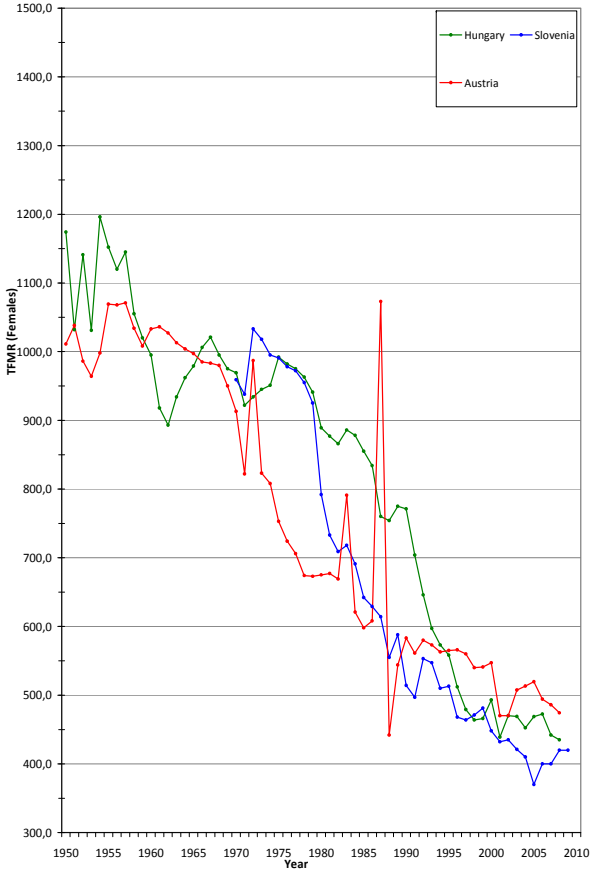
**Table 1 Classification according to the values for TFMR**

| | 1950-1955 | 1955-1960 | 1960-1965 | 1965-1970 | 1970-1975 | 1975-1980 | 1980-1985 | 1985-1990 | 1990-1995 | 1995-2000 | 2000-2005 | ->2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group 1 "North Europe"– model** *+Canada* | ↔ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↔ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Group 2 "Central Europe" model** *Hungary, Slovenia, Austia* | ↔ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| **Group 3 "Western Europe" model** *+New Zealand* | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ |
| **Group 4a Ex socialist European countries model** *Bulgaria, Poland, Croatia, Slovak and Czech Republics* | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| **Group 4b Ex-socialists' Baltic countries model** *Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia* | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ |
| **Group 5 "South Europe" model** *Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland* | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| **U.S.A.** | | | ↑ | ↑ | ↓ | ↔ | ↔ | ↓ | | | | |

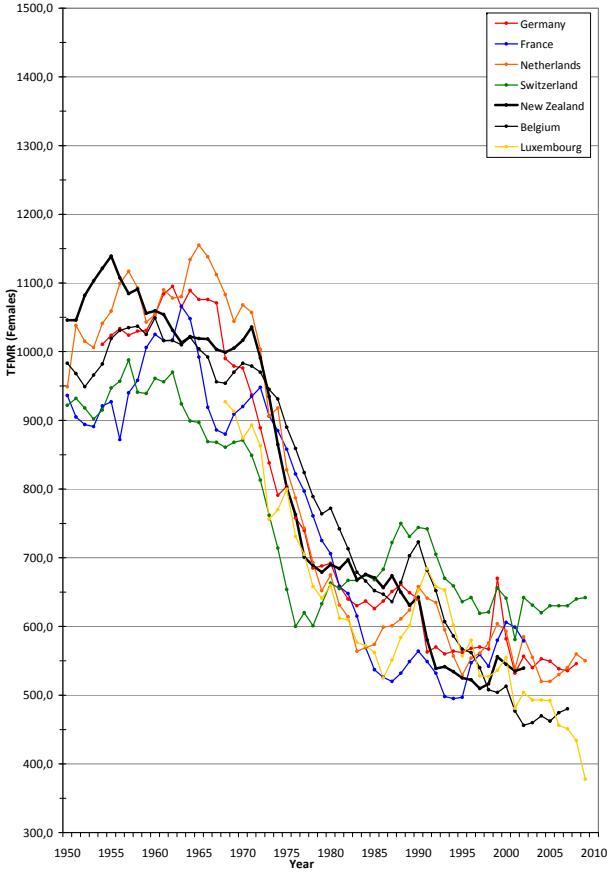
## Group 1



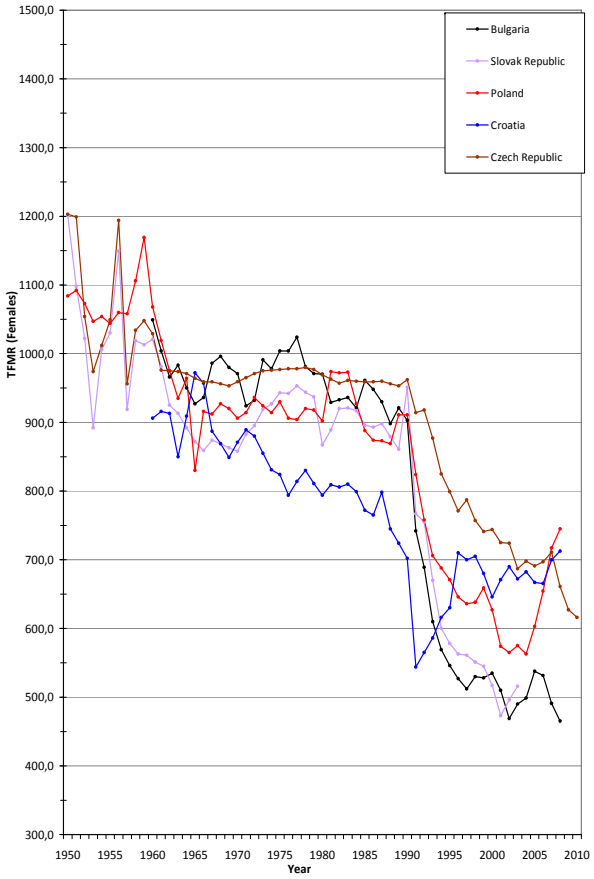

## Group 2



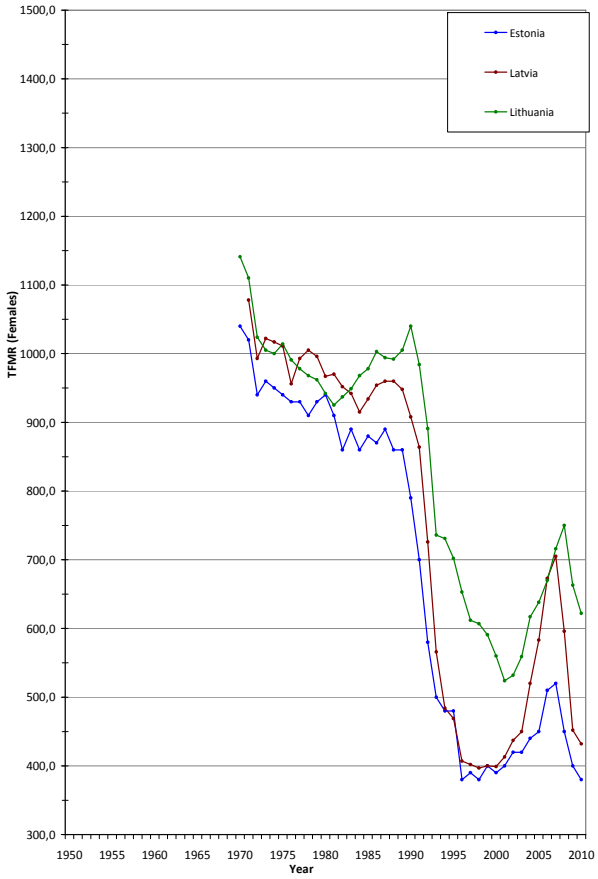

## Group 3



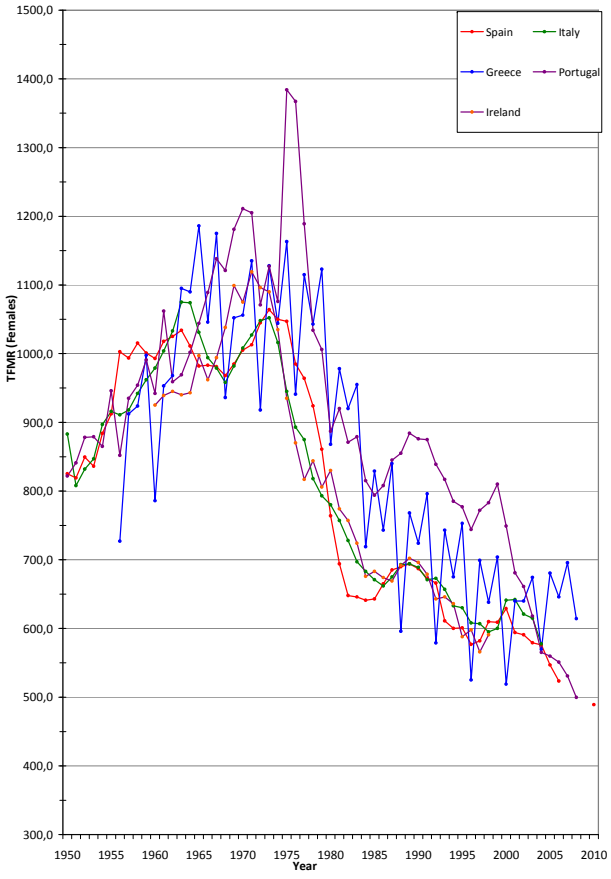
## Group 4a




## Group 4b




## Group 5



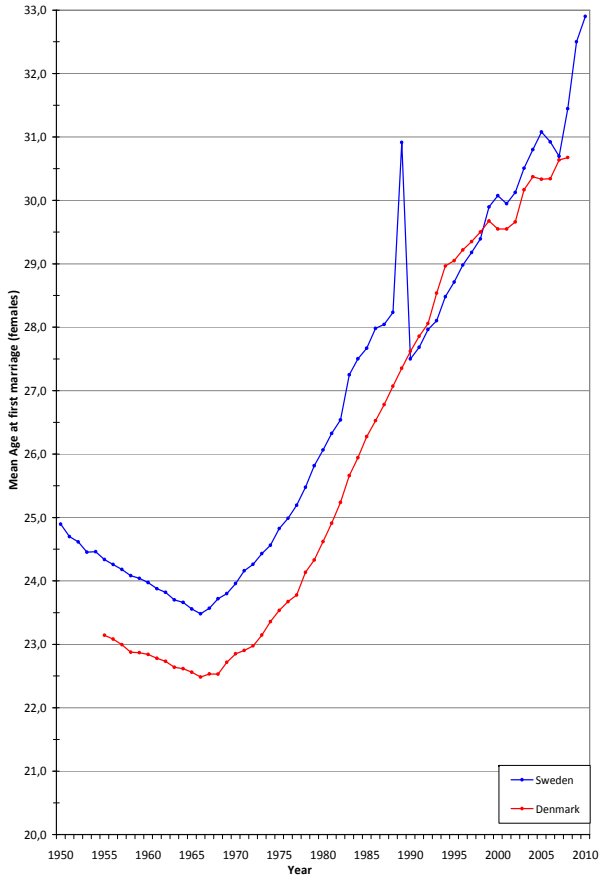
**B. Classification according to the values of mean age at first marriage**

At the beginning of the time period considered, the mean age at marriage considerably varied between countries (20-26,5 years) and was lower for the former socialist European countries and the U.S. than for the other developed countries. The classification of countries according the mean age at marriage slightly differs of the one based on the values of TFMR.

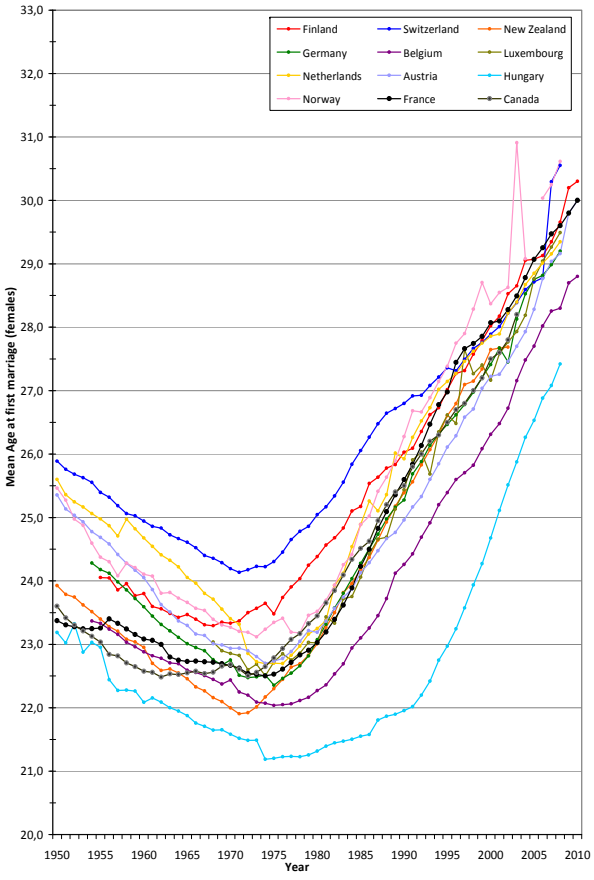
**Table 2 Classification according to the mean age at first marriage**

| | 1950-1955 | 1955-1960 | 1960-1965 | 1965-1970 | 1970-1975 | 1975-1980 | 1980-1985 | 1985-1990 | 1990-1995 | 1995-2000 | 2000-2005 | ->2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group 1 "The pioneers" model** *Denmark+Sweden* | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Group 2 "North-West" Europe model** *+Canada* | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Group 3a Ex socialist European countries model** *Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovak and Czech Republics* | ↓ | ↓ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↔ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Group 3β Ex-socialists' Baltic c countries model** *Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia* | | | | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Group 4 "South Europe" model** *Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland* | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **USA** | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |

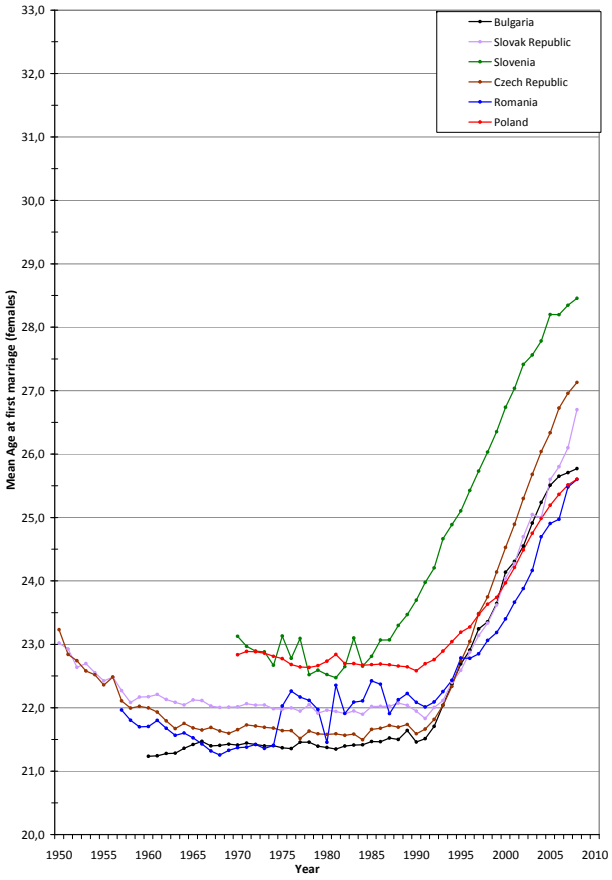
## Group 1



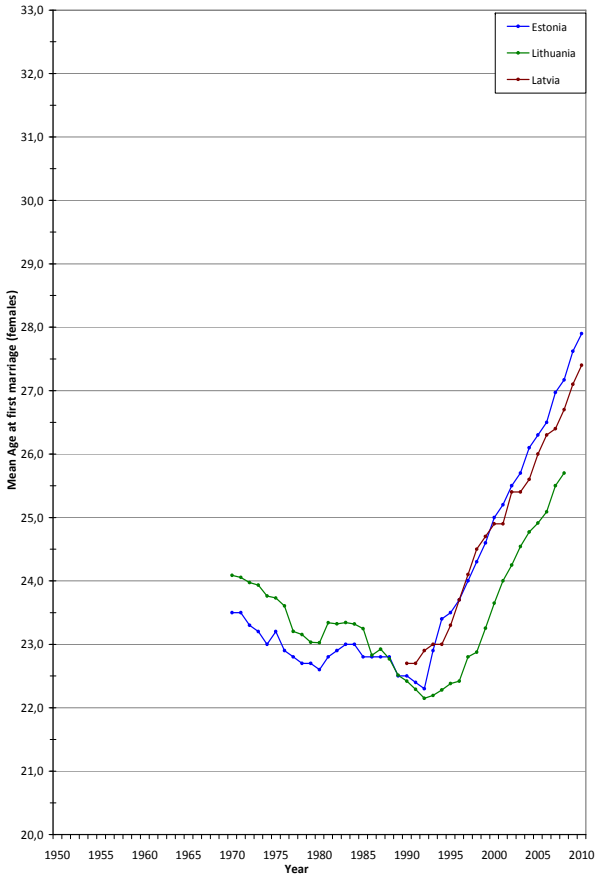

## Group 2



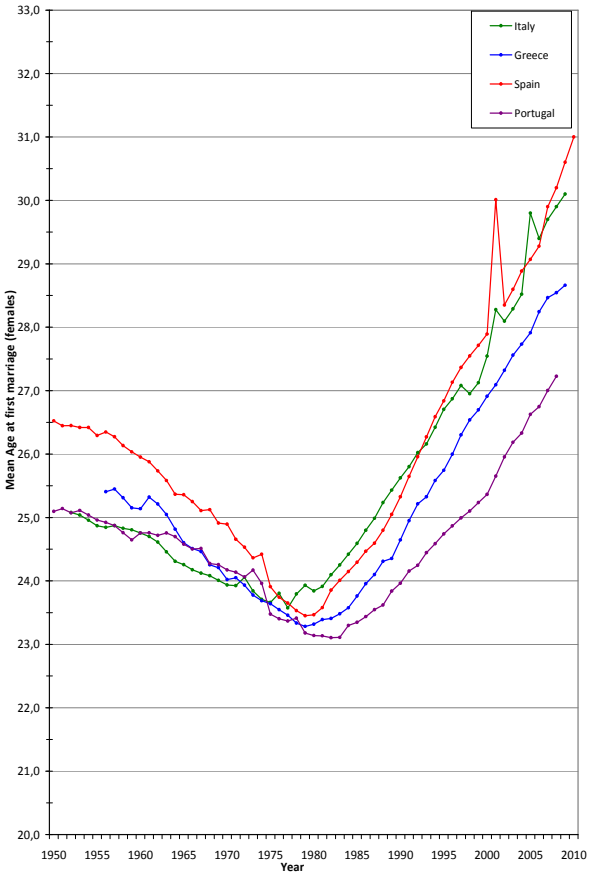

## Group 3a



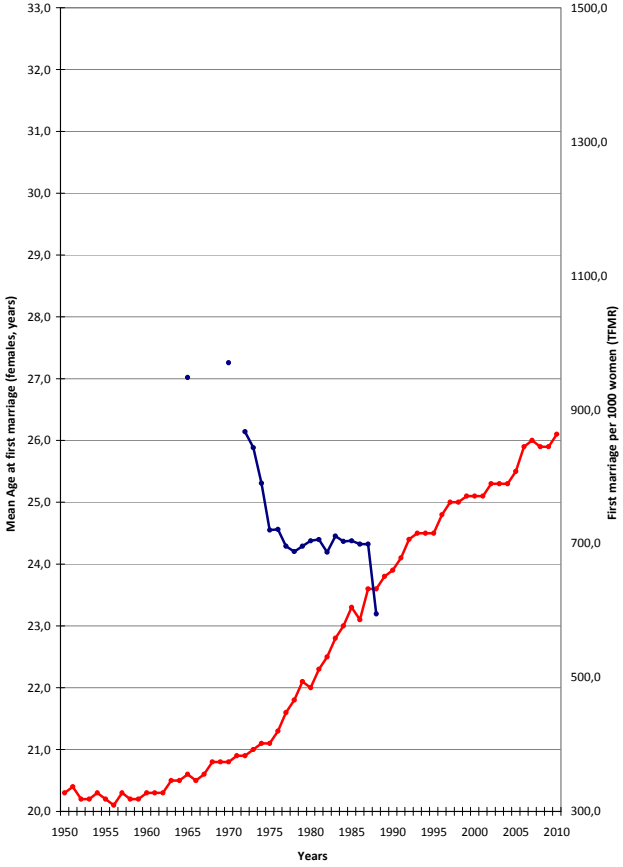
**Group 3b**




**Group 4b**




**USA** *(TFMR and median age)*

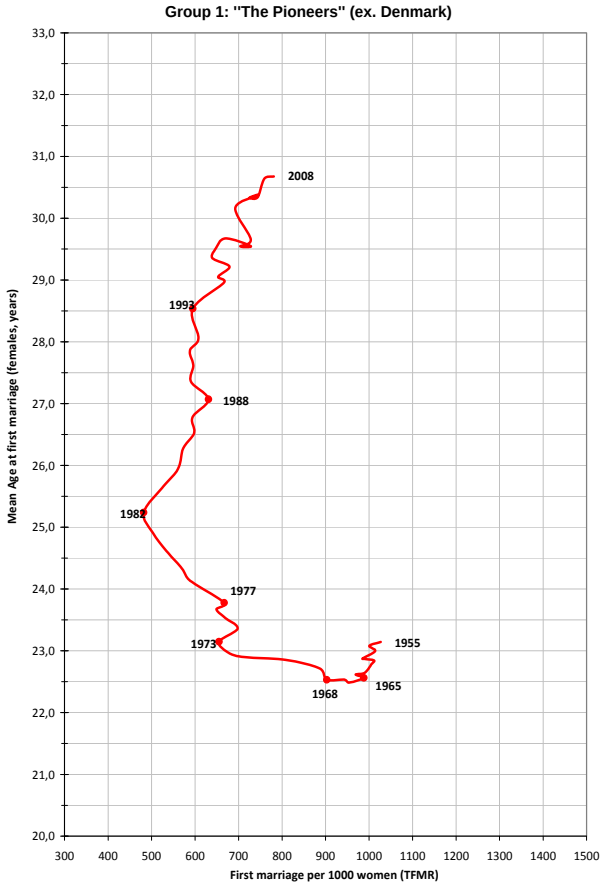


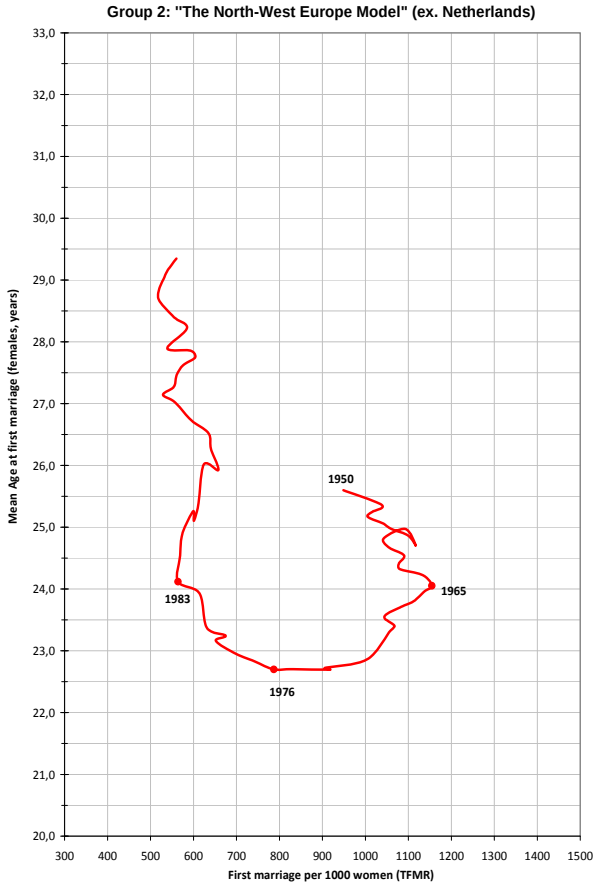
## C. Classification according to the mean age at marriage and the TFMR values

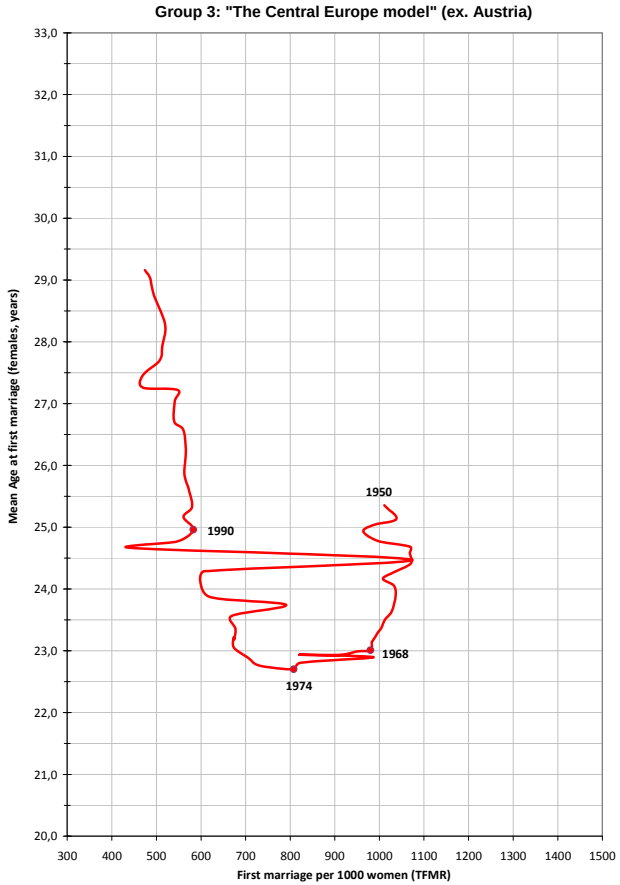
The analysis of the time evolution of the two cross-sectional indicators (TFR and mean age at first marriage) allows a classification of countries in 6 groups.

### Table 3 Classification according to the mean age at marriage and the TFMR values

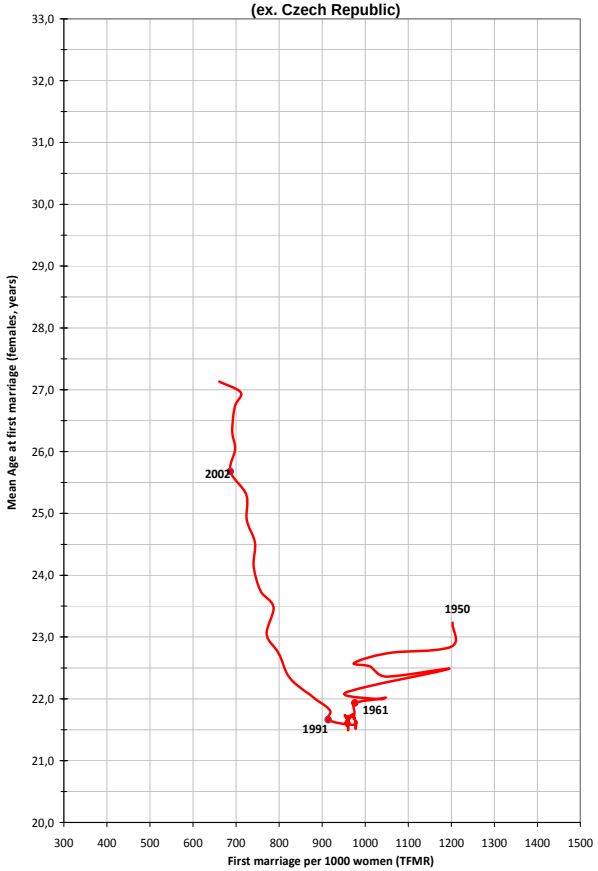
| | |
|---|---|
| Group 1<br>"The pioneers" model<br>*Denmark+Sweden* | This group consists of the two leading countries (Sweden and Denmark). The curve reflects a long period of an exponential increase of the mean age and a simultaneous rapid decline of TFMR at the beginning of the period, while a, reversing this trend during the last two decades (see graph. Denmark). |
| Group 2<br>"North-West"Europe model | For the countries of this group the values of mean age at the beginning of the time period considered are much higher than for the countries of Group 1, while the falling of mean age in the beginning followed by a rapid rise until the recently. The fall of TFMR begins later than for the countries of Group 1 and the values of TFMR are stabilized over the last two decades (see graph. Netherlands). |
| Group 3<br>"Central Europe" model<br>*Hungary, Slovenia, Austria* | The countries of this group are characterized by a fairly stable TFMR and a fall of mean age, during the first three decades. At the outset the mean age stabilized and the TMR is falling, while during the recent decades the values of TFMR are more or less stabilized and the mean age is constantly increased (see graph. Austria). |
| Group 4α<br>Ex socialist European countries model | This group is characterized by the lowest mean age and a slow decline of the values of both TFMR and mean age, at the beginning of the period considered while by a rapid increase of mean age and a simultaneous slow decline of TFMR after 1990 (see graph. Czech Republic). |
| Group 4β<br>Ex-socialists' Baltic c countries model<br>*Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia* | This group characterizes by a low mean age at the beginning of the period and a constant decline of TFMR and the mean age during the decades 1970-1990. Thereafter the mean age is constantly increasing until 2005 and the TFMR exponential declines until it reach the lowest levels (400 first marriages per 1000 women (see graph. Estonia). |
| Group 5<br>"South Europe" model<br>*Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland* | This group is clearly different than all the others groups. TFMR exhibits an increase during the first two postwar decades while the mean age falls. At the outset the mean age is constantly increasing while TFMR is significantly decreasing through time while and finally it becomes stabilized in recent years (see graph. Italy). |


Group 1: "The Pioneers" (ex. Denmark)
Mean Age at first marriage (females, years)
First marriage per 1000 women (TFMR)
2008
1993
1988
1982
1977
1973
1968
1965
1955

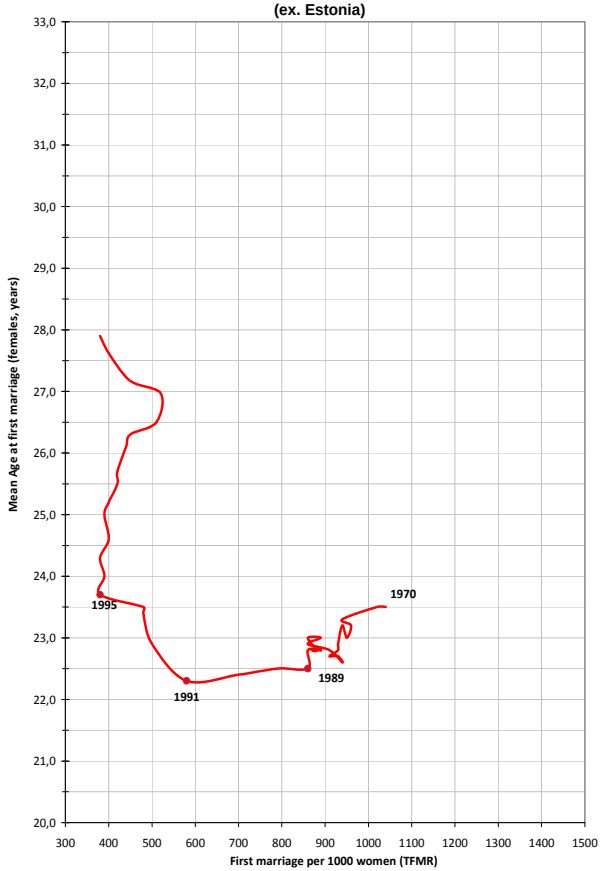

Group 2: "The North-West Europe Model" (ex. Netherlands)
Mean Age at first marriage (females, years)
First marriage per 1000 women (TFMR)
1950
1965
1983
1976


Group 3: "The Central Europe model" (ex. Austria)
Mean Age at first marriage (females, years)
First marriage per 1000 women (TFMR)
1950
1990
1968
1974

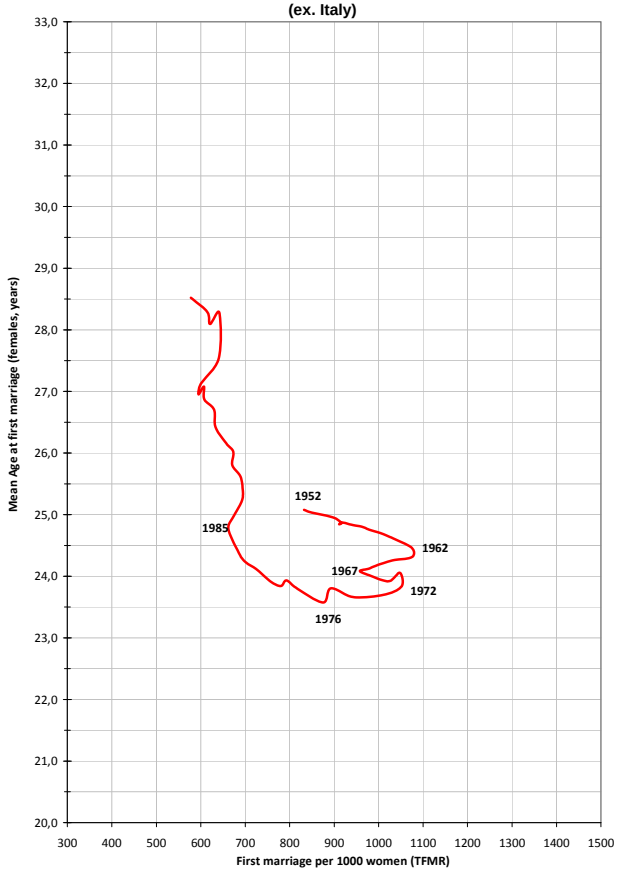
**Group 4a: "The ex-socialist European Countries Model" (ex. Czech Republic)**




**Group 4b: "The ex-socialist Baltic Countries Model" (ex. Estonia)**




**Group 5: "The South Europe model" (ex. Italy)**



**CONCLUSIONS**

The types of marital life have changed considerably in the developed countries since the end of the Second World War. While during the first post-war period the TFMR took extremely high values (around 1000 first marriages for 1000 women) reflecting the decline of the % of unmarried women born during the interwar period as well as the reduction of the average age at first marriage, during the last two decades, the values of the TFMR are the lowest recorded in the demographic history reflecting the rise in the average age at first marriage and at the same time the rapid increase of the % of unmarried women in the generations born after 1960-65.

However, in a lot of developed countries considered, the changes of the TFMR values also reflect a radical change in the first post war years' dominant model of family. In these countries, new partnership models emerge and become dominant, as the percentages of people living together outside marriage tend to be greater than the corresponding ones of people living in marriage, while the percentages of out of marriage births exceed 40%. Obviously, in countries where the values of TFMR are extremely low over the two recent decades (Sweden, Finland, Island, Norway, France, Belgium, New Zeeland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Bulgaria etc), the percentages of out of wedlock births exceed 40% while in contrary, in countries where the TFMR takes higher values (Greece, Switzerland, Croatia, Poland, Italy), the percentages of births outside marriage is still relatively shrunken (<20%).

Obviously the rates of these changes vary considerably between countries, as revealed by the examination of the two key indicators (TFMR and the mean age at marriage for females) for the 35 developed countries considered, throughout the seven postwar decades. This analysis allowed us to highlight the differences between the various nuptiality patterns, closely related to the differential socio-economic development of these countries, and differences in their cultural characteristics.

**SOURCES**

**UN, Demographic year book**
**US, Census Bureau**
**EUROSTAT, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/data/database**
**Statistics Canada**
**Statistics New Zeeland**
**INED, http://www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/**
**Observatoire Démographique Européen (ODE) base des données**