

# SOCIOLOGICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC AND SPATIAL ASPECTS OF THE SINGLES PHENOMENON IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Marián Halás, Lucie Formanová<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Palacký University Olomouc, 17. listopadu 12, 771 46 Olomouc, marian.halas@upol.cz, lucie.for@gmail.com

## Abstract

The growing number of single people, postponing marriages until later or alternative forms of cohabitation, are topics which are appearing more and more often in the headlines of not only glossy magazines for the so called “modern men” but also of daily broadsheets. We speak about a new lifestyle – singles. In Western Europe it is quite a common term, in the Czech Republic, however, it is a new trend which has been recently gaining popularity.

The aim of the article is a complex evaluation of the singles phenomenon, mainly at the theoretical level with emphasis on its sociological and demographic aspects. In the brief empirical part we are going to try to analyze selected demographic indicators concerning the singles phenomenon (e.g. nuptiality, divorce rate, the average age of mothers at first birth, the proportion of children born out of wedlock etc.), their development in the whole area of the Czech Republic and partly also their spatial differentiation.

**Key words:** singles, sociological aspects, demographic aspects, spatial differentiation, the Czech Republic.

## INTRODUCTION

Even the Czech Republic has seen some social changes in relation to the singles phenomenon. In the years preceding 1989, during the Communist era, the young generation had limited possibilities of self-realization (i.e. career building, social activities or travelling). For this reason people were forced to find an alternative in which they could fulfil their needs and desires. Marriage and its consummation became the alternative. The proportion of singles was in the then society substantially lower than it is today.

As has already been hinted, the current situation of the Czech society is quite the opposite. This has led not only to significant demographic changes – with which a large part of the article deals – but also to a shift in understanding marriage and values

related to it. As Černý (2003) puts forth, today's Czechs consider the traditional contents of a marriage (mutuality, exclusivity and understanding) as less important in comparison with inhabitants of other post-Communist countries in Europe. Marriage is more often viewed as an institution which limits personal freedom, kills romance in relationships and thus breeds contempt. Marriage is also still connected with the idea of “a tool for conceiving children”, which does not have to be seen always positively. These three reasons thus support the single phenomenon, which is connected mainly in the eyes of the young with freedom and individual successes. We can therefore say that marriage has lost to a certain extent its significance; evidence for this finding is to be found in the up-to-date statistics of the Czech Statistical Office – the nuptiality has been significantly decreasing (see chapter below).

A change of the approach to families in the current Czech society is reflected in the values and attitudes of the young generation. Young people clearly demonstrate that their values and lifestyle are different than those of their parents (Tuček et al. 1998). In other words we can say that at present various alternatives of partnership at the expense of traditional marriage are gaining support and popularity.

## **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASICS**

### **Definition of the term ‘singles’**

If we want to deal with the singles phenomenon, we must first of all state what the term denotes and what we can include within its concept. The singles term, like most terms in social sciences, is also a bit problematic when forming generally accepted definitions. This is not to be understood negatively. A larger number of definitions is an evidence of a developing approach to the given issue and of an intensive interest in it. The aim of the chapter thus is not to create such a definition but rather to sum up given approaches, which is fully sufficient for the purpose of the article.

As was already stated before, there are several ways how to approach the singles term. The first way is to focus on the very meaning of the word ‘singles’. From the statistical point of view we speak about a single person – single referring to his/her legal marital status. A decisive criterion of such approach is the marital status of the given individual. We can therefore assume that all men and women who have not for any reasons decided to enter into a marriage fall into this group. At present there is also a tendency to include within the group people with homosexual orientation who refused the possibility of a registered partnership. In this case it is, however, debatable if such people should be considered single – not always can they enter the same equivalent of a marriage and thus many of them should not fall into this group at all. And it becomes evident that the definitions are not fully satisfying – although a certain criterion is given, in this case the marital status, with respect to the above mentioned problem the criterion becomes misleading. It does

not take into consideration possible restrictions, limits and motivations of individuals who do not live in a marriage. On the other hand a clear asset of such approach is a relatively easy collection of data and their subsequent evaluation.

The second approach to the singles phenomenon – despite being based on the marital status of an individual – takes into account motivations which make the individual choose such lifestyle. According to Jan-dourek (2009) singles are individuals who do not want to enter into a marriage since such lifestyle accommodates their needs. Their motivation is mainly a bigger chance to focus on their careers, pastimes and the possibility to enter more sexual relationships.

The main advantage of this definition is unequivocally the approach to the marital status which is not taken solely as a fact. It is rather viewed as a result which has a certain telling value; what really matters is, however, the cause and motivation of an individual for such behaviour. Hence we have new possibilities which can provide us with more objective data. However, the question is who, according to this definition, we can include among singles and who not. There are two examples which can be seen to a certain extent controversial – single parents and Catholic priests. By looking at the everyday life of a family of parents who have not entered into a marriage we find out that the only difference is that the mother and father are not married. With the Catholic priests the question is even more complicated. Even though they live as singles they do so since it is “prescribed”, it is something that their vocation requires. Again we can see that even this definition shows certain imperfections, that although it is more elaborate it still can not define the singles phenomenon precisely and absolutely.

Another example of a similar type of definition is the singles concept in the work of Stein (1981), who defines the phenomenon solely on the basis of reasons and motivations, whose result is a single status of an individual. According to Stein the following can be included among motivations – career building, sexual preferences, responsibility connected with family, demographic conditions, lower social intelligence or serious health problems.

Apart from the two basic approaches it is worthwhile to mention a categorization created by Hertel et al. (2007). They offer a new view on the matter. The first – or broad – concept of the single phenomenon is based upon the above mentioned definitions and includes single, divorced or widowed persons – according to demographic characteristics the ones who are not married. What is reflected is the development of a life of an individual with respect to his/her relationships, which can be understood as a positive step forward. The second – or narrow – concept of the singles phenomenon deals with the relationship between two people and introduces division into two main groups – groups with a partner and groups without a partner. In this case they refer to a long-term partnership. The last category aims at the single status and its detailed description. Again we can see a certain thought progress, the single status is not understood only as an interim period in the life of an individual. It is rather a period during which an individual looks for a steady relationship which leads to a marriage. It is not considered a lifestyle.

In spite of the fact that each of the above mentioned definitions puts emphasis on different criteria as to who should be considered single, it can be said that they all draw upon the same basis. They all assume that singles are individuals who do not have a long-term partnership. Apart from the more or less general definitions there is a tendency nowadays to define the singles phenomenon in more detail. Geißler (2002) defines singles as young or middle-aged individuals who do not have a steady relationship and who have chosen to live alone for a longer period of time. Such definition comes with quite a specific description of a part of society which can be defined as singles. As a criterion it counts not only on the absence of a partner but it relies also on age structure. Without doubt it is an interesting approach which does not take into account motivations that make the people live alone. The age certainly plays a significant part. We can also have a look at an example from Czech sociology, namely at a definition by Radimská and Tomášek (2003). According to it singles are people who do

not live in couples, who live without their lifetime partners. A substantial part of this group is made up by relatively young people (from 25 up to 40 years of age) who have more or less decided to live alone without a partner in order to develop other than family strategies.

### **Historical development of the singles phenomenon**

If we see the singles phenomenon as a certain type of a lifestyle, we must definitely deal with its historical development. The very presence of the historical perspective is a proof that it is a long-term, and at the same time a new trend.

Schwartz and Scott (2003) prove this statement on the growing number of women living alone as early as in the half of the 19th century. Being single was viewed rather negatively in the past, which usually meant that such people were excluded from the society and had to face prejudices on the part of the then society. It is also not very surprising that in this respect women were exposed to a much bigger pressure. They became literally a laughing stock and their status within the society was far from enviable. Exceptions were only women who devoted their lives to the help of others. Marriage at that time had a much bigger economic significance, the so called marriages of convenience being an evidence. Despite a strict attitude of the society to the single status, the number of singles was growing. The reason were new social and economic possibilities especially for women. Since the 1970s the attitude of the society to the singles phenomenon has changed. This was caused mainly by the higher education of women, better work prospects and by the invention of a more effective control of conception. The fight for the rights and freedom of women has brought about a change in the presumption that a marriage is something inevitable in the life of a woman.

At present the society has gone through many essential changes so the singles phenomenon is viewed as something fully legitimate and something that every individual can freely choose. Personal freedom and independence are often more

appreciated than marriage. Despite this a long-term partnership is still understood as something expected and typical – something that everyone should head towards. Even today many people still consider a single person as a violator of the “right” family and gender behaviour. That is why part of the today’s society still does not understand the singles phenomenon and reasons why some people choose such lifestyle.

### **Singles typology**

As has already been mentioned above, the singles phenomenon is a relatively new trend in the society, it is still undergoing some changes and that is the reason why it is not easy to find a general definition of the concept. As a result it is necessary to modify and specify typologies which are related to the phenomenon. In the 1970s and 1980s the typology was based upon a single individual who was not married for a long time, but who preferred a more open form of cohabitation. As an example we can take Staples’ (1981) typology based on the degree of “openness” of a relationship:

- a) free-floating single (the most frequent type who is characterized by the absence of commitments and random dates),
- b) open-coupled relationship (an open type who is characterized by a steady relationship and sexual relationships outside the steady partnership),
- c) closed-coupled (closed couples whose sexual and romantic needs are accommodated only within the couple; faithfulness plays an important part),
- d) committed singles (these are characterized by a certain type of a commitment – engagement and cohabitation in one household),
- e) accommodationists (these are characterized by a temporary or permanent lives without partners; typical of higher age categories).

A disadvantage of the typology is the fact that even persons living in cohabitation (cohabitation – two individuals living together) are included in it – i.e. a phenomenon quite rare in the past. With respect to the development of our society and the growing number of people leading such lives it is

essential to re-evaluate this fact. In other words cohabitation is not a marginal phenomenon nowadays; it should not be included in the singles phenomenon, it is rather a pre-stage of matrimony or even its alternative.

Another typology which is a contemporary alternative is the typology according to Stein (1981). As opposed to Staples’ model it takes as an essential and basic factor of the singles phenomenon “the acceptance of values of personal growth, freedom and chances of prospects, or transfer of these values originally connected with the youth to older generations”. Based on the combination of these values it distinguishes between four basic types:

- a) voluntary temporaries (young, single and divorced),
- b) voluntary stables (young singles, priests, members of religious orders who are satisfied with their current statuses),
- c) involuntary temporaries (young and older singles looking for partners),
- d) involuntary stables (older divorced, widowed, single, who wanted to enter into a marriage but did not find a suitable partner and have come to terms with their status).

Many authors agree that we need to take into account the fact that many people whom we would include in the category of singles live alone; this is, however, not completely true. We can speak about the so called alternative relationships which we can further divide into sub-groups. This phenomenon is dealt with in the works of the sociologist Tomášek (2006). Within the first group he includes – according to him surprisingly – a large group of single women who are in a long-term relationship with a married man. Such relationship is fairly free. Another group is made up by the so called weekend marriages, a relationship when partners meet only in their free time, they do not live in one household. There is a similar concept in English; such relationships are referred to as living apart together (LAT). Another group of alternative relationships is formed by long-distance relationships and one night stands. And last but not least Tomášek speaks about other open relationships when partners agree on a certain – even sexual – freedom in their relationship.

**Table 1** Advantages of the lifestyle of the singles and marriage. Source: Benokraitis (2002).

| Lifestyle of the single                     | Marriage   |
|---|--|
| Privacy, more freedom, independence         | Mutuality  |
| Varied sexual experience                    | Steady reliable sexual partner                       |
| Exciting, changeable lifestyle              | Love, reliability                                    |
| Meeting new people with different interests | Common interests                                     |
| Economic independence                       | Common financial resources                           |
| No responsibility for partner and children  | Social recognition of marriage and care for children |
| Need for independence                       | Need to “belong somewhere”, be part of a family      |

## SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE SINGLES PHENOMENON

### Lifestyle of the singles

Although at first sight it may not be evident, singles do not represent a homogeneous group. Their lifestyles and motivations can sometimes be very different. This can be clearly seen in the typology of activities and orientation in their lives (Schwartz and Scott 2003):

- a) Supportive (the determining activity of such people is the help and support of the others; they find fulfilment in jobs such as teachers or in those whose primary goal is to help the needy),
- b) Passive (these people act rather passively when forming their lives; such people like spending time alone; their level of social participation is low and their view of life tends to be negative),
- c) Activists (for this group of singles is typical their involvement in political and social lives; their fulfilment comes from their participation in forming public matters),
- d) Individualistic (a characteristic feature of this group of singles is their emphasis on autonomy and personal development; independence and privacy are viewed as a means to achieve individual growth),
- e) Social (people in this group are opposites of the above mentioned passive singles; they are often involved in more personal relationships and rarely spend their time alone; their priority are friends and social activities),

- f) Professional (as the name of this group suggests, these people devote most of their energy to their professions and often they identify themselves with it).

Even though this typology is very clearly organized and discloses possible causes of the lifestyles of the singles, it also has its disadvantages. One of the two disadvantages is the fact that the authors of the typology automatically presume interconnection of the lifestyle of the singles with a specific stereotype which should replace the absent relationship. The other disadvantage is a rather problematic classification of individuals into groups – in many cases these can easily mingle.

### Advantages and disadvantages of being single

The lifestyle of the single has its positives and negatives, while advantages usually surpass over the disadvantages (especially in the eyes of the young) and thus make such lifestyle very attractive. In Stein's terminology (Stein 1981) two terms describing such characteristics appear – push and pull factors. Push factors represent negative or discouraging aspects and pull factors the positive or attractive aspects of the lifestyle of the singles. The survey of the advantages of the lifestyle of the singles and marriage (Benokraitis 2002), presented in Table 1, draws upon the Stein's concept.

Whether the push or pull factors prevail depends on the individual characteristics of an individual such as sex, age, race, social status, education, financial situation, sexual orientation, and also accessibility

and intensity of the so called supportive relationship networks, e.g. family, friends (Campbell 2002). If we look at the advantages of a marriage, we find out that they are based on traditional values such as fulfilment of a desire to start a family, to have children, the possibility that one can rely on their partner, deeper emotional experiences, stable emotional bond, security, recognized social status, prestige and financial stability. All these can be viewed as the pull factors of matrimony. Generally speaking, the society highly respects such values due to their traditional character and thus these are preferred. Their disadvantage is, however, that sometimes the society puts them forth too vehemently, which can lead to a strong refusal and resistance on the side of some individuals who feel that these values are imposed on them.

If we compare the positives of the lifestyle of the singles and those of a marriage, we come to a conclusion – not surprising – that for most singles a long-term relationship or a marriage is a hindrance to self-fulfilment and a limitation in keeping and/or starting other relationships. This is also due to the fact that nowadays being married does not make a person an adult. In the past an individual was considered an adult only when he started his/her own family and was able to provide for it. A current criterion is rather a manifestation of individual freedom which is usually achieved through a well-paid job.

For most sociological surveys being single and married are opposites. Some authors point out in their works that married people are happier. Also, according to some statistics, married men live longer, are happier and healthier. Single men, on the other hand, commit suicide twice as often as married men; divorced men even three time more often.

### **Motivation to be single**

If we understand the lifestyle of the singles as their choice based upon the above mentioned transformation of values and attitudes of an individual, and a bigger tolerance on the side of the society, we must also deal with motivation that leads the individual to such a decision.

Basically, there can be two basic possibilities. Either the individual understands such lifestyle as a temporary strategy. Being single is fulfilling for such individuals only until they secure sufficient conditions for a long-term partnership or marriage, or they are single solely because they have not found an ideal partner who makes them re-evaluate their system of values. Or the individual simply chooses being single as he finds such lifestyle very attractive.

The reasons why some people want to remain single can be different, as was already stated in the chapter dealing with lifestyle of the singles generally; moreover they may change in the course of time. Being single can thus be a positive voluntary choice; in this case we presume that such individual is satisfied with his/her decision. We must also realize that such status does not have to be voluntary and can be a result of some extrinsic factors that are impossible to influence. If this be the case, being single brings about unhappiness and other negative feelings (Uhdeová 2003).

In 2004 the RSW organization carried out a research in New Zealand on a sample of one thousand persons, out of which 348 were single. The research was aimed at family behaviour of the selected persons. Even though the research was carried out in New Zealand, we can assume that if it was carried in Europe or the Czech Republic, the finding would not be significantly different. One of the basic questions for singles was the following:

*What are the main reasons of your current marital status (meaning single status)?*

- I have not met the right person yet (63%).
- I am satisfied with my status (44%).
- the person I am interested in is already engaged (34%).
- my previous relationship was not successful (26%).
- I am not ready for a relationship (15%).
- A relationship is not convenient for me right now (14%).
- I am uncertain about my sexual orientation (3%).

## DEMOGRAPHIC AND SPATIAL ASPECT OF THE SINGLES PHENOMENON

### The second demographic transition

The process of a significant change of demographic characteristics of the western society took place in the 1960s in the countries of northern and western Europe. The fertility rate fell in the majority of countries under the level of simple reproduction. This was also reflected in the decreasing nuptiality, new alternative forms of family cohabitation started to appear. Apart from traditional marriage we could see the growing number of families living in cohabitation (parents not being married but living together). Such trend appeared first with divorced couples, later even with people under 35 years of age as the so called “mock marriage” phenomenon (young people wanted to try to live as married to see if the marriage would work). Marriages became less stable and we could observe a growing number of incomplete families.

Until then, such model of demographic behaviour did not have a historical parallel and thus started to represent a new but deeply embedded model of demographic behaviour. In this connection we speak about the so called demographic turn or the second demographic transition. The basis of this transition is the change in the thinking of men, women and couples, the change of the system of values, higher acceptance of divorces, homosexuality etc.

The result of such changes in the given spheres of life was a decrease of demographic indicators, namely of nuptiality and fertility to a very low level. The second demographic transition brought about other changes: the average age of entering into a marriage and having the first child increased and, as was stated above, alternative forms of partnership gained huge popularity. Demographically relatively homogeneous Europe suddenly differentiated in demographic indicators – a gap between East and West appeared.

Political changes of 1989 and the subsequent economic transformation brought about new conditions; demographic behaviour of the citizens of the Czech Republic gradually started to resemble that

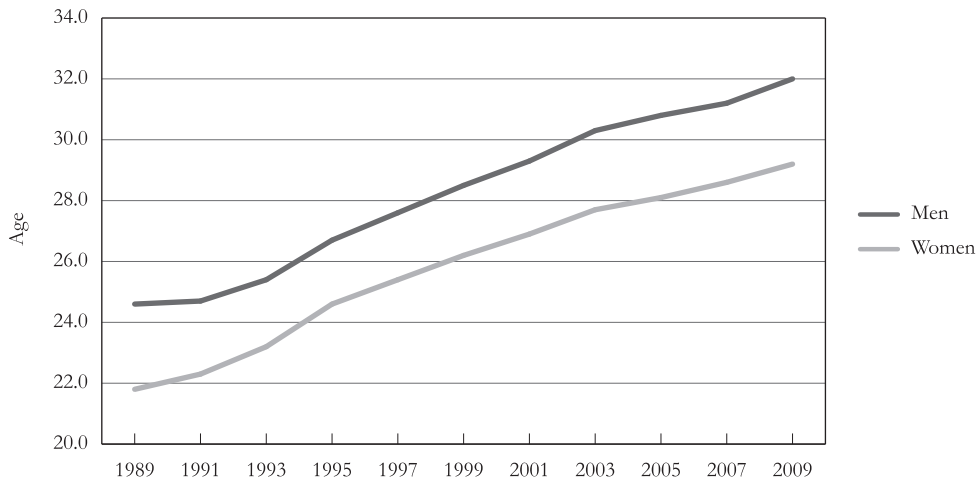
of Western Europe. Democracy meant that young people could freely decide about their future lives and the number of possibilities grew (the possibility of studies, travelling, career etc.). As the people started to prefer other values, they postponed marriages and its consummation (Volfšicová 2008). While in Western Europe such process lasted for several decades, in the Czech Republic the changes took place within several years. One explanation for such a rapid change can be that whereas in western Europe it was a novelty which gradually developed, in our case the model was imported and at the time it was fully developed – thanks to its material side (accessibility of suitable and quality contraception) and its psychological side (change of attitudes, norms, lifestyle, etc.).

### Selected demographic characteristics of the singles phenomenon in the Czech Republic

As far as the transformation of the demographic situation of the society is concerned, there are altogether two main approaches. The first draws upon economic, political and social changes after 1989. In this respect we could mention growing costs, unemployment and limited possibilities to obtain own place to live (Rychtaříková 1996). These factors force young people to postpone their marriages until they are financially and socially independent. The second approach is more positive. As a reason for the decreasing nuptiality and the increasing number of singles it sees the space for free individual choice and lifestyle after the fall of the Communist regime (Rabušic 1997). In other words a space in which young people can find self-fulfilment in different ways – not only in starting a family. New forms of partnership are thus becoming commonplace.

The singles phenomenon is impossible to analyze directly in statistical terms. This is because there are still discrepancies in the definitions and also due to the lack and accessibility of data. To evaluate the situation in the Czech Republic the following demographic indicators have been selected:

- nuptiality and divorce rate,
- natality and related characteristics,
- religiosity,
- household of the individuals.



**Figure 1** Mean age at first marriage in the Czech Republic. Source: Czech Statistical Office.

For some of the characteristics an age group between 20 to 40 years was selected. Most sociological definitions define singles as individuals from 25 to 35 (or 40) years of age.

### Nuptiality and divorce rate

When the western society was undergoing a similar change in demographic behaviour which the Czech Republic underwent in the 1990s, Berger and Kellner (1964) claimed at that time that the reason why young people did not enter into marriages was not because weddings and family would be empty concepts for them but because they took marriage very seriously and thus did not want to enter into it with just anybody. According to them young people needed to choose their partners very carefully and planned how many children they would have. Also, if the young were not satisfied in their marriage, they felt free to divorce and look for a more suitable partner.

Until the 1980s nuptiality in the Czech Republic was relatively high; a large proportion of men and women entered into a marriage (96-97%, respectively 90-95%); they also entered into a marriage being very young. The average age of brides was 21-22 years, of bridegrooms 24-25 years. In the course of time the number of young men and women between 20-40 years of age who entered

into a marriage has rapidly decreased. This fact does not mean that these individuals decided to live alone. One of the essential changes in demographic behaviour of today is the growing number of alternative forms of partnership. Young people can nowadays decide on the form of partnership; marriage is only one of many possibilities.

In 2009 the average age of persons entering into first marriages has significantly exceeded the age limit of 30 years with men – the exact value being 31.9 years. With women it was 29.2 years. Contrary to the year of 1989 the age limit at first weddings increased by seven years with both sexes (Figure 1), which is a relatively significant shift given the short period of time; it also gives evidence to the theory of the second demographic transition in the Czech Republic in this period. The age limit is by far the highest in Prague – by 1-2 years higher than in other regions, where the differences are not so significant. The age limit of 25-29 year-old men at first weddings surpassed the age limit of 20-24 year-old men for the first time in the Czech Republic in 1994, of women in 1997; in 2009 there were more 30-34 year-old men who entered into a marriage than those between 25-29 years of age. With respect to the growing tendency in the previous years, we may presume that the age limit at first weddings is going to keep increasing in the years to follow.



**Table 2** Development of the proportion of singles in the Czech Republic, according to age.

Source: Czech Statistical Office.

| Age | Men  |      |      | Women |      |      |
|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|------|
|     | 1991 | 2001 | 2009 | 1991  | 2001 | 2009 |
| 20  | 88.2 | 98.9 | 99.7 | 62.0  | 94.7 | 98.4 |
| 25  | 42.1 | 82.7 | 93.9 | 23.5  | 66.6 | 84.0 |
| 30  | 24.3 | 55.8 | 73.9 | 13.7  | 41.2 | 57.5 |
| 35  | 19.0 | 42.5 | 57.1 | 10.6  | 32.7 | 44.8 |
| 40  | 17.0 | 37.2 | 49.1 | 9.5   | 29.6 | 40.2 |

The overall number of weddings in the Czech Republic in 2009 was 47.9 thousand. It was the lowest number of contracted marriages since 1918. After 2007 the number of weddings started to decrease (after a slight growth), the most numerous generations are 35-39 years old and their chances to marry are relatively limited. That is why we should count on further decrease in nuptiality in the future.

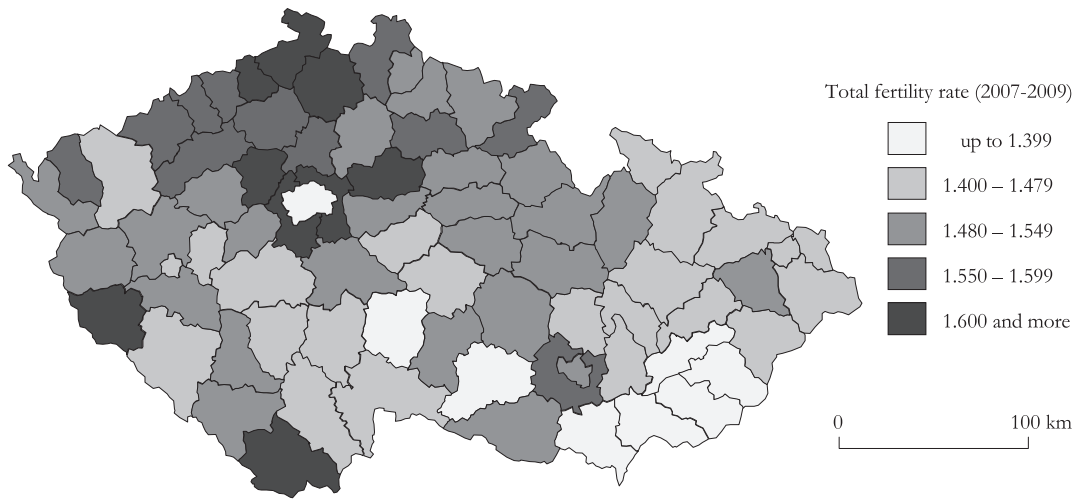
In 1991 there were almost 12% of twenty-year old men married and 38% of women of the same age. This is hard to believe in comparison with today's 0.3% of men and 1.6% of women. The situation is the same with other age categories. This is only further proof that the age limit at first weddings (or at having children) is increasing. On the other hand we must not automatically assume that being single equals living alone. A large number of young people try to live as married couples. They live with their partner in a household without being married and some do not want to change their status even after some time. Starting a family is also not a reason for many of them to get married. These individuals are not reflected in this statistics. According to Katriňák (2004) in 2001 such couples made up a substantial part of the number of singles – up to 30%.

Divorce rate in the Czech Republic is in comparison with neighbouring countries relatively high. Not even in 2009 the absolute number of newly divorced marriages did not change a lot in comparison with previous years. Altogether there were 29.1 thousand approved divorce petitions, out of which two thirds were initiated by women. The absolute number of divorces has been during the last 20 years

relatively stable. In relation to the number of weddings which resulted in a divorce, the total divorce rate (calculated between the numbers of marriages contracted in different years and ending in divorce and the numbers of all marriages contracted in the same year, respectively) has also increased. In 2009 the total divorce rate reached 46.8%, while in 1991 it was 35%.

### Natality

As was said before, the 1990s in the Czech Republic are connected with a significant change in the lifestyle. Thanks to a greater number of possibilities of personal and professional life and to a certain extent due to the transition to market economy, which was connected with economic problems uncommon until then in the Czech Republic (e.g. growing unemployment rate), people put more emphasis on their personal growth which led to a decrease in birth rate (or natality). Since the second half of the 1990s this is clearly evident in the age pyramid and its consequences have been reflected in the age structure of the population. A result of the dramatic decrease of natality and fertility was that in 1994 for the first time the Czech Republic experienced a decrease in the total number of inhabitants in the time of peace. In this year for the first time the number of deceased surpassed the number of newborns. Natural increase is recorded only twelve years later, i.e. in 2006, when natality slightly increased. Such is the trend even today, the total fertility rate has increased from the minimum in 1999 (being 1.1) to the current 1.5. The reason, however, is the “babyboom” – the numerous generation of the second half of the 1970s is giving birth. We can



**Figure 2** Total fertility rate in the Czech Republic.

**Table 3** Average age of mother at first birth in the Czech Republic. Source: Czech Statistical Office.

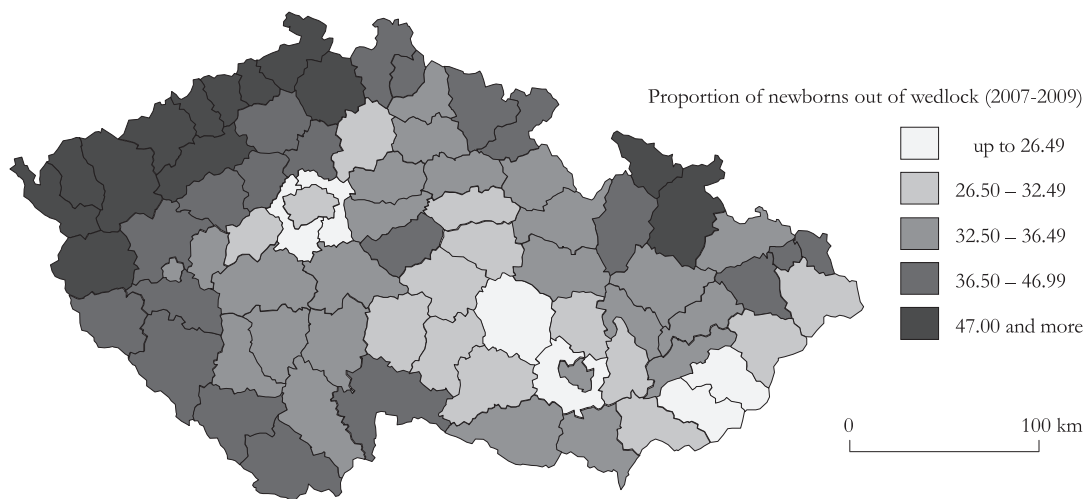
| Year          | 1989 | 1991 | 1993 | 1995 | 1997 | 1999 | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Age of mother | 22.5 | 22.4 | 22.6 | 23.3 | 24.0 | 24.6 | 25.3 | 25.9 | 26.6 | 27.1 | 27.4 |

expect that within five years the natality will fall dramatically once again. Higher natality and total fertility rate have suburbanized space, which is seen in Figure 2 on the example of Prague, partly also Brno and Plzeň (a similar situation is in the hinterland of other big cities, which would become evident if in the analysis we went on to lower than district level). There are no differences between natality and total fertility rate in urban and rural areas in the Czech Republic.

If we should deal with natality from the point of view of the singles phenomenon, the statistical data concerning the number of new born babies do not have to be fully decisive. If we related the data on natality to specific selected age groups, we could analyze for example the development of the new borns according to the age of mother at birth. Another interesting piece of information is the average life of mother at first birth (Table 3).

The age increased between 1989-2009 by 5 years, which is a relatively big shift. The result is not so surprising as it copies the development of other demographic indicators and reflects the above mentioned change of lifestyle of the young generation in the course of the 1990. As far as the spatial differentiation is concerned, in Prague the average age of mother at first birth is higher by 2-3 years in comparison with other regions.

The proportion of newborns out of wedlock is another demographic characteristic, which is to a certain extent a typical feature of behaviour of women-singles. Women-singles do not have to be only careerists who do not plan to marry and start a family. Many of them want children, they only postpone their decision to have a child until a later stage in their lives. They want to be able to financially provide for the child and they also need to find the right partner in the first place. The fact



**Figure 3** Newborns out of wedlock in the Czech Republic.

**Table 4** Proportion of newborns out of wedlock in the Czech Republic. Source: Czech Statistical Office.

| Year                   | 1989 | 1991 | 1993 | 1995 | 1997 | 1999 | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Proportion of newborns | 7.9  | 9.8  | 12.7 | 15.6 | 17.8 | 20.6 | 23.5 | 28.5 | 31.7 | 34.5 | 38.8 |

is that with growing older demands and requirements on herself and the prospective father are increasing and so it often happens that a woman-single chooses to become a single mother. Being financially independent, she can afford it. She prefers the life of a single mother to a life with an unsuitable partner. Apart from this we also have to count on another widespread possibility today – the mother has a stable partner but they do not live in contracted marriage. The proportion of children born in wedlock is significantly decreasing and the number of children born out of wedlock is relatively increasing. In 2009 the proportion of children born out of wedlock was 38.8%, which was five times higher than in 1989 (Table 4). In Karlovarský and Ústecký regions more than half of the children were born out of wedlock; the lowest proportion was recorded in Zlínský, Jiho-moravský, Vysočina regions and also in Prague-east and Prague-west districts (Figure 3). In the

Czech Republic it is women-singles who prevail among mothers outside contracted marriages; the proportion of divorced women among mothers of children born out of wedlock is decreasing.

We cannot state clearly how many children born out of wedlock are born into functioning families whose parents are not married and how many are born to single mothers. To delimit the proportion of single mothers we may use the data on the fathers, which has been collected since 2007 even with children born out of wedlock. If we suppose that mothers who did not give the name of the father at child birth are prepared to care about the child on their own, then in 2008 there were at minimum 11.9 thousand children born into incomplete families, i.e. every tenth child. The proportion of children of single mothers among children born out of wedlock was at least 27.5%.

**Table 5** Proportion of single religious persons and single persons without religion in 2001.  
Source: Czech Statistical Office.

| Religion                       | Age group |       |       |       |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                | 20-24     | 25-29 | 30-34 | 35-39 |
| <i>Men – proportion in %</i>   |           |       |       |       |
| Religious                      | 89.6      | 54.1  | 28.4  | 19.5  |
| Without religion               | 90.9      | 54.4  | 23.4  | 13.6  |
| <i>Women – proportion in %</i> |           |       |       |       |
| Religious                      | 74.0      | 31.2  | 12.6  | 7.6   |
| Without religion               | 77.7      | 31.8  | 9.9   | 5.4   |

## Religiosity

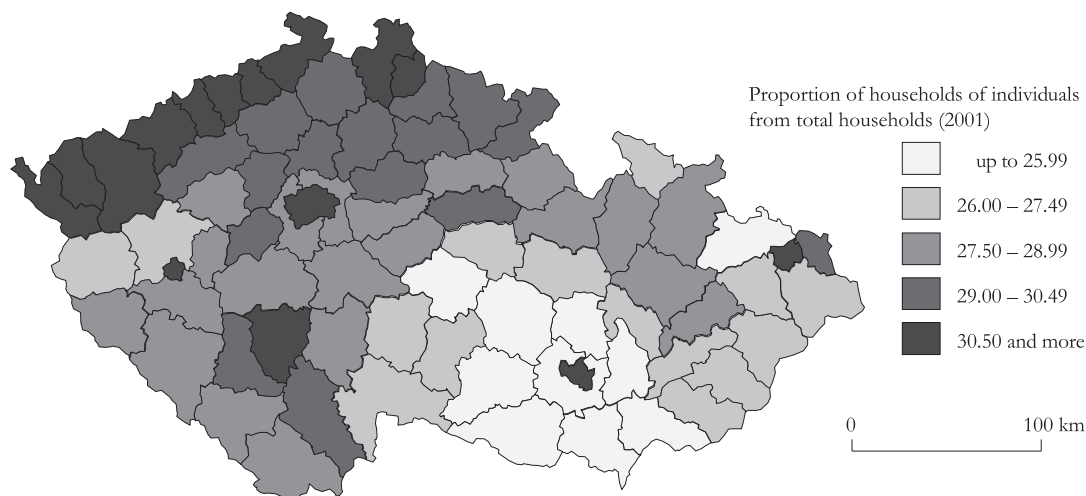
Another demographic characteristic which could be connected with the singles phenomenon is religiosity or belief. Does the fact that a person who is religious influence his or her social behaviour? It is an ongoing fact that women tend to be by far more religious than men. Differences are also between age groups. There is about one fifth of religious people in the age category between 20-24 years and even in the category five years older. No significant change is recorded until about forty years of age; only from this age there is a slight increase in its proportion. A substantial increase of the number of religious people is recorded in the age category between 50-59 years. This is an age category which experienced religious education at schools and in whose families the members intensively passed down religious traditions.

Marital status of the inhabitants is not significantly reflected in their relation to the church or faith. When comparing data on religious people and people without religion we can say that during the last decade both groups entered into marriages at about the same age. Both groups tend to marry later. Though the average age at first weddings has increased, it is evident that religious people tend to marry less often than people without religion, mainly the elderly (Table 5). The situation as found out in 1991 – a higher proportion of single persons who are religious as opposed to persons without religion – has not changed.

## Households of individuals

Census households of individuals is a demographic characteristics which is probably the most relevant to the singles phenomenon – if it is related to a specific age category. Like all the other characteristics it is also only approximate and has its disadvantages. One of the problems is the fact that not all the individuals who are single live alone. Some still live with their parents and share a flat with friends. There is no such definition that would state that a typical single lives alone in one household. When examining census households of individuals it is necessary (as is for example with religious belief) to draw upon data from the census.

Although since 1970 there has been a significant increase in the number of young people living in own households, the large majority is still represented by the elderly. This is true especially about households of women who with respect to their higher life expectancy live longer than men. From the point of view of singles we must focus on lower age categories. There are more women living in own households between 20-29 years of age, on the contrary there are only a few of them between 30-39 years of age (Table 6). There are no significant age differences in the households of single men. Men older than 70 years make up only 12.8% of households of men-individuals, a relatively same number of households concerns men between 25-29 years of age. Age categories 30-34 and 35-39 are represented evenly and largely.



**Figure 4** Census households of individuals in the Czech Republic.

**Table 6** Census households of individuals according to sex and age in 2001.

Source: Czech Statistical Office.

| Age   | Number of households of individuals |        |         | Share of households of individuals (%) |       |       |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|--|-------|-------|
|       | Men                                 | Women  | Total   | Men                                    | Women | Total |
| 20-24 | 40,439                              | 37,361 | 77,800  | 7.1                                    | 5.3   | 6.1   |
| 25-29 | 72,391                              | 40,805 | 113,196 | 12.8                                   | 5.7   | 8.9   |
| 30-34 | 58,244                              | 19,063 | 77,307  | 10.3                                   | 2.7   | 6.1   |
| 35-39 | 54,002                              | 14,983 | 68,985  | 9.5                                    | 2.1   | 5.4   |

A relatively significant differences are noted in the structure of households of men and women according to marital status. Among households of women more than a half (54.8%) are widowed wives, one fifth are divorced women, more than one sixth are single women and only 6.6% are married women. On the contrary when analyzing households of men we can see that younger age categories are significantly represented – the majority are single men (35.3%), another third are divorced men, almost 15% are married men and only one eighth are widowers.

The highest proportion of households of individuals among census households is recorded in the capital of Prague. More than 30% proportion

of households of individuals could be found in Ústecký, Karlovarský and Liberecký regions. In Moravian regions and in Vysočina region the proportion of households of individuals is substantially lower than in Bohemia. The lowest is in Vysočina – about one fourth – and in Zlínský regions where it is only slightly higher than in Vysočina. A significantly below average value was recorded in Jihomoravský, Olomoucký and Pardubický regions.

The explanation of the differences is complex and rather hypothetical. The proportion of households of individuals is connected with a large number of demographic, social and cultural characteristics of population, with the population structure and with the housing stock. The history of the region

also plays an important part. Regional differences are related to a different structure of settlement and the urbanization rate. There are significant differences also among individual size categories of municipalities. Above average proportion of census households is recorded in big cities with 50,000 to under 100,000 inhabitants (32.3%) and mainly in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (35.3%). There is a large proportion of households of individuals in Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem or Liberec; low proportion of such households are in suburban zones and in the countryside (in the countryside singles usually live in a household with their parents). Spatial distribution of households of individuals is shown in Figure 4.

## CONCLUSION

The present generation seems to enjoy and make the most of its youth; it travels, studies or focuses on its professional career. Growing possibilities in these areas are tempting and thus hard to succumb and up to a certain age there is no reason why to resist them. A problem arises when such age limit – not clearly stated – is crossed. A person gets used to comfort and peace of such lifestyle easily, even though the majority of individuals enters adulthood with a strong belief they want to settle and start a family one day. A growing number of such individuals does not manage to do so at all. From the point of view of motivations and statistical data it is not an easy task to define typical singles – their typology is far from being simple.

The development of demographic behaviour in the Czech Republic of the generation of 20-40 years old has changed significantly during the years 1990-2010. We are going through the so called second demographic transition whose start was in comparison with Western Europe much more dynamic. Essential life decisions including entrance into a marriage and its consummation have been being postponed by 5-8 years. An increasing number of young individuals postpones such decision indefinitely, sometimes they even refuse it. There is a growing number of middle-aged singles. This leads to a decrease in natality and the demographic ageing of population. The

singles phenomenon is typical mainly of big cities and urbanized spaces; it exists even in the countryside but due to inaccessible data it is hard to identify and it definitely has a lower intensity. The phenomenon is least recorded in suburban zones where younger families (and middle generations) move with intention to live a more quiet family life.

## References

- Benokraitis, N. V.** 2002: *Marriages and families: changes, choices, and constraints*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- Berger, P., Kellner, H.** 1964: Marriage and the social construction of reality. *Diogenes* 46, 1-25.
- Campbell, L. D.** 2002: *Singles/ never married persons, social and historical context of singlehood* [on-line, retrieved 2010-02-09]. Available at <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1582/Singles-Never-Married-Persons-Social-Historical-Context-Singlehood.html>
- Černý, J.** 2003: *Manželství v transformaci* [on-line, retrieved 2010-02-13]. Available at <http://www.socioweb.cz/index.php?disp=temata&shw=116&lst=103>
- Geißler, R.** 2002: *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Hertel, J. et al.** 2007: She's single, so what? How are singles perceived compared with people who are married? *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* 19, 2.
- Jandourek, J.** 2009: *Úvod do sociologie*. Portál, Praha.
- Katrnák, T.** 2001: Strukturální příčiny poklesu sňatečnosti a nárůstu svobodných v devadesátých letech v České republice. *Sociologický časopis* 37 (2), 225-239.
- Rabušic, L.** 1997: Polemicky k současným změnám charakteru reprodukce v ČR (sociological perspective in demography). *Demografie* 39 (2), 114-119.
- Radimská, R., Tomášek, M.** 2003: Singles – nový životní styl a jeho genderová specifika v České republice. *Gender on-line*, č. 1-2/2003, [retrieved 2010-02-10]. Available at [http://www.gendersonline.cz/download/Rocnik04\\_1-2\\_2003.pdf](http://www.gendersonline.cz/download/Rocnik04_1-2_2003.pdf)
- Rychtaříková, J.** 1996: Současné změny charakteru reprodukce v České republice a mezinárodní situace. *Demografie* 38 (2), 77-89.
- Schwartz, M. A., Scott, B. M.** 2003: *Marriages and Families: Diversity and Change*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- Staples, R.** 1981: *The world of black singles: Changing patterns of male-female relationships*. Westport, Greenwood.

- Stein, P. J.** 1981: *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context*. St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Tomášek, M.** 2006: Singles a jejich vztahy, kvalitativní pohled na nesezdané a nekohabituující jednotlivce v České republice. *Sociologický časopis* 42 (1), 81-105.
- Tuček, M. et al.** 1998: *Česká rodina v transformaci: Struktura, dělba rolí a hodnotová orientace*. Sociologický ústav AV ČR, Praha.
- Uhdeová, Z.** 2003: Sociologie rodiny – sociologie genderu – sociologie výzkumu. *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* 4 (1-2), 15-19.
- Volfsčicová, M.** 2008: *Vybrané aspekty současného demografického vývoje ČR* (minor thesis). Masarykova univerzita, Brno.

## Resumé

### Sociologické, demografické a prostorové aspekty fenoménu singles v České republice

Zvyšování počtu svobodných, odkládání vstupu do manželství na pozdější dobu či alternativní formy spoluzití jsou témata, která na nás čím dál častěji vyskakují z nadpisů časopisů pro tzv. „moderního člověka“ ale i ze seriózních denníků. Jedná se o nový životní styl – singles. Pro západní Evropu je to již poměrně běžný pojem, u nás však přesto stále nový, o to však rychleji se rozvíjející fenomén.

Príspevek měl ambici komplexního zhodnocení problematiky fenoménu singles, a to hlavně v teoretické rovině s důrazem na jeho sociologické a demografické aspekty. Ve stručné empirické části analyzoval vybrané demografické ukazatele se singles související (např. sňatečnost, rozvodovost, průměrný věk matky při narození prvního dítěte, podíl živě narozených mimo manželství a další), jejich vývoj jednak v rámci celého území České republiky a částečně i jejich prostorovou diferenciaci.

Před rokem 1989, během komunistické éry, měla tehdejší mladá generace značně omezené možnosti seberealizace. Z tohoto důvodu byli lidé nuceni najít si alternativu, v rámci které by se mohli svobodně realizovat. Touto alternativou

neboli novou náplní života se stalo manželství a s ním související založení rodiny. Současná generace si částečně prodlužuje své mládí a tento prostor ve velké míře využívá také ke studiu, cestování, příp. k rozjezdu profesionální kariéry či občanské angažovanosti. Rostoucí možnosti v těchto oblastech jsou lákadla, kterým se těžko odolává a do určitého věku vlastně ani není důvod se jim bránit. Problém nastává, pokud se tato určitá nevyřčená hranice překročí. Člověk si lehce zvykne na pohodlí a klid takového života a i když většina jedinců vstupuje do dospělosti s přesvědčením, že se později chtějí určitě usadit a založit rodinu, čím dál většímu procentu populace se to nakonec nepodaří.

Z hlediska motivací i z hlediska statistiky není definování singles resp. jejich typologie vůbec jednoduchá záležitost. Čistě statisticky se jedná o svobodné lidi, kdy slovem svobodný je myšlen zákonný rodinný status. Většina přístupů k této tématice se ale snaží brát v potaz i motivace, které jedince k takovému způsobu života vedou. Pro mnohé autory (hlavně sociology) není rodinný status podstatný, ale analyzují tento fenomén výhradně z hlediska důvodů a motivací, jejichž výsledkem je samostatný život jedinců. V důsledku proměnlivosti pohledů na život singles evidujeme i mnohé typologie singles vycházející např. z jejich způsobu života, otevřenosti vztahů, přesunem tzv. hodnot osobní svobody původně spojených s mládím do různého věku apod.

Demografické chování generace 20-40letých se v České republice v období let 1990-2010 zásadně změnilo. Česká republika přechází druhým demografickým přechodem, kterého nástup je ve srovnání se západní Evropou omnoho dynamičtější. O 5-8 let se posouvají zásadní životní rozhodnutí, které jsou spojovány se vstupem do manželství, příp. s rodičovstvím. Stále větší část mladší populace tato rozhodnutí odkládá na neurčito, příp. k nim nepřistoupí vůbec. Neustále se zvyšuje podíl svobodných ve středním věku. V návaznosti na to se zároveň zásadně snižuje porodnost, úhrnná plodnost klesá hluboce pod hladinu prosté reprodukce a přichází k celkovému demografickému stárnutí populace.

Prostorově je fenomén singles typičtější hlavně pro větší města a urbanizované prostory, určitě se vyskytuje i na venkově, ale vzhledem k nedostupným datům je tady hůře identifikovatelný a určitě má o něco nižší intenzitu. Nejméně je pozorovatelný v suburbánních zónách, do kterých se zpravidla stěhují mladší rodiny (ale i střední generace) s motivací pokojnějšího rodinného života.