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## **Family ties and intergenerational relationships in European families in the twentieth century**

Więzy rodzinne i relacje międzypokoleniowe w rodzinach  
europejskich w XX wieku

### **Streszczenie**

Na początku dwudziestego wieku międzypokoleniowe relacje rodzinne nadal pełniły ważną funkcję społeczną w społeczeństwach wiejskich Europy. Sytuacja rodziny czeskiej ilustruje współczesne problemy odnoszące się do więzów rodzinnych i relacji międzypokoleniowych. Problemy te pojawiły się w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku. Widoczne są negatywne tendencje rozwojowe, szczególnie w porównaniu z sytuacją rodziny w innych państwach europejskich. Przede wszystkim chodzi tu o starzenie się ludności i różnorodną aktywność seniorów. Luźniejsze relacje z ich rodzinami i spadek ich zaangażowania w opiekę nad wnukami oznaczają, że czescy dziadkowie plasują się obok tych w państwach bardziej społecznie rozwiniętych. Jednak w warunkach czeskich prowadzi to do dużych napięć związanych z aktywnymi rolami seniorów. Rosnąca liczba dorosłych potomków, szczególnie męskich, mieszkających z rodzicami nie mieści się w postępowych trendach społecznego i gospodarczego rozwoju. Przypomina raczej tradycje południowoeuropejskie. Preferowanie alternatywnych form kohabitacji, szczególnie przez partnerów z wykształceniem podstawowym, odkładanie w czasie narodzin pierwszego dziecka, wzrost liczby jednoosobowych gospodarstw domowych oraz, co może najważniejsze, ogromny wzrost liczby gospodarstw domowych składających się z ludzi młodych lub w średnim wieku (w wieku produkcyjnym) może, co prawda, plasować Czechy wśród państw rozwiniętych i w okolicach europejskiej średniej, jednak biorąc pod uwagę niekorzystne trendy demograficzne fundamentalna zmiana w systemie państwowego wsparcia dla małżeństw i rodzin wydaje się konieczna również w Czechach. Faktem jest, że ponad jedna trzecia rodzin z dziećmi za-

grożona jest ubóstwem. Wniosek wyłaniający się z przeprowadzonych analiz wskazuje, że obecne problemy państwowej polityki społecznej i rodzinnej odbijają się na rodzinie, której wartość wzrasta i której nie mogą zastąpić instytucje państwowe. Pod koniec XX wieku rodzina ponownie staje się źródłem pewności i bezpieczeństwa materialnego, a solidarność międzypokoleniowa pozostaje ważną tradycyjną wartością.

**Słowa kluczowe:** związki pokrewieństwa, społeczeństwa wiejskie, ludzie starsi, mobilność zawodowa, rodzina nuklearna, państwo opiekuńcze, kryzys, centrum bezpieczeństwa.

### Abstract

Intergenerational family relationships still performed an important social function in rural society in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. The situation within the Czech family illustrates the current problems in family ties and intergenerational relationships that have surfaced since the nineteen nineties. Negative developmental trends are being seen, particularly in comparison with family circumstances in other European countries, most significantly the continuing ageing of the population and the wide-ranging activities of seniors. Looser relationships with their families and a decline in their engagement in caring for their grandchildren mean that Czech grandparents tend to rank alongside more socially developed countries in this respect. Under Czech conditions, however, this can lead to great strain on the active roles played by seniors. The growing number of adult offspring, particularly men, living with their parents is a far from progressive trend in social and economic development, and corresponds more closely with southern European traditions. A preference for alternative forms of cohabitation, particularly among partners with primary education, the postponing of the birth of the first child, the growth in the number of single-person households and, perhaps most importantly, the enormous rise in the number of households comprised of young or middle-aged individuals in the economically productive age group may, it is true, rank the Czech Republic among socially developed countries and at around the European average, though in view of the unfavourable demographic trend a fundamental change in state support for marriage and the family is, however, also essential in the Czech Republic. The fact is that more than a third of families with children are threatened with poverty. The conclusion arising from the analyses performed indicates that the current problems in state social and family policy are reflected in the increasing importance of the family and the fact that it cannot be replaced by public institutions. At the end of the twentieth century, the family is again becoming the focus of certainty and material security, and intergenerational solidarity remains an important traditional value.

**Keywords:** kinship ties, rural societies, elderly people, professional mobility, nuclear family, welfare state, crisis, center of security.

Intergenerational family relationships still performed an important social function in rural society in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. The father generally passed on practical knowledge in arable agriculture and live-

stock farming to his sons, while daughters were taught skills in running the household by the mother. In exchange, the adult children were then obliged to care for their parents in old age.

Family life saw rapid change with the development of capitalist industrialisation, urbanisation and the shaping of the social state, particularly after the Second World War. Intervention by the state had a significant influence on family life and loosened intergenerational ties. The modern, two-generational nuclear family was restricted to the cohabitation of parents and their children. The state school system took over responsibility for their upbringing and education. Social institutions and medical institutions were to provide for citizens in their old age.

After the Second World War, old people with small pensions were rather a burden for their offspring. The life expectancy of the current older generation with an assured income is increasing. Grandparents can provide support for their children and grandchildren, particularly in the form of financial support in the resolution of problems caused by marital crisis or the problems associated with seeking employment. Seniors also provide families with considerable indirect help, notably by childminding their grandchildren<sup>1</sup>.

Traditional demographic data is frequently insufficient for a comparison of intergenerational family ties. Data from the Czech Statistical Office on the Population and Housing Census of 2011 makes it possible to uncover views of traditional family values and their specifics with the use of qualitative and analytical research. An international comparison of the results demands that both national influences and historical and ideological contexts influencing social and family life are respected.

The continued ageing and increasing life expectancy of the population is an unfavourable demographic trend in Europe. In 2011, people aged 65 and above accounted for 15.5% of the population of the Czech Republic. Their number is set to double (to three million people) by the year 2050<sup>2</sup>. While around 2.3 million people currently receive a pension in the Czech Republic, i.e. roughly 22% of the population, this figure is likely to be 35% in the year 2050<sup>3</sup>. State social and family policy will have to adapt to the growing number of seniors and their

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<sup>1</sup> D.I. Kertzen, M. Barbagli (edd.), *Family Life in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2003, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> V Evropě v roce 2011 dosahovalo zastoupení populace ve věku 65 a více let např. v Německu 20,6%, v Itálii 20,3%, v Řecku 19,3%, ve Švédsku 18,5%, v Rakousku 17,6%, ve Velké Británii 16,6%, v Norsku 15,1%, v Polsku 13,6% a na Slovensku 12,4%. Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů 2011, data Český statistický úřad, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

<sup>3</sup> M. Fojtů, *Bude tahle země pro starý?* „Muni. Měsíčník Masarykovy univerzity, březen“ 2014, pp. 4–5 source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

Češi v současnosti pobírají starobní důchod v průměru 23 let, v roce 1970 to bylo pouze 11 let. Průměrný věk v Německu je 44,6 let, v České republice 39,4 let, na Slovensku 37,4 let, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

altered lifestyle. Intergenerational solidarity is an essential feature of family ties throughout Europe.

Nevertheless, the data in recent years has shown that older people guard their privacy and are maintaining looser ties with their families. On average, 40% of people in Europe above the age of sixty see their family only once a week. There are, however, considerable differences between European countries moving from north to south. While 71% of older people in Italy, 65% in Greece, 61% in Spain and 60% in Portugal see their family every day, the figures are lower in northern European countries – 14% in Denmark, 19% in the Netherlands, 22.9% in Great Britain and 34% in France<sup>4</sup>.

A woman's principal role used to be that of mother and, later, grandmother. Today's young parents, prioritising success at work, transfer their family responsibilities onto their children's grandmothers. The grandmothers of the twenty-first century, however, take a different view of their lifestyle. They take an active approach to old age and, most importantly, spend less time with their grandchildren. Only 10% of grandparents in the Czech Republic care for their grandchildren every day. Those who do are usually grandparents that live with the family in the same house. Thirty percent of grandparents in Italy and Spain and twenty-eight percent in Poland care for their grandchildren daily<sup>5</sup>.

Almost a quarter of a million Czech pensioners continue to work, accounting for 5.1% of the workforce. A conflict of roles occurs when they try to combine their interests and activities with care for their grandchildren, as is expected of them by their families. The younger generation should not determine what seniors do with their lives, but rather try to achieve mutual agreement and comprehension. The role played by seniors in their grandchildren's upbringing and in helping with their grandchildren has been a traditional and essential one in European families for generations. Czech grandparents, however, tend to be only average childminders from the viewpoint of the hours they put in.

The growing number of dependent men, known as "mummy's boys", who still live with their parents is a significant trend in the transformation of the Czech family<sup>6</sup>. 31.2% of women and almost half of men aged between 25 and 29 still live with their parents. They have doubled in number since 1995. These trends do not apply just to the Czech Republic. The number of European families with adult offspring living at home increases from north to south. The number of people aged 25 to 34 living with their parents is just 1.8% in Denmark, 4% in Finland, Norway and Sweden, 11.5% in France, 14.4% in Switzerland and

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<sup>4</sup> C. and R. Facchini. *Familles et personnes agréées, une enquête européenne*, „Gérontologie et Société” 68, Scortegagna 1994, pp. 10–16.

<sup>5</sup> I. Matyášová, *Dnešním dětem zoufale scházejí babičky*, „Lidové noviny” 15. a 16.02.2014, pp. 33–34, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

<sup>6</sup> L. Zlámalová, *Mamánci ohrožují českou prosperitu*, „ČTK. Echo Media a.s.”, source: [www.echo.24.cz](http://www.echo.24.cz) 10.04.2014. [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

Great Britain, and 17.3% in Germany. In Italy, however, 46.6% live with their parents, with 51.6% in Austria and 56.6% in Slovakia. The figure for Poland is 43.2%<sup>7</sup>. The availability of housing is not the decisive factor here. Countries whose young people are averse to taking risks have less chance of succeeding in the face of competition, for which reason the number of these stay-at-home children is a direct threat to the prosperity of the country. Mummy's boys also do not tend to be socially attractive. Women's magazines are full of popular psychological advice as to how to spot and avoid a mummy's boy.

Putting off the birth of the first child for five or six years, which is accompanied by a greater preference for alternative forms of cohabitation, is becoming a basic demographic characteristic of Czech society<sup>8</sup>. More than half of people living as a stable couple or as man and wife are of similar age and similar educational attainment. The number of couples in which the woman is more highly educated is, however, on the increase. This is influenced by the changing structure of the population according to education and the difference between men and women completing higher education. 22.8% of women and 15.7% of men have successfully graduated from university by the age of thirty-five.

People with a university education are also more likely to get married. 73.4% of them live in wedlock at the age of thirty-five. The formerly widespread view that unmarried cohabitation is the ideological choice typical of the urban environment and of people with a higher education no longer applies. In contrast, people with primary or secondary education without qualifications are least likely to enter into marriage. The number of marriages that end in divorce increases with an increasing age difference between the partners. Marriages in which the man is younger than the woman also show a lower degree of stability. Married and unmarried couples show a similar tendency as far as the selection of partner by nationality is concerned. More than 91% of married couples and 89% of unmarried cohabitants are both of Czech nationality. Of other nationalities, Czechs most frequently choose partners from neighbouring Slovakia, Poland and Germany<sup>9</sup>.

This statistical analysis provides one positive result in relation to the topic of our conference. The number of children growing up with just one parent has not increased since 2008. The statistics at that time were influenced, first and foremost, by the high divorce rate in the post-revolutionary nineteen nineties.

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<sup>7</sup> V České republice žije s rodiči 33,7% potomků, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014]. Toto porovnání sleduje věk respondentů od 25 do 34 let, proto se odlišuje od údajů výše uvedených pro ČR.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Lebdušková, *Vysokoškolačky bez manžela. Mužům se nechce od rodičů*, „ČTK. Echo Media a.s.”, [www.echo.24.cz](http://www.echo.24.cz) 09.04.2014, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

<sup>9</sup> V ČR žije kolem 430 tisíc cizinců. Nejvíce je Ukrajinců (113 tisíc), Slováků (82 tisíc), Vietnamců (52 tisíc), Rusů (32 tisíc) a Poláků (17 tisíc). V přepočtu tvoří cizinci více než 4% obyvatel. Téměř 22% cizinců má vysokoškolské vzdělání. Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů 2011, data Český statistický úřad, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

Even so, 13.4% of children up to the age of fifteen in the Czech Republic still grow up in an incomplete family<sup>10</sup>.

Evidence of the fragmentary nature of the family is provided by the fact that the number of single-person households in the Czech Republic has doubled since the middle of the nineteen nineties. While there were 670,000 such households in 1995, there were 1.3 million in 2013. This means that approximately every third household is made up of just one person. The number of people living without a partner is increasing more quickly than the number of traditional families comprised of parents and children. A significant role here is played by the increase in the number of households made up of young or middle-aged individuals in the economically productive age group. A particularly enormous increase has been seen in the age group 25 to 34 with a five-fold increase in the years 1995 to 2010. The reason for the growing number of single-person households is, as for the results given above, the change in lifestyle and reproductive behaviour that has been seen since the nineteen nineties.

The largest number of single-person households is found in Prague, amounting to 40% of all households according to the statistics. Practically one in five people in Prague live and keep home on their own. For the sake of comparison, in 2009 the largest proportion of single-person households in Europe was found in the Netherlands, Austria and France (around 15%). One in ten Europeans lived and kept home as individuals, making the Czech Republic slightly above average in this respect with more than 11% single-person households. The traditional cohabitation of multiple generations in a single household is influenced by the finding that the proportion of single-person households is lower in southern Europe (in Italy, Spain and Portugal, for example). The figure in Slovakia is also low in comparison with others<sup>11</sup>.

We have attempted to draw attention to the current problems facing family and intergenerational relationships in the Czech Republic that have appeared since the nineteen nineties and that demonstrate negative developmental trends, particularly in comparison with family conditions in other European countries. Reference has been made to the continuing ageing of the population and the wide-ranging activities of seniors. Their looser relations with their families and their limited engagement in care for their grandchildren rank Czech grandparents alongside those from more socially developed countries in this respect. Under the conditions in force in the Czech Republic, however, this leads to great stress on the active roles played by seniors. The growing number of adult offspring,

<sup>10</sup> Výsledky analýzy vzdělanosti a věkové podobnosti snoubenců a stability manželství vznikly porovnáním údajů o sňatcích a rozvodech z demografické statistiky za období 1993–2012 s údaji o věkové, vzdělanostní a národnostní podobnosti partnerů žijících v manželství a v nesezdaných soužitích ze Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů z roku 2011, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

<sup>11</sup> P. Baroch, *Rozdrobené rodiny. Každá třetí domácnost je jednočlenná*, „ČTK. Echo Media a.s.“, [www.echo.24.cz](http://www.echo.24.cz). 30.03.2014, source: [www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/statistiky) [access: 14.09.2014].

particularly men, living with their parents is a far from progressive trend in social and economic development and is more in line with the traditions of southern Europe. A preference for alternative forms of cohabitation, particularly among partners with merely primary education, the delaying of the birth of the first child, the growth in the number of single-person households and, in particular, the enormous growth in the number of households comprised of young or middle-aged individuals in the economically productive age group rank the Czech Republic among socially developed countries and at around the European average. In view of the unfavourable demographic trend, however, a fundamental change to state support for marriage and children is essential in the Czech Republic. More than a third of families with children are threatened with poverty.

A lifestyle transformation accompanied by a change in reproductive behaviour, particularly among young people of economically productive age, has undoubtedly been occurring in Czech society since the revolutionary years of the nineteen nineties. In many respects, state policy has failed to take adequate measures in response to these trends, particularly in terms of systematic support for the young and the old alike. Will this country be a good place for the young and the old in the future?

The conclusion arising from the analyses performed indicates that the current problems in state social and family policy are reflected in the increasing importance of the family and the fact that it cannot be replaced by public institutions. At the end of the twentieth century, the family is again becoming the focus of certainty and material security, and intergenerational solidarity remains an important traditional value.

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