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ROMANIAN FAMILY BETWEEN TRADITIONS AND MODERNISM

Literature
review

Keywords

Marriage,
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Second Demographic transition,
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JEL Classification

J10; J11; J12

Abstract

Families and living arrangements have changed dramatically since the 1960s in the majority of European countries. Family life and the meaning of family have undergone a profound change. Relationships between partners or spouses, but also the relationships between parents and their children, have moved away from the realm of normative control and institutional canons, into the ideal of reflexive 'pure relationships' based on mutual consent and the recognition of individual autonomy. Following the collapse of communism, Romania has experienced dramatic changes in family formation. Common patterns include delays and/or declines in marriage and fertility, increasing rates of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing, rising rates of divorce. This paper aims to document the main stages of the evolution of marital behaviours in Romania from the traditional family of the 19th century to present days.

Introduction

In Romania, as in the majority of Eastern European countries, family behaviour had two major characteristics, on one side it was universal and on the other it was premature, since marriage took place very early in life (Mureşan, 2012). The institution of marriage in Romania started to decline beginning with the fall of the communist regime, when the total first marriage rate plunged from 8.3 marriages per 1000 inhabitants to 4.9 marriages per 1000 inhabitants, leading to a drastic shift in marriage patterns. The 25-year transition that followed the fall of communism was accompanied by significant demographic changes. The analysis of macroeconomic indicators signalled the beginning of the second demographic transition around 1996 (Mureşan, 2007) with sharply decreasing fertility rates, declining rates of marriage and delaying marriage. However Romania did not entirely, by that time, experience postmodern behaviours as it happened in most European countries. Marriage remains stable, permanent celibacy is rare and the use of contraceptives is still not a common practice (Gheţău, 2004, Mureşan, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to document the main stages of the evolution of marital behaviours in Romania from the traditional family of the 19th century to present days in the form of a literature review.

The Traditional Romanian Family

As regarding the Romanian family behaviour before the 20th century, there is little detailed analysis. We note a general survey for the 1946-1978 periods on marriage (Trebici, 1979). As for the marriage rates analysis in Romania in the past, there is only the study of Gr.Şerbu (Retegan 1962 apud Trebici, 1979), where marriage is considered as determinant of fertility over a period of six decades (1900-1960). In terms of intensity marriage Romania belongs, according to Hajnal's classification (1965), to the Eastern European model. The majority of Romania's population in the 19th century was married (95%) with a universal marriage in the sense that only a small percentage (2-4%) of individuals who reached 50 years did not contract any marriage before that age (Rotariu, 2003). Also the average age at which most marriages took place was much lower compared to the Western European model around 22-23 years old.

For most of its history Romania's population has been a rural population. Marriage was considered a central event in the life of the individual, in traditional societies, a large social event, a festive occasion, and a break in the daily routine and the frequent privations throughout the year (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2002). According to

Mircea Brie (2005) the minimum legal age for marriage in the early 19th century was 14 years for men and 12 years for women, so parents played an important role in choosing the partner and the dowry. Each partner had to contribute to the new household, the man was responsible for ensuring the dwelling and outbuildings and women's contribution consisted of household items such as pillows, blankets, furniture and so on. In the event of divorce, each spouse was entitled to his/her share of the dowry.

The institution of marriage in Romania in the 19th-20th century is an institution governed mainly by the Church norms and principles. The Romanian society, predominantly Christian orthodox was strongly influenced by the Church regulations that occupy a central role in the life of the individual. Gender inequality is the common law element supported by unwritten rules of society and by the church. Romanian traditional family was the patriarchal family and through marriage, young girls passed from the father authority under that of the husband's, to whom they were totally dependent and owed total obedience. In general, the new family lived with the husband's parents (Brie, 2005).

Located at the crossroads between East and West, Romania's history is full of wars and political events that did not allowed, among other things, keeping detailed statistics on population evolution in that time. Also, primary education was virtually non-existent among the masses, and was accessible especially for nobles and clergy. The most important source of demographic information is found in church registers, which can aid to the reconstruction of marriages and births development patterns. Most information about the evolution of marriage and divorce in Romania before the 20th century can be found on the population of Transylvania (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2002; Brie, 2005; Rotariu, 2003).

Due to the predominantly rural population with its numerous constraints on the social life and church involvement in regulating social life, cohabitation and births outside marriage were considered illegal behaviour and were strongly blamed, socially. Marriage was the only socially acceptable institution for bringing up children. Community norms and values and those of the state and the church were transmitted within the family. Family dissolution through divorce was viewed negatively by the community and consequently was strictly "monitored" by the church. Liberal attitudes such as cohabitation and extramarital births were "punished" by social marginalization of the individual (Brie, 2008).

The steps leading to marriage in Romanian traditional society were dictated by the canons of

the church and the entire process of family formation was dictated more by the parents and relatives than by the couple (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2002). The engagement ceremony was formalized by a priest who recorded the agreement established between the man and woman and confirmed that all the necessary criteria are met to contract marriage. Certain pre-requirements had to be fulfilled before the marriage could take place: young people had to have the legal age for marriage, to be healthy, not married, they shouldn't be related, and the man had to have finished military service. In order to check for this information, the engagement was announced three times in three different church services. If all these conditions were met, the priest tested whether the two were familiar with the Church canons and he had the right to postpone marriage in case he suspected that they were not sufficiently known. (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2008). The ritual of marriage required a written commitment between the spouses before witnesses followed by a sermon referring to the value of marriages an institution and to the rights and obligations of the spouses (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2008; Vasile, 2010).

Strict rituals and obligations to be met before marriage in the 19th century led to the increase of the mean age at first marriage at 24 years for men and 20 years for women. Marriage was almost universal in nature, only 4% of men and 2% of women remained unmarried until the age of 55 years. (Table 1). Early marriage among women is marked by the low percentage of unmarried women between ages 21-25 years (20.3%). The difference between the mean age at first marriage for men and the mean age at first marriage for women is about 4.2 years, at approximately 24.5 years for men and 20.3 years for women.

Marriage in the late 19th century Romanian society was largely seasonal. Seasonality is determined by two factors: firstly, the large proportion of the rural population, whose pace of life is determined by agricultural practices, and secondly, the Orthodox calendar which provides strict periods when marriage can be performed. Thus most marriages occur in the months January-February and November (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2008). By mid-20th century, the end of the Second World War, increasing urbanization, agricultural mechanization, the second wave of secularization, along with improving living and health conditions have influenced changes in marital behaviour. The particularities of urban life reduced the differences in timing and seasonality of marriages. Towards the end of the 20th century there was little difference between urban and rural marital behaviour (Vasile, 2010). By 1956 census marriage situation was as described in Table 2. The age at which women first contracted marriage was between 20 and 24 and only 33.5% of them remain unmarried by age

25. The proportion of women that remained unmarried at the age of 50-54 years was very low, 3.8%. Marriage remains early and universal.

Analysing the evolution of marriage rates in the 20th century one can observe the high level of marriage indicators in the immediate area of the two World Wars, 1920-1924 and 1946-1958. The phenomenon of recovering postponed marriages and births due to world wars can succeed in explaining the high level of marriage, although quantification is difficult. We can admit that, in Romania, during 1946- 1958 a similar phenomenon to the "Honeymoon Explosion" in the West took place, which can be described as having a relatively low stretch but high intensity (Table 3). According to Hajnal (1965), the phenomenon happened in the West around 1935-1950 and resulted in lower mean age at first marriage and increase in total marriage rate.

Marriage, as compared to other demographic events, is strongly influenced by social factors, beginning with legislation and ending with cultural and psychological factors. Although the legislation set minimum age for marriage ranged from 14 to 16 years for girls and from 16-20 for boys (Bolovan and Bolovan, 2002; Brie, 2005), the mean age at first marriage still manifests a great stability over time, as shown in Table 4. If we consider only the period between 1961 and 1984, we find that the mean age at first marriage for women ranged from 21.15 years to 22.30 years. The difference between the mean ages of the spouses is about 3.0-3.5 years.

Facing the Second Demographic Transition

Political and economic transformations that took place in our country starting December 1989 were accompanied by substantial changes in family and reproductive behaviour of the Romanians. Marriage rates have sharply fallen, the mean age at marriage increased, indicating changes in the timing of marriages (Muresan, 2012; Rotariu, 2010; Sobotka, 2008). The social surveys that focused on family and fertility (Generation and Gender Survey, 2005) indicated a significant increase in consensual unions and the number of persons entering into a cohabitation, as well as a decrease in the proportion of consensual unions that turn into marriages (Muresan, 2007).

The fall of the communist regime meant a reconnection to the European values and models of modernity, development and civilization of the West. Principles and programs from Western Europe have been implemented in Romania, the multi-party electoral system and different economic, legal and statistical systems were set in place. Information overflows, media channels have been set up in a few months, as well as magazines, newspapers, radio stations and television programs. All have contributed to the promotion of new

ideologies (Thornton and Philipov, 2009) including those related to family, marriage, cohabitation, divorce. The transition from a centralized political and economic system to a democratic one influenced the family and reproductive behaviour of the Romanians. Since the early years of democracy fertility rate is below replacement level, 1.8 births per woman in 1991, the gross rate of marriage decreases from 8.3 marriages per thousand inhabitants in 1990 to 6.8 in 1994.

The Romanian overall pattern of family formation is one where after school, around the age of 18, most people will find employment, in the following two years the majority will leave the parental home; after two more years of living alone they marry, and childbearing occurs in general after two years. The pattern is slightly different for those with higher education for whom marriage intervenes at a later age, on average one year after graduation. (Popescu, 2009).

Although marriage is no longer considered necessary, the preferred family model for Romanians remains the traditional one. The majority of births occur within marriage, in spite of the increased proportion of extramarital births from 26.7% in 2002 to 31 % in 2012. A number of studies argue that in Romania the apparent post modernity of demographic behaviours, especially after 1990, was not caused by changing attitudes towards marriage or family, but only by a return to traditional family models, since the new political regime has taken a new perspective on family and fertility, at least in terms of legislation.

Leaving the parental home

Leaving the parental home is considered to be the event triggering the transition to adult life. In demographic research, this is defined by the moment when the young adult leaves the home he inhabited with his parents to move into another home, alone or with a partner. Currently this is considered as an a priori condition for the beginning of adult life. Entering a form of marital union and paternity, in the former communist countries, leaving the parental home occurs later in life, many young people continued to live with their parents even after starting a family (Sobotka, 2008; Mureşan, 2012). This phenomenon is explained by the lack of housing in these countries as a result of a centralized allocation of housing. Co-residence is, in these cases, more of an involuntary phenomenon. Apart from access to their own home, there are other factors that influence the age at which young adults leave the parental home, such as employment opportunities, income, spatial distribution of university centres (Mureşan, 2012).

In Romania, leaving the parental home depends on whether the young adult or his family can afford to buy or rent a new home. The reasons

why young people decide to take this step are multiple: departure for studies, moving with life partner or simply the desire to become independent. The probability of the manifestation of this behaviour increases with the likelihood of marriage, when the newlyweds often decide to invest the money received as a wedding present into a home. It is accustomed for parents to financially support young adults during studies by covering the tuition costs.

As for the age at which this behaviour occurs, in the last 20 years there was observed a tendency of increasing the mean age to 23 years for men and 22 years for women (Mureşan, 2012).

Cohabitation vs. Marriage

In recent years the evolution of all family behaviour indicators: proportion of births outside marriage, crude marriage rate, mean age at first marriage and crude divorce rate indicate a weakening of the institution of marriage among Romanians. The proportion of extramarital births increase sharply exceeding the level of 25% of all births in 2000 (Muresan, 2007). Although an upward trend sets the phenomenon at a smaller scale than in Bulgaria or Hungary, where the 25% threshold was reached much earlier, in Bulgaria in 1995 and 1998 in Hungary (see Figure 1). Sobotka noted in 2003 that in Romania, extramarital births occur mainly in consensual unions, while in Bulgaria they are mainly attributed to single mothers.

Since 1990 there is a tendency to postpone marriage and first births. The difference between the moments of the two demographic events is becoming smaller with a minimum of 0.5 years attained in 2007 (see Figure 2). The postponement of marriage occurs at a faster pace than the postponement of first births. A possible explanation may lie in the easy acceptance of changes in marriage patterns, such as consensual unions (Mureşan, 2007). It is also possible that some marriages are determined by the occurrence of an unplanned pregnancy within the cohabiting partnership (Mureşan, 2012; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). Mureşan (2008) suggested, regarding Romania's case, that there is a general impression that consensual unions are not very common, which contradicts a number of studies, including the authors who estimated that more than a fifth of Romanian women would have entered into a consensual union before the age of 40 years (Hoemet al, 2012). Since the 1960s, in Romania there has been a steady increase in the incidence rate of consensual unions despite the communist policies aimed at reducing individualization and serving only to achieve demographic short term goals (Sobotka, 2008)

Rising Divorce Rates

Approaches of the determinants of divorce in Romania are very scarce. Rotariu (2012) studied divorce in the cross-sectional perspective, offering an image of the phenomenon intensity and also certain socioeconomic differences. Nevertheless, he is aware of the limits of this approach. Mureșan (2007) takes a longitudinal approach, describing divorce in the context of transitions over the life-course of individuals, but does not study determinants or predictors.

The evolution of divorce rates also contributed to the weakening of the institution of marriage in Romania. The critical threshold for divorce rates in the Second Demographic Transition is set at 10% (Muresan, 2007; Sobotka, Zeman & Kantarova, 2003, p. 257). In Romania this threshold was reached in 1960 and since then the evolution of the divorce rate remained constant, with no significant changes until 1990 (Figure 3); even after, little variations were noticed. The average length of marriages ending in divorce was of 13.2 years in 2012. The highest proportion of divorced men are those aged between 30 and 34 - 20.8%. followed by those aged 35 and 39 - 20.8% and those between 40 and 44 years - 19.2%; while in women the largest share is between 30 and 34 years - 20.5% and between 24 and 29 years - 18.2%.

Conclusions

Preserving its importance in the whole societal system, Romanian family is going through a process of liberalization and tends to discard traditional values and become a barometer of the economic and social changes that have affected the country in the last 25 years of transition.

In the context of changing paradigms that seems to dominate the evolution of the society of the third millennium, the concept of family is changing rapidly and significantly. Individualization, economic independence and personal autonomy determined individuals, especially women, to be increasingly less willing to sacrifice their life and personal growth and development in favour of maintaining the family unit. New rules of consumerism have profound consequences on the development of individual identity. The values of global culture based on individualism, free market, democracy, freedom of movement, openness to change, and tolerance influence the individuals' identities in detriment of traditional values. One of the consequences with the greatest impact on family behaviour is the increase of the transitional period from teenage to adulthood. Transition stages that engage young adults in developing a career, marriage, starting a family, take place at increasingly advanced ages. Thus the life of the individual and of the family suffered a more obvious de-standardization than

ever before. Governed by total freedom of action, the materialization of wishes depends only on the opportunities and resources that the individuals and their families have at their disposal and on the constraints they must face.

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Appendices

Table 1
Proportion of never married by age groups, Romania, 1899 %

Age group (years)	Proportion of never married	
	Men	Women
16-20	96,9	78,0
21-25	66,7	20,3
26-30	20,9	7,9
31-35	10,6	4,8
36-40	7,5	4,0
41-45	5,6	3,2
46-50	4,9	2,8
51-55	4,1	2,1

Source : http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf2142.pdf

Table1
Proportion of never married by age groups, Romania, 1956 (%)

Age group (years)	Proportion of never married	
	Men	Women
14-19	97,0	84,2
20-24	71,1	33,5
25-29	21,6	13,3
30-39	5,0	7,0
40-49	2,9	4,3
50-54	2,3	3,8

Source : http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf2142.pdf

Table2:
Crude rate of marriage in Romania, 1900-1984

Period (years)	Marriages per 1000 inhabitants	Period (years)	Marriages per 1000 inhabitants
1900 -1904	8,3	1951-1958	10,9
1905-1909	9,4	1956-1958	11,6
1920 -1924	10,5	1959-1969	9,0
1925-1929	9,6	1970-1979	8,4
1930-1934	9,1	1980-1981	8,2
1935-1939	9,0	1982	7,8
1946-1950	11,2	1984	7,3

Source : http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf2142.pdf

Table3:
Crude rate of first marriage and mean age at first marriage, 1960-1980

Year	Crude rate of first marriage		Mean age at first marriage		Age difference between spouses at first marriage
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1961	9,8	10,6	25,1	22,0	3,1
1962	10,5	10,9	25,1	21,8	3,3
1963	9,4	10,3	25,2	21,7	3,5
1964	9,2	9,8	25,2	21,8	3,4
1965	9,1	9,4	25,1	21,7	3,4
1966	9,8	9,8	25,1	21,7	3,4
1967	9,4	9,1	25,1	21,6	3,5
1968	9,2	8,7	25,1	21,5	3,6
1969	8,7	8,2	25,1	21,6	3,5
1970	8,9	8,1	25,1	21,7	3,4
1971	9,0	8,4	25,1	21,7	3,4
1972	9,2	8,7	25,1	21,8	3,3
1973	9,6	9,2	25,1	21,7	3,4
1974	9,7	9,4	25,2	21,8	3,4
1975	9,3	9,9	25,2	22,0	3,2
1976	9,8	10,1	25,4	22,2	3,2
1977	9,9	10,6	25,3	22,2	3,1
1978	9,8	10,3	25,3	21,9	3,4
1979	9,5	10,7	24,8	21,4	3,4
1980	8,9	10,1	25,2	21,8	3,4

Source http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf2142.pdf

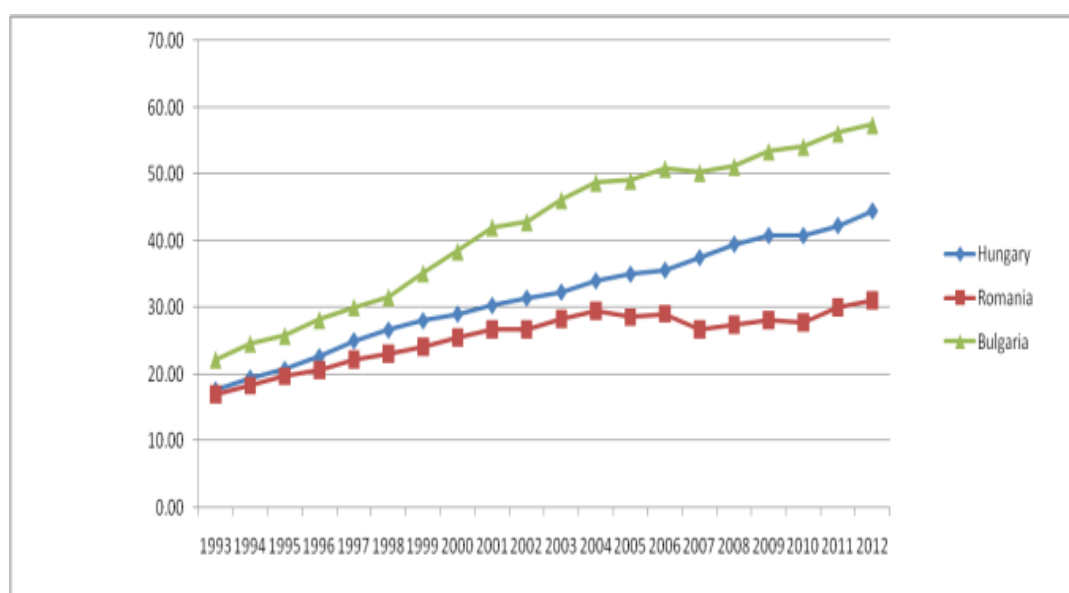


Figure 1: Proportion of births outside marriage, Romania 1993- 2012

Source: authors' computation using data from Eurostat (2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

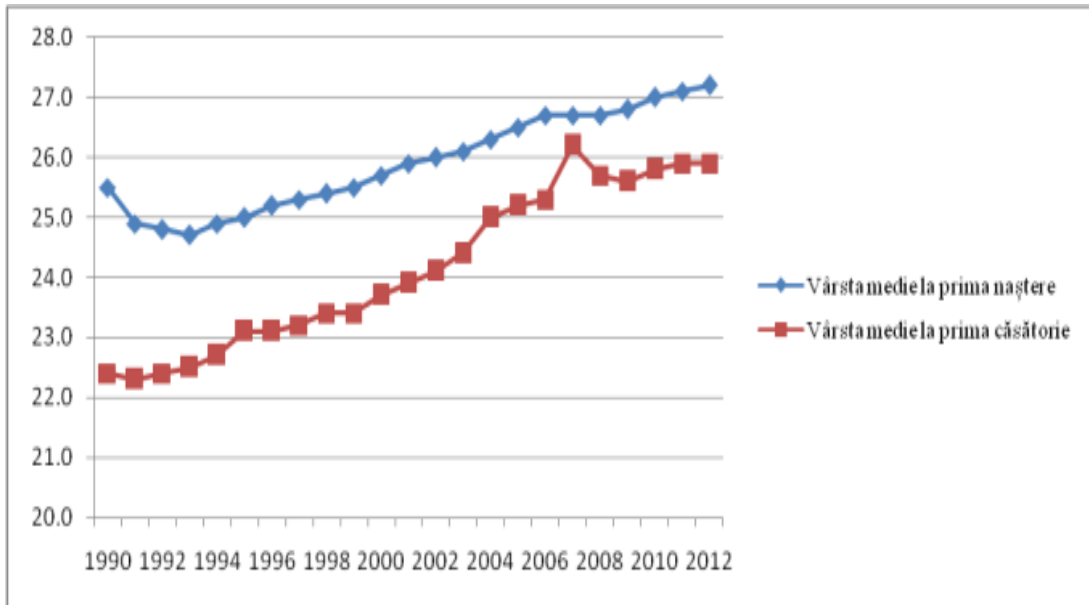


Figure 2: Mean age at first birth and mean age at first marriage, women, Romania, 1990-2012
Source: authors' computation using data from Eurostat Eurostat (2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

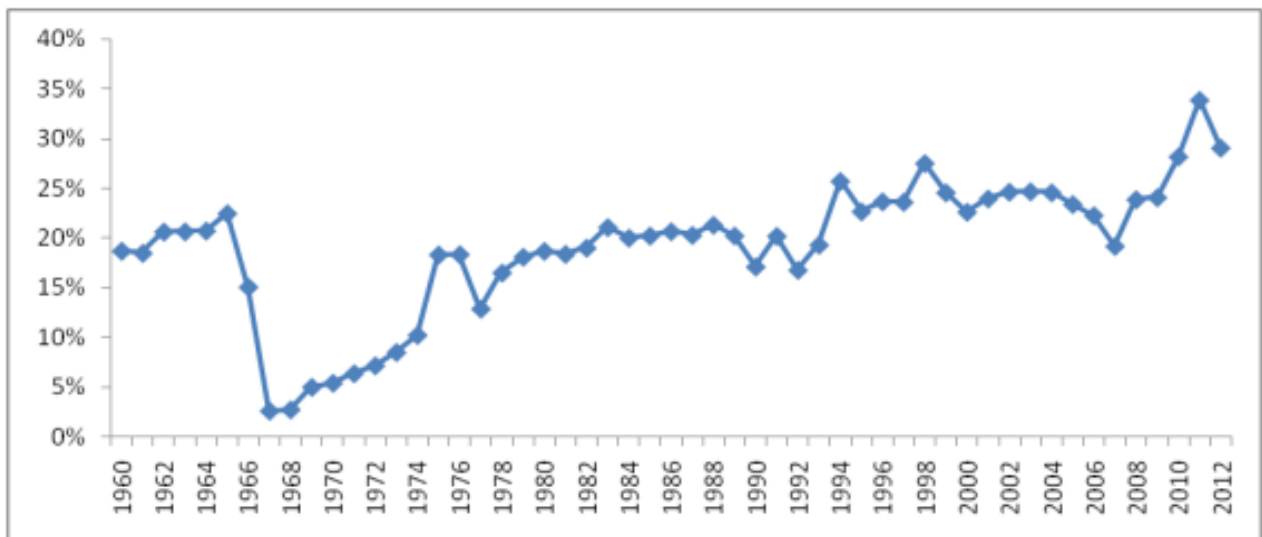


Figure 3: Divorce rate, Romania, 1960-2012
Source: authors' computation using data from Eurostat Eurostat (2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>