

## Perception of marriage in Luxembourg

Marie VALENTOVA



## Programme European Values Study

L'European Values Study (EVS) est une enquête réalisée au Luxembourg en 2008 auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population résidente composé de 1610 individus âgés de 18 ans ou plus.

Au niveau national, cette enquête fait partie du projet de recherche VALCOS (Valeurs et Cohésion sociale), cofinancé par le FNR dans le cadre du programme VIVRE. Au niveau international, elle est partie intégrante d'une enquête réalisée dans 45 pays européens qui a pour objectif d'identifier et d'expliquer en Europe les dynamiques de changements de valeurs, et d'explorer les valeurs morales et sociales qui sous-tendent les institutions sociales et politiques européennes ([www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu](http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu)).

Plus d'infos : <http://valcos.ceps.lu>.



Fonds National de la  
Recherche Luxembourg

\* This research is part of the VALCOS project supported by the Luxembourg 'Fonds National de la Recherche' (contract FNR/VIVRE/06/01/09) and by core funding for CEPS/INSTEAD from the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of Luxembourg.

## INTRODUCTION

Thanks to cultural, economic and demographic change, the institutions of family and marriage have undergone dramatic developments over the past decades. "The emancipation of the individual life course from traditional determining influence of factors such as gender and social or regional origin" (Strohmeier and Kuijsten, 2002:6) allow everyone to lead his or her "own life" and consequently make individual choices regarding couple formation and organization of family life.

Due to this evolution, post-modern western societies is characterised by a low level of union stability and growing pluralisation of living arrangements. Traditional marriage (defined as a long-lasting legal companionship of man and woman) is being replaced or alternated by other forms of partnership such as, for example, cohabitation<sup>1</sup>.

Divorce rates are continuously increasing - as well as the incidence of "patchwork" families and single parenthood. Partnerships between men and women have become less focused on reproduction and childbearing. This leads to a growing number of childless couples and one-child families (Strohmeier and Kuijsten, 2002: Gustaffson et al., 2002).

The present paper builds on existing research and analyses how Luxembourg residents perceive the institution of marriage<sup>2</sup> and whether the changes in behavioural patterns regarding couple formation and couple life are reflected in people's attitudes towards marriage. In a first step, the paper analyzes to what extent Luxembourg residents perceive marriage as an outdated institution and reveals how attitudes toward marriage differ depending on the year of the survey, gender, age and marital status. In a second step, it examines which aspects of couple life are considered as the most important prerequisites of a successful marriage, how these perceptions have evolved between 1999 and 2008 and how they are affected by gender and age of respondents.

It needs to be noted that with respect to factors affecting attitudes toward marriage, we focus only on the effect of gender, age and marital status as they are considered the most important determinants of attitudes toward marriage (Trent and South, 1992). Other predictors such as, for example, parents' socio-economic status and mother's labor market status are disregarded due to the limited scope of the paper.

<sup>1</sup> Cohabitation is an unmarried form of couple life. Cohabitation is either registered (formal status of partnership) or informal.

<sup>2</sup> It needs to be stressed here that in this paper we focus exclusively on the institutions of marriage, which is only one of many possible types of couple formations. Thus, the term "marriage" should not be used interchangeably with the term "family". The family is a more general and broader concept that includes all possible forms of private kin relationships.

## I. CONTEXT

Despite the general convergence in European countries concerning the weakening of the importance of traditional marriage, and the increasing acceptance of alternative ways of partnership and family formations, the differences in occurrence and acceptance of these new trends in family life vary markedly across European countries (Strohmeier and Kuijsten, 2002). Table 1 presents selected Eurostat (2010) figures that describe situation in Luxembourg in the context of other European countries.

As marriage behaviour is concerned, the Eurostat data (2010) show that in the vast majority of the EU-15 countries, the number of marriages per 1000 inhabitants has decreased between 1999 and 2008. The only exceptions from this general downturn trend are the Nordic countries and Ireland where we observe a reverse tendency, i.e. increment in the incidence of marriage. In Luxembourg, the marriage rate<sup>3</sup> declined from 4.9 in 1999 to 3.9 in 2008<sup>4</sup>, which places Luxembourg at the bottom of the EU-15 ranking. One of the possible explanations of this decline in marriages rate is the growing importance and occurrence of alternative forms of couple life and in particular, registered and non-registered cohabitation. In 2004, registered partnership (PACS) was legally introduced in Luxembourg. Registered partners, be it same-sex or different-sex partners, enjoy many of the rights of married couples including access to welfare benefits, and most of the fiscal advantages.

The Eurostat data for example, reveals that in all observed countries the incidence of out-of-wedlock, parenthood has increased during the past ten years, which signals marriage and child bearing have become increasingly separate. The Nordic countries, France and Great Britain are front-runners in accepting new non-traditional family forms and parenthood. In 2008, the number of life births outside marriage in these countries exceeded 40 %. On the contrary, in Greece and Italy the proportion of children born out of wedlock

was below 10 %. In Luxembourg, about 30 % of children were born outside of marriage that year. This means that Luxembourg belongs to a group of countries with a moderate acceptance of non-marital parenthood. However, the increase of birth occurring to unmarried women during the past ten years was substantial – increasing from 19 % in 1999 to 30 % in 2008.

The average of crude divorce rates (the number of divorces per 1000 persons) in EU-15 countries in 2008 varied between 0.8 in Ireland and 3.3 in Belgium. Luxembourg, where the divorce rate in that year was equal to 2.0, thus belongs to European countries with relatively less stable marriages. In the majority of EU-15 countries, divorce rates have increased or stagnated between 1999 and 2008. In Luxembourg, the divorce rate in 2008 was lower than 9 years ago. However, after having a close look at yearly Eurostat figures it becomes apparent that the divorce rate has been relatively stable during this period and only in 2008 it dropped to 2.0<sup>5</sup>. Bodson and Segura (2010) present longitudinal data on divorce covering several decades and following different cohorts of married couples and show that among couples who married in the 70s, 80s and 90s, the highest divorce rate was found among the most recent couples (i.e. people who got married in the 90s). The authors report that after the first 13 years of marriage 10 % of couples who married in the 70s got divorced, while among those that got married in the 90s the divorce rate was almost three times higher (25 %).

Another phenomenon linked to the couple life is childlessness. Bodson (2010) mentions that in 2001, the rate of childless women in the cohort of females born between 1952 and 1956 in Luxembourg was equal to 20 %, while for example in Portugal it was about 6 % and in Germany approximately 30 %. The author also reveals in many European countries, including Luxembourg, the number of childless women has been continuously increasing during the past decades.

<sup>3</sup> The crude marriage rate is defined as marriages per 1000 persons. The crude marriage does not take into account other factors, for example; institutional factors, demographic structure, family law etc.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage rates in Luxembourg: in 2000 – 4.9, 2001 – 4.5, 2002 – 4.5, 2003 – 4.4, 2004 – 4.4, 2005 – 4.4, 2006 – 4.1, 2007 – 4.1. (Eurostat, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> Divorce rates in Luxembourg: in 2000 – 2.3, 2001 – 2.3, 2002 – 2.4, 2003 – 2.3, 2004 – 2.3, 2005 – 2.2, 2006 – 2.5, 2007 – 2.3. (Eurostat, 2010)

**TABLE 1.** Family and parenthood related indicators in selected countries in 1999 and 2008

	Life birth outside marriage (% of all live birth) 1999	Life birth outside marriage (% of all live birth) 2008	Marriages per 1000 persons 1999	Marriages per 1000 persons 2008	Divorce rate (per 1000 persons) 1999	Divorce rate (per 1000 persons) 2008
Belgium	25.4	-	4.3	4.3	2.6	3.3
Denmark	44.9	46.1	6.7	6.8	2.5	2.7
Germany	22.1	32.1	5.3	4.6	2.3	2.3
Greece	3.9	5.9	5.6	4.8	0.9	1.2
Spain	16.3	31.7	5.2	4.2	0.9	2.4
France	42.8	52.6	4.9	4.1	2.0	2.2
Ireland	31.1	33.1	4.9	5.1	0.7	0.8
Italy	9.2	17.7	4.9	4.1	0.6	0.9
<b>Luxembourg</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Netherlands	22.8	41.2	5.7	4.5	2.1	2.0
Austria	30.5	38.9	4.9	4.2	2.3	2.4
Portugal	20.9	36.2	6.8	4.1	1.8	2.4
Finland	38.7	40.7	4.7	5.8	2.7	2.5
Sweden	55.3	54.7	4.0	5.5	2.4	2.3
Great Britain	38.8	45.4	5.1	4.4	2.8	2.4

Source: Eurostat 2010

The aforementioned demographic figures from different countries confirm that family life and consequently marriage behaviour is going through profound changes. These behavioural changes are associated with shifts in people's values and attitudes. As Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) point out, values are principles that guide or channel people's behaviour. Even if it is not always straight forward to uncover whether attitudes shapes human actions or if it is the other way around (i.e. that the changes in human behaviour stimulate attitudinal shifts), it is claimed with certitude these two aspects are closely related. Thus, to understand better people's marriage-related behaviour it is necessary to examine how they perceive marriage and couple formation. Previous research on this issue suggests that public's acceptance of a wide range of family and gender role behaviors, divorce, never marrying, and unmarried motherhood has increased over time (Trent and South 1992). In parallel, perceived advantages of marriage compared to single life have declined (Thornton and Freedman, 1982).

Building upon previous research and available statistics, this paper aims to answer the following questions: do Luxembourg residents see marriage as an outdated institution? Are there any gender and age<sup>6</sup> differences in attitudes toward marriage?<sup>7</sup> Have attitudes toward marriage evolved in the period between 1999 and 2008? What are the most important preconditions of a successful marriage? Can we observe some over-time changes in perception of the preconditions of a successful marriage? Does appreciation of preconditions of a successful marriage differ depending on gender age and marital status<sup>8</sup>?

Given the evidence mentioned above suggesting that the traditional marriage is losing its primacy among other forms of companionship between men and women and that divorce, separation and cohabitation play a more important role in people's everyday life, we hypothesize that respondents interviewed in 2008 would be more likely to agree with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution than people surveyed in 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Due to problems regarding comparability of the EVS data from 1999 and 2008 with respect to age (Fleury, 2010a), we analyze the age effects only on the data from 2008.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper we focus only on the effect of gender and age as they are considered to be the most important determinants of attitudes toward marriage (Trent and South, 1992). Other predictors such as, for example, marital status, parents' socio-economic status and mother's labour market status, are disregarded due to limited scope of the paper.

<sup>8</sup> Only data from 2008 are used to examine the associations with age (see arguments in note 4)

It has also been found that attitudes toward marriage are also strongly affected by age. In general, older respondents tend to exhibit more traditional attitudes than their younger counterparts (Trent and South, 1992). With respect to the effect of age, Estgen (2002) claims that the relationship between age and perception of marriage in Luxembourg is not linear. According to the author, the strongest agreement with the claim that marriage is an outdated institution is found among 35-44 year old and, conversely, the strongest disagreement among 65 years old and more. Based on these previous findings, we hypothesize that middle aged Luxembourg residents exhibit the least positive attitudes toward wedlock.

As the marriage institution is based on the assent of both partners, and as gender roles and their perception have changed substantially during past decades (Barber and Axinn, 1998), it is important to examine where there are gender differences in perception of marriage. Trent and South (1992) in this context claim that, in general, men tend to display more traditional, meaning pro-marriage attitudes than women. However, other research (Thornton and Freedman, 1982) suggests that the effect of gender on attitudes toward marriage interact with age. The authors show that, among the US citizens, marriage continues to be more important to young women than young men, despite recent trends toward more egalitarian gender roles. Given this, we infer that women at the peak of reproductive age (25-35 years old) exhibit more positive attitudes toward marriage than their older female counterparts or than men.

With respect to the effect of marital status on perception of the marriage institution, Trent and South (1992) claim that married people report more pro-marriage attitudes than individuals out of wedlock. We find a couple of possible explanations for this phenomenon. One of them is that people who have a positive (or non-negative) attitude toward the marriage institution tend to get married. Another explanation might be a so called attitudinal alignment. The concept of attitudinal alignment lies on the premise that people try to avoid a dissonance or contradictions between their behavior and attitudes and, as a consequence, they adjust their attitudes to be in line with their actual acts and objective situation (Kalmijn, 2005). Therefore, married individuals have a tendency to adapt a pro-marriage stance. The third possible explanation is a social desirability bias, where the respondents have a tendency to reply to survey questions in a manner viewed favorably by others

(Fisher, 1993), i.e. married respondent deliver a socially desirable answer.

Given the above arguments, we hypothesize that in Luxembourg married or widowed individuals value the marriage institution more than respondents who have never been married or experienced a marriage break-up. It is also expected that separated or divorced individuals perceive marriage the most negatively of all groups of respondents.

To set our hypothesis regarding the evolution of attitudes towards preconditions or determinants of successful marriage, we base ourselves on two main theoretical premises. The first one is the theory of individualization - stating that people in Europe have exhibited increasingly individualistic values, i.e. stressing the importance of individual freedom, personal autonomy, and self-development rather than respect to norms, authority and conformism (Aster et al., 1993). As a consequence, the perception of family life is transformed from a self-evident institution into a matter of individual choice and preference (Strohmeier and Kuijsten, 2002).

The second theoretical cornerstone around which one can build a hypothesis regarding perceptions of prerequisites of a successful marriage are studies reporting the decline of material and economic motivations for couple formation. In this context, Estgen (2002) argues that people give more importance to personal affection and emotional solidarity than one century ago when it was the private property and personal wealth of partners that played a more important role in couple formation. In line with this, Cherlin (1981) states that increasing participation of women in the labour market and consequent augmentations of economic independence of women reduce their economically-driven needs to marry. These changes translate in people's attitudes toward marriage and their expectations and consequently, marriage is seen more as a voluntary partnership than an economic necessity. Vandecasteele and Billiet (2004) cite that younger respondents stress more the importance of quality of marriage (consisting of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance, happy sexual relationship and sharing household chores) than material and homogamy aspects of this institution. The authors also point out that women in the analyzed European countries tend to judge partner's homogamy in social background, religion and politics as well as quality of marriage as more important compared to their male counterparts.

Deducing from aforementioned evidence, it is inferred that: first, Luxembourg respondents value more emotional and abstract aspects than material or practical ones and second, that the importance of the abstract and emotional preconditions of a successful marriage have gained importance in the period between 1999 and 2008.

With respect to the effect age, we expect that the younger are the respondent, the more they will underline importance of abstract and emotional aspects of marriage. Due to the inexistence of literature examining effects of gender and age on attitudes toward prerequisites of a successful marriage, we do not set any hypothesis with respect to these issues.

## II. DATA

The analyses are based on the data from the European Values Study (EVS). The original sample consisted of a representation of 2354 Luxembourg residents from two waves of the survey (1999 and 2008). The respondents were 18 years old or more. The sample was weighted by a specific weight that was constructed to conduct a sound comparison of the results from 1999 and 2008 and to examine the evolution of attitudes across time.

For the purpose of this paper we used two groups of questions included in the international EVS questionnaire. The first group consists of only one question on the general perception of marriage. The exact formulation of this question is as follows: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Marriage is an outdated institution?" where response category 1 stands for an agreement with the statement and 2 for a disagreement.

The second group consists of eleven items regarding perceived determinants of successful marriage which were present in both waves of the EVS survey. The exact wording of the question in the EVS questionnaire was: "Here is a list of things which some people think make for a successful marriage. Please tell me, for each one, whether you think it is very important, rather important or not very important for a successful marriage?" Respondents were asked to assess the list below and state how important each of them is:

Response category 1 stands for very important, 2 stands for rather important and 3 stands for not very important.

**TABLE 2.** Wording of items as mentioned in the EVS questionnaire

	Tentative abbreviation
Faithfulness	Faithfulness
An adequate income	Income
Being of the same social background	social background
Shared religious beliefs	Religion
Good housing	Housing
Agreement on politics	Politics
Living apart from your in-laws	parents in law
Happy sexual relationship	Sex
Sharing household chores	housework
Children	Children
Being willing to discuss the problems that come up between husband and wife	Discussions

Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

### III. IS MARRIAGE AN OUTDATED INSTITUTION?

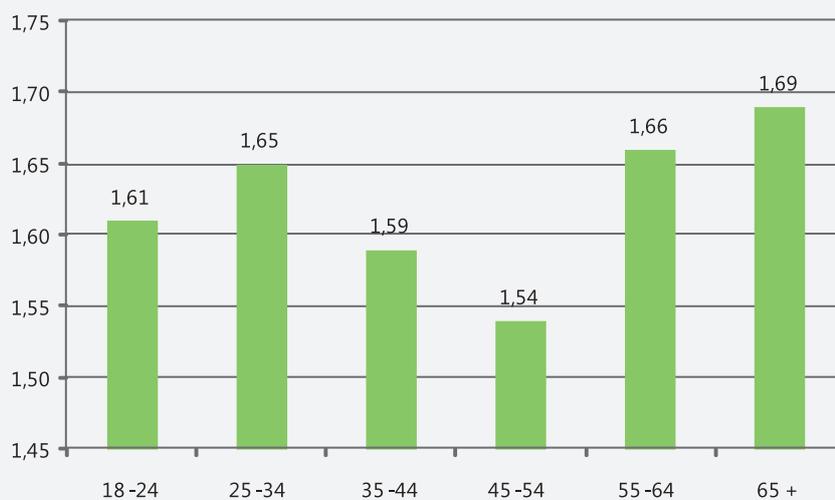
The EVS data reveal that in 1999 about 32 % of Luxembourg residents agreed with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution, while in 2008 it was 38 %. The additional statistics confirm that this increase is statistically significant. From this we can deduce that the importance of the marriage has decreased over time and about one third of the Luxembourg population consider it as not up-to-date mode of partnership between men and women.

Deducing from the existing literature, we assume attitudes toward marriage vary across various age groups of Luxembourg residents. According to Estgen (2002), it is often expected younger respondents are less traditional in their attitudes toward marriage than their older counterparts. However, the Luxembourg data does not corroborate this rather simplifying hypothesis. The author demonstrates on the EVS data from 1999 that the relationship between age and perception of marriage is not linear. It is confirmed that the oldest category of respondents (those aged

65 years or more) adopt the most traditional, meaning pro-marriage, attitudes. However, the strongest to agree with the claim that marriage is an outdated institution is found among 35-44 years old residents, not the youngest ones. The youngest respondents aged 18-24 years express only a moderate stance toward the out datedness of wedlock.

When calculating the mean values of attitudes toward the out-datedness of the marriage institution using data from 2008, we arrive to similar findings reported by the Estgen (2002) for 1999. Namely, the association between age and marriage attitude is proven to be non-linear. The strongest "pro-marriage" attitudes are reported by residents aged 65 or more years. The youngest generation adopts only moderately liberal stance toward this institution. The strongest advocates of out-datedness of marriage appear to be respondents born between 1954 and 1963, i.e. the same cohort like in the 1999 wave of the EVS survey.

**FIGURE 1.** Attitudes toward the statement that marriage is an outdated institution by age in 2008, mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: Interpretation of mean values: the closer the mean value is to 1, the higher the agreement with marriage as an out of date institution. The closer the mean value is to 2, the more they disagree with the statement. The absence of the asterisk means no significant difference between 1999 and 2008.

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

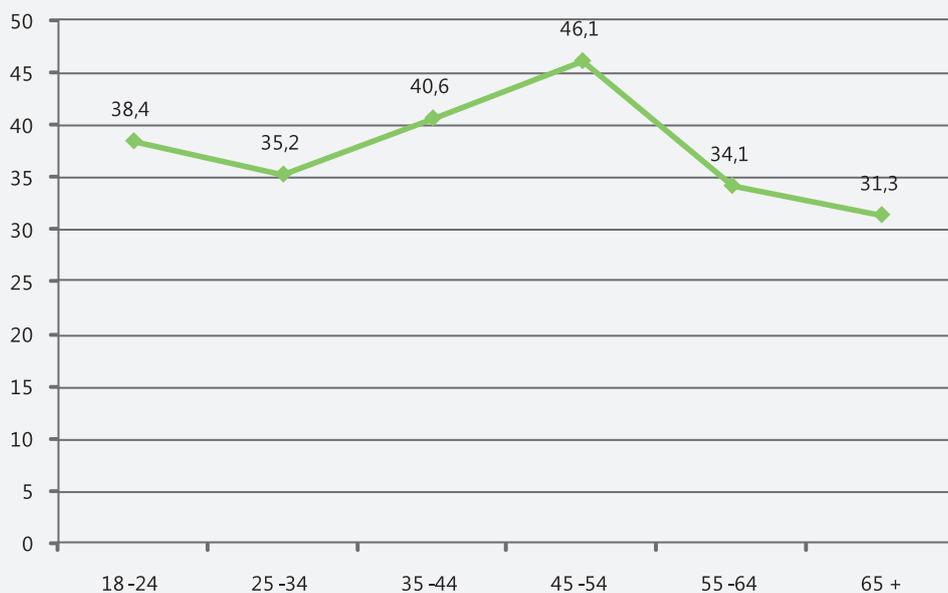
To give a clearer idea about the proportion of Luxembourg residents who consider marriage as an outdated institution, we present Figure 2. This figure reports the percentage of people who in 2008 agreed with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution in relation to their age. The data shows 46 % of 45-54 year olds were the strongest supporters of the outdatedness of marriage. On the contrary, the lowest proportion of "marriage skeptics" was found among the oldest category of respondents (31 % of agreement with the statement).

To test our hypothesis regarding the gender effect on attitudes toward marriage, we present Figure 3. It shows that the trend of decreasing support of the marriage institution is observed among male as well as female residents. However, despite this general decline, it becomes apparent that in both waves of the EVS survey females agreed less with the out-datedness of marriage than their male counterparts. This suggests that women value wedlock more than men and that they are, in this respect, more traditional than their male counterparts.

It needs to be also noted that the gender gap in perception of marriage, i.e. the difference between the percentage of men and women who agree with the outdatedness of this institution, has narrowed between 1999 and 2008 - in 1999 the gender gap was equal to 7 % and was statistically significant, while in 2008 it was insignificant and equal to only 3 %. This evolution indicates an across-time convergence between men and women regarding this issue.

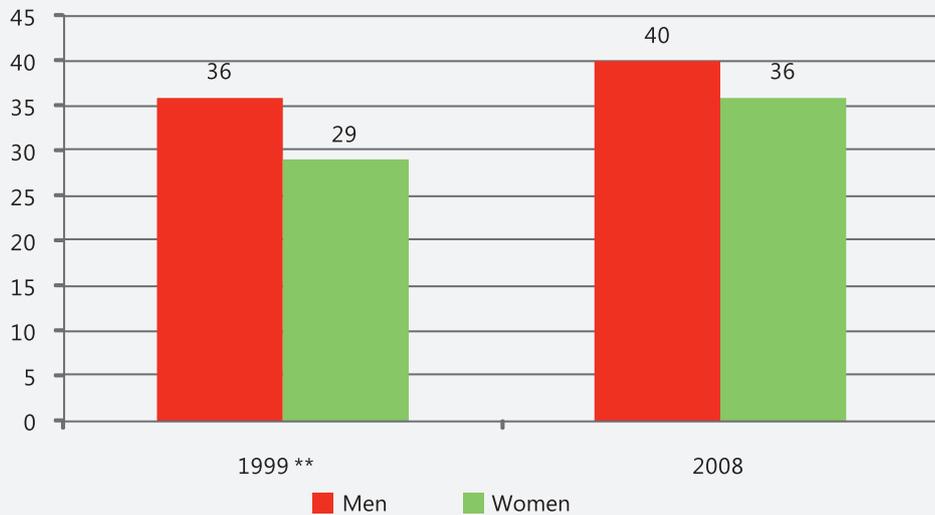
To see whether the effect of gender on attitudes toward marriage interacts with age as suggested by Thornton and Freedman (1982), we conduct a mean analysis of attitudes toward marriage depending on gender and age (*cf. Figure 4*). In this exercise we use only data from 2008. The mean values vary between 1 and 2. The closer is the value to 1, the stronger is the conviction that marriage is an outdated institution. The closer is the value to 2, the more the respondents disagree with the statement.

**FIGURE 2.** Percentage of agreement with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution by age



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

**FIGURE 3.** Percentage of agreement with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution by gender and wave



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 1999, SESOPI ; EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The absence of the asterisk means no significant gender differences in attitudes toward marriage.

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

**FIGURE 4.** Attitudes toward marriage by gender and age - mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The mean values vary between 1 and 2. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger is the conviction that marriage is an outdated institution. The closer is the value to 2 the more respondents disagree with this claim.

The absence of the asterisk means no significant difference among age categories for the particular groups of respondents (ANOVA analysis).

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

The outcomes of this analysis show that on the contrary to women, the effect of age is very weak and statistically insignificant among male residents, meaning that the attitudes do not vary significantly across different age groups.

When checking for age effect on attitudes toward marriage among women, it becomes apparent that those aged 25 - 34 years exhibit significantly more traditional attitudes than women of almost all other age categories with the exception of female respondents aged 65 years or more. This peak of "pro-marriage" attitudes could be explained by the fact that at this age women usually consider motherhood and get married, which might have a significant impact on their perception of couple life and wedlock.

With respect to the relationship between marital status<sup>9</sup> and attitudes toward marriage (cf. Table 3), the data indicate that married or widowed residents express the most positive attitudes of all analyzed groups. They are followed by individuals who have never been married. Respondents who experiences a marital break-up adapted the least positive stance toward marriage (i.e. divorced or separated persons).

When comparing attitudes of respondents of different marital status between two waves of

the EVS survey, we observe a slight statistically significant decrease in pro-marriage attitudes among divorced or separated residents. Perception of marriage among remaining groups has not changed significantly between 1999 and 2008.

As we might expected that the effect of marital status on attitudes toward marriage interacts with age of respondents we present outcomes of the mean analysis of attitudes toward marriage broken by marital status and age<sup>10</sup> (cf. Figure 5). The data show that in case of two categories of respondents (married or widowed and never married), the effect of age on marriage attitudes is statistically significant. In concrete terms, it is observed that people aged 35 - 54 express slightly less pro-marriage attitudes than the remaining two age categories. The differences between the youngest and the oldest cohorts are negligible.

Among divorced and separated, no statistically significant association between categorized age and marriage attitudes was found, which might indicate that attitudes of people who experience a marital break-up do not vary across analyzed age groups. However, this conclusion should be read with caution as only 15 separated or divorced respondents belonged to category of 18-34 years old.

**TABLE 3.** attitudes toward marriage by marital status - mean values (scale 1-2)

	1999	2008
Married or widowed	1.73	1.70
Never married	1.58	1.55
Divorced or separated*	1.46	1.31

Source: EVS, Luxembourg, 1999, SESOPI; EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The mean values vary between 1 and 2. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger is the conviction that marriage is an outdated institution. The closer is the value to 2 the more respondents disagree with this claim.

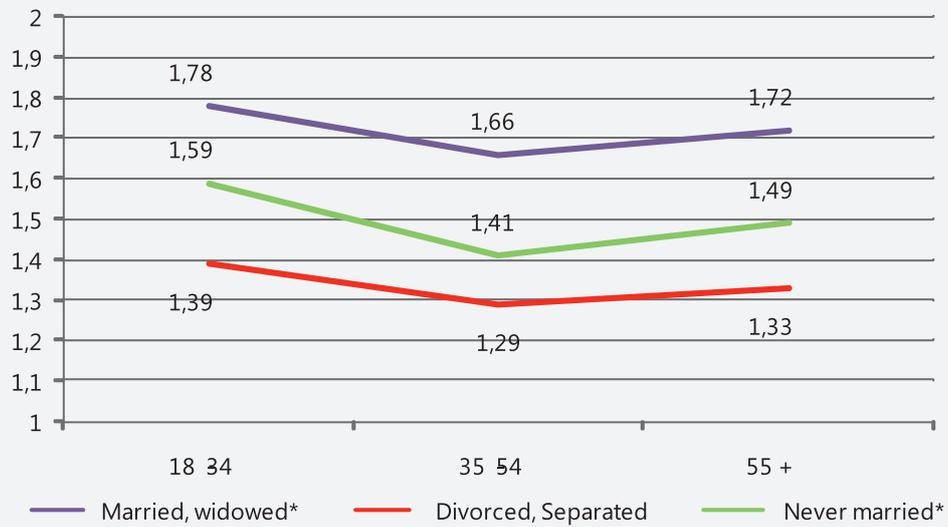
The absence of the asterisk means no significant difference between two waves within a particular group of respondents (ANOVA analysis).

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

<sup>9</sup> For this purposes of this paper we created three generic categories of marital status: 1 - married or widowed, 2 - divorced or separated and 3 - never married (never married or registered cohabitation)

<sup>10</sup> In this analysis we work only with the data from 2008. The age variable is re-categorized in three groups (18-34, 35-54, 55 or more) to assure the sufficient number of case for each cross-section of age and marital status categories.

**FIGURE 5.** Attitudes toward marriage by marital status and age - mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The mean values vary between 1 and 2. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger is the conviction that marriage is an outdated institution. The closer is the value to 2 the more respondents disagree with this claim.

The absence of the asterisk means no significant difference among age categories for the particular groups of respondents (ANOVA analysis).

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

#### IV. WHAT DOES MAKE A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE?

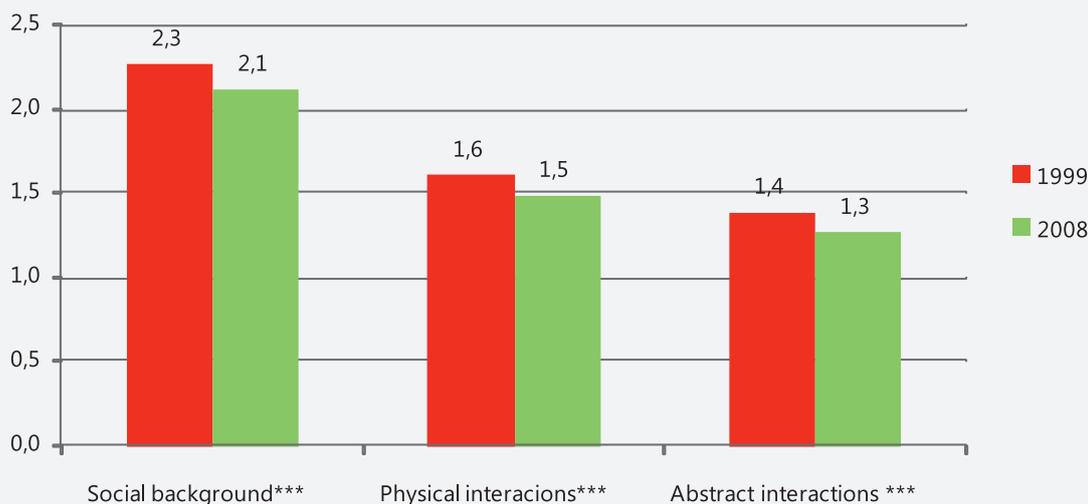
In the following paragraphs we turn our attention to the perceived prerequisites of a successful marriage. As indicated earlier the EVS questionnaire lists eleven items that might be considered as preconditions of a successful marriage (for more details see page 6 and 7). To facilitate analysis of this amount of elements, it was decided to group them and construct composite scores. The outcomes of the principal composite analysis suggest creation of three distinctive composite scores of perception of necessary attributes of successful marriage<sup>11</sup>.

The first score tentatively entitled "social background" consists of the following five items: religion, social background, income, housing and politics. The second sum score labeled "physical interactions" is composed of items such as cohabitation with parents in law, division of housework and sexual relationship. The last score captures mainly "abstract interactions" and clusters the three remaining items: faithfulness, children and discussions.

The values of each sum score vary between 1 and 3. The closer is the mean value to 1, the more importance is attributed to the given element. On the contrary, the closer is the value of a sum score to 3, the less important is the given composite aspect.

Figure 6 examines whether attitudes toward the three scores have evolved overtime and if yes, how they have done so. The data indicate that all three analyzed scores of preconditions of successful marriage gained on their importance over time, meaning that people interviewed in 2008 considered all three composite indicators more important than respondents who were interviewed in 1999. These over time augmentations were proven to be statistically significant. The largest gap between 1999 and 2008 was found in social background related prerequisites of a successful marriage.

**FIGURE 6.** Attitudes toward three composed scores of prerequisites of successful marriage by wave - mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 1999, SESOPI ; EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The values of sum score vary between 1 and 3. The closer is the mean value to 1, the more respondents think that the given aspect is important. Conversely, the closer is the mean value to 3, the less important is the given aspect. The asterisk means significant differences between men and women.

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

<sup>11</sup> For more details regarding the construction of sum scores see Valentova (2010).

We also observe that, according to Luxembourg residents, the most important precondition of a successful marriage are abstract interactions, followed by physical interactions and spouse's social background. This ranking of successful marriage prerequisites is found in both waves of the EVS survey.

Figure 7 presents the mean values of the three composite scores depending on gender and wave. The outcomes of our analysis point out that among men and women, the most important preconditions for a successful marriage are abstract interactions followed by physical interactions. Social background appears to be the least important of all three aspects.

Looking at the gender gap regarding the perception of the composite scores depending on the time of the survey, 1999 reveals no statistically significant gender differences in perception of the prerequisites of a good marriage. Regarding 2008 data, the gender gap in the assessment of the importance of social background is statistically significant. Social background appears to be more important for men interviewed in that year than their female counterparts. However, it needs to be noted this gap is not very large in terms of magnitude.

The outcomes of analysis, using conventional measures of association between variables<sup>12</sup>, conducted on the data from 2008 suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between age<sup>13</sup> and two composite scores: social background and abstract interaction. With respect to the nature of the age effects, both scores and age are negatively correlated, which means that the older are the respondents, the more importance they give to the role of social background and abstract interactions.

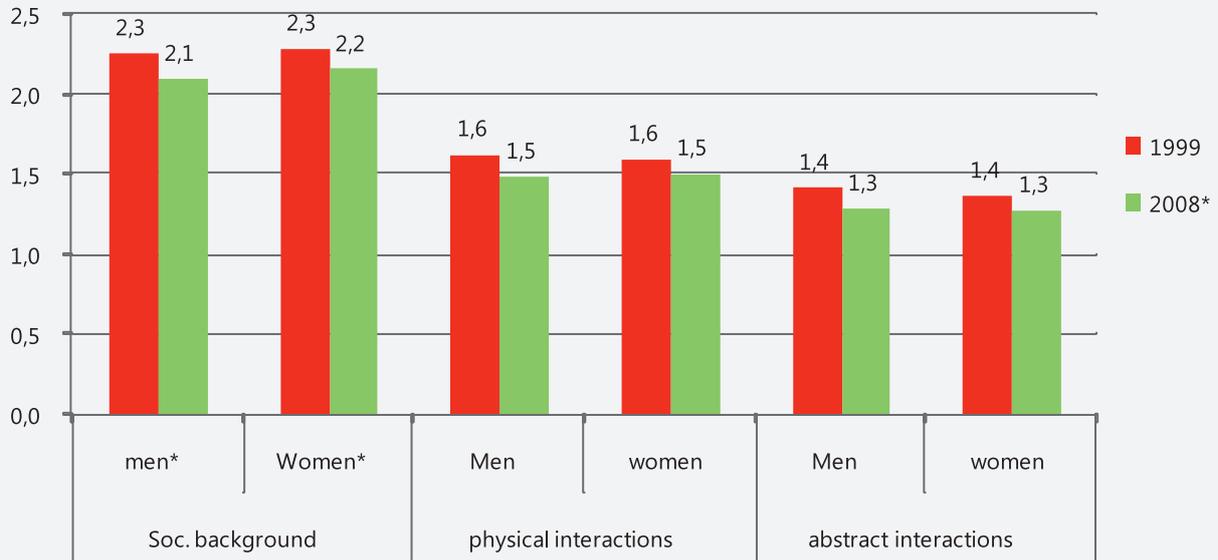
To make the outcomes of this analysis more obvious to the reader, we examine the age effect on perception of prerequisites of a successful marriage using categorized age variable (five categories) and mean analysis (see Figure 8). The closer is the mean value to 1 the more the respondents think that the given aspect is important for a successful marriage. Opposed to this, the closer is the value of a sum score to 3 the less important is the given aspect.

The data presented in the figure below corroborate the aforementioned tendencies. However, after a closer look at the social background score, one can observe a notable and statistically significant drop in mean values among respondents aged 35-44 years. This may imply that respondents, who were in 2008 at the peak of their productive and reproductive age, were more concerned by social background (i.e. religious, political and social homogeneity between spouses and material wellbeing) than residents of younger age or those aged 45-54.

<sup>12</sup> Chi-square test and Pearson correlation coefficient.

<sup>13</sup> In this particular analysis age is treated as a continuous variable.

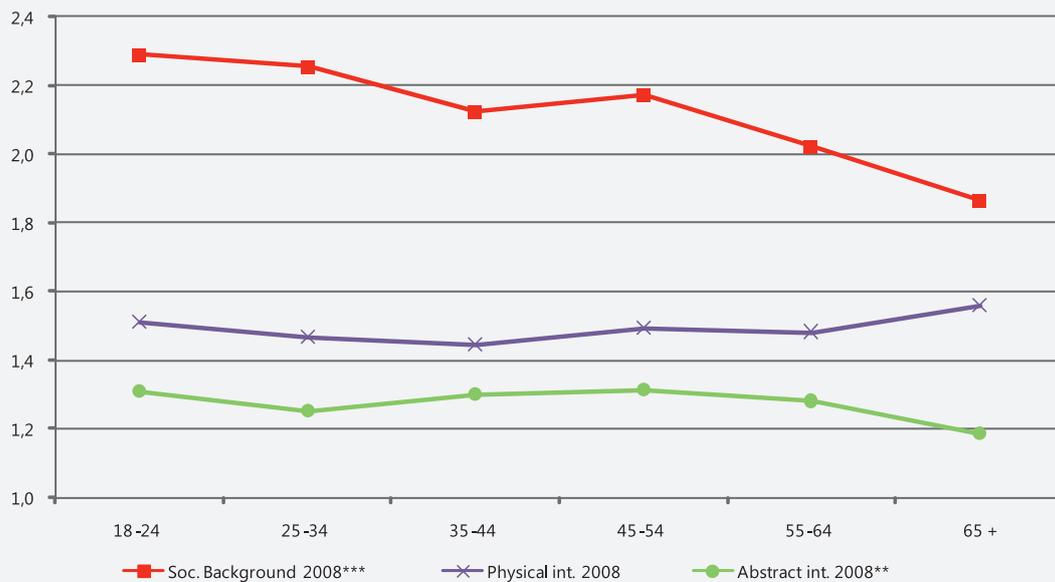
**FIGURE 7.** Attitudes toward three composed scores of prerequisites of successful marriage by gender and wave - mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 1999, SESOPI; EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The sum scores vary between 1 and 3. The closer is the mean value to 1, the more respondents think that given aspect is important for a successful marriage. Conversely, the closer is the mean value to 3, the less important is the aspect.

**FIGURE 8.** Attitudes toward three composed scores of prerequisites of successful marriage by age and wave - mean values (scale 1-2)



Source : EVS, Luxembourg, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: The sum scores vary between 1 and 3. The closer is the mean value to 1, the more the respondents think that the given aspect is important for a successful marriage. Conversely, the closer is the value to 3, the less important is the given aspect. The absence of the asterisk means no significant difference among age categories for the particular groups of respondents (ANOVA analysis).

Interpretation of the asterisk: \*\*\*=0,001 significance level; \*\*=0,01 significance level; \*=0,05 significance level.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present paper had two main objectives. First, it was to analyze to what extent Luxembourg residents perceive marriage as an outdated institution and to uncover how the perceptions evolved during past ten years and how do they differ depending on gender and age of respondents. Second, it examined people's attitudes toward the prerequisites of a successful marriage and how they have changed between 1999 and 2008.

Our analysis of the attitudes toward the marriage institution yields the following results: in conformity with our expectations and the available figures regarding marriage behavior, more Luxembourg residents see marriage as an outdated institution (about 30 % in 1999 and about 40 % in 2008)<sup>14</sup>.

It appears as well that perception of marriage is associated with gender, age and marital status of respondents. Our findings suggest that Luxembourg women exhibit slightly more traditional attitudes toward marriage than the male counterparts, meaning they are more likely to consider marriage as legitimate mode of partnership in contemporary society. In 1999, the gender gap was statistically significant. During the following decade, the gap has decreased and became statistically insignificant, which may indicate an overtime convergence between men and women regarding outdatedness of wedlock.

With respect to age, our analysis based on 2008 data confirms trends published by Estgen (2002). The association between the perception of marriage and age is not linear. The most liberal, i.e. the strongest defenders of the outdatedness of the marriage institution were respondents born between 1954 and 1963 (45-54 years old in 2008).

When analyzing attitudes toward outdatedness of marriage depending on age and gender in 2008, we observe that age matters only in the case of female respondents. Women aged 25-34 years show a stronger "pro-marriage" attitude than

women age 35-64. This finding may suggest that among women who reached the age, at which most women consider family formation and motherhood, the marriage institution gained at its attractiveness.

The outcomes of our analysis also show that married or widowed residents tend to agree less with the outdatedness of wedlock compared to never married, separated or divorced, while the latter group of individuals (divorced or separated) show the most negative attitudes. These findings corroborate our hypothesis stating that married individuals (or those who's spouse passed away) appreciate marriage more than respondents who have never been married or have experienced a marriage break-up.

With respect to perception of prerequisites of a successful marriage, it is summed up that for Luxembourg residents the most important corner stones of a successful marriage are abstract interactions, followed by physical interactions and social background. The outcomes of our analysis also indicate that the importance of all three indicators of preconditions of successful marriage has slightly increased between 1999 and 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the reported decrease in the importance of formal wedlock, it needs to be acknowledged here that the family in the broader sense remains to play a very important role in people's life. According to Fleury (2010b), the importance of family in everyday life of Luxembourg residents has even slightly increased between two waves of the EVS survey. The author indicates that in 1999 about 88% of Luxembourg residents stated that family is very important for them, while in 2008 it was 91%. This means that the family continues to be one of the most important and valued entities in life, even if its forms and functioning have changed dramatically during past decades.

## REFERENCES

- ASTER, P., HLAMA, L. DE MOOR, R. 1993. *The Individualizing Society*. Tilburg: Tilburg Press.
- BARBER, J.S., AXINN, W.G. 1998. Gender Role Attitudes and Marriage among Young Women. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 39 (1), 11-31.
- BODSON, L. 2010. *De plus en plus de femmes sans enfant*. Les Cahiers du CEPS/INSTEAD n° 2010-05.
- BODSON, L., SEGURA, J. 2010. *Le divorce au Luxembourg en droit et en chiffres*. Les Cahiers du CEPS/INSTEAD n° 2010-01.
- CHERLIN, A.J. 1981. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- ESTGEN, P. 2002. *La famille, oui! Mais laquelle ?* In M. Legrand (Eds.) *Les valeurs au Luxembourg. Portrait d'une société au tournant du 3e millénaire*. Saint-Paul: Luxembourg.
- EUROSTAT 2010. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search\\_database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database), 19.09. 2010.
- FISHER, R.J. 1993. Social Desirability Bias and the Validity of Indirect Questioning. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (20), 303-315.
- FLEURY, C. 2010a. L'analyse par cohorte au Luxembourg. Les limites de la méthode dans un pays d'immigration: illustrations à partir des données de l'European Values Study. Working paper du CEPS/INSTEAD n°2010-43.
- FLEURY, C 2010b. *La famille : une valeur sûre*. Les Cahiers du CEPS/INSTEAD n° 2010-14.
- GUSTAFFSON, S., KENJOH, E., and WETZELS, C. 2002. *Postponement of maternity and the duration of the time spent at home after first birth: Panel Data analysis comparing Germany, Great Britain, The Netherlands and Sweden*. Paris: OECD - Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.
- KALMAJN, M. 2005. Attitude alignment in marriage and cohabitation: The case of sex-role attitudes. *Personal Relationships* 12 (4), 521-535.
- KLUCKHOHN, F.R., STRODTBECK, F.L. 1961. *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson.
- KUIJSTEN, A. 2002. Variety and Change in the Forms of Private Life in the 1980s. In F.X. Kaufman. et al. (Eds.) *Family Life and Family policies in Europe* Volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- STROHMEIER, K.P. and KUIJSTEN, A. 2002. Family Life and Family Policies in Europe: an Introduction. In: F.X. Kaufman et al. (Eds.) *Family Life and Family policies in Europe* Volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TRENT, K., SOUTH, J.S. 1992. Sociodemographic Status, Parental Background, Childhood Family Structure, and Attitudes toward Family Formation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54 (2), 427-439
- THORNTON, A., FREEDMAN, D. 1982. Changing attitudes toward marriage and single life. *Family Planning Perspectives*. 14 (6), 297-303.
- VALENTOVA, M. 2010. *Elements of successful marriage*. In Dicks, P. (Eds.) *Cohésion sociale. Enquêtes EVS Luxembourg 1999-2008. Variables intermédiaires*. Differdange: CEPS/INSTEAD.
- VANDECASTEELE, L., BILLIET, J. 2004. *Privatization in the family sphere: longitudinal and comparative analyses in four European countries*. In W. Arts and L. Halman (Eds.), *European Values at the Turn of the Millennium*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

## LES CAHIERS DU CEPS/INSTEAD PARUS EN 2011

- N°02 Population & Emploi Religion au Luxembourg. Quelle évolution entre 1999 et 2008 ? | Monique BORSENBARGER, Paul DICKES
- N°01 Population & Emploi Spécificités et performances des canaux de recrutements | Anne-Sophie GENEVOIS



Sources Mixtes  
Groupe de produits issus de forêts  
bien gérées, de sources contrôlées  
et de bois ou fibres recyclés  
www.fsc.org Cert no. CU-COC-812363  
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

ISSN: 2077-3048

**CEPS**  
I N S T E A D

B.P. 48  
L-4501 Differdange  
Tél.: +352 58.58.55-801  
[www.ceps.lu](http://www.ceps.lu)