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# Love Will Keep Us Apart? Understanding Living Apart Together Partnerships in the Post-state-socialist Czech Republic\*

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**Abstract:** Living apart together (LAT) relationships are under-researched in European sociology and overlooked in Czech sociology. Based on data from 16 biographical interviews with partners living in separate households, this analysis focuses on how LAT is experienced, understood, and explained in the context of the post-state-socialist Czech Republic. Do LAT partners actively choose LAT to avoid or subvert the norm of co-residence? Or do they frame their situation as a result of external constraints and pressures? What is the role of gender norms and of the gendering of a life course in the LAT experience? Our results show the high value that current Czech society continues to place on co-residential partnerships. The study also shows that persistent gender and social inequalities, specific for the post state-socialist Czech Republic, make individual choices more difficult or impossible in both private life arrangements and when combining private life with work. A LAT partnership is not always the result of individual choices, but the relationship often is shaped by external structural and institutional pressures and gendered norms.

**Keywords:** living apart together, biographical research, post-socialist, gender norm, co-residential partnership

*Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, 2015, Vol. 51, No. 6: 993–1022

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2015.51.6.226>

## Introduction

LAT partnerships remain an ‘invisible population’ [Reimondos, Evans and Gray 2011: 43] as for demographers a shared household represents one of the main characteristics of an intimate relationship [Strohm et al. 2009]. The fact that ‘not living with a partner does not necessarily mean not having one’ was recognised only recently [Roseneil 2006: 95]. LATs are usually categorised as singles, except in research studies specifically focused on LAT partnerships [Karlsson and Borell

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\* Work on this article was supported by project no. GA15-13766S and project no. P404/12/0021 of the Czech Science Foundation.

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2002]. Nevertheless, data collected in Great Britain suggest that LAT partnerships should not be overlooked in the research on intimate relationships, as up to 25% of adults who are not cohabiting are in fact living apart together [Duncan et al. 2014:1]. Data from the survey *Life and Work Trajectories 2010*<sup>1</sup> conducted in the Czech Republic provided some statistical evidence of this phenomenon. In the Czech Republic about 6% of the adult population between the ages of 25 and 60 live in a LAT relationship. This type of partnership is most prevalent in the 25–35 age group (10%). This corresponds with research findings in Western European countries, where about 4–10% of the adult population lives in LAT partnerships [Levin and Trost 1999; Haskey 2005; Levin 2004; Duncan et al. 2013].

In the western sociology of intimate life, a growing body of research is available on living apart together (LAT) partnerships [e.g. Strohm et al. 2009; Simon Duncan and Phillips 2010; Upton-Davis 2012; Phillips et al. 2013; Duncan et al. 2013; Stoilova et al. 2014; Duncan et al. 2014]. In Czech sociology, by contrast, these unions are under-researched. Our study represents one of the first qualitative research studies focusing specifically on LAT to be carried out in the post-state-socialist Czech Republic (besides Očadlíková [2009]). Contrary to Očadlíková [ibid.], who focused on the internal motives for LAT (discussed below), we aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of a gendered social structure and external conditions for the decisions about a LAT partnership and for the LAT experience. We use data from 16 in-depth biographic interviews to contribute to the general discussions on LATs by answering the following research questions: What are the social factors contributing to the understanding and experience of LAT in different stages of the life course, either as a preferred partnership model or as a temporary phase of a partnership? What role do gender norms and the gendering of a life course play in the LAT experience in post-state-socialist Czech society with its specific demographic and family-policy development?

LAT can be seen as one of the new trends in socio-demographic behaviour that developed in the Czech Republic and other former state-socialist countries during the transformation after 1989. The typical model of demographic behaviour in the time of state socialism was high fertility, high marriage rates, and starting families at a young age [Fialová and Kučera 1997]. After 1989, however, the fertility rate dropped dramatically from 1.9 children per woman in 1989 to 1.13 children at the end of the 1990s [Hašková 2009]. Fertility has been slowly growing again since 2005 and is now between 1.56 and 1.45 children per woman [CSO 2013]. The average age of a woman when she has her first child increased from 22 in 1990 to the current age of 28 years [CSO 2013]. This trend was closely connected to a sharp increase in the average age of men and women when they marry for the first time (from 22 to 30 for men and from 20 to 28 for women

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<sup>1</sup> 'Life and Work Trajectories 2010' is a survey that was conducted by the Czech Academy of Science's Institute of Sociology on a representative sample of 4010 men and women in the Czech Republic between 25 years and 60 years of age.

between 1989 and 2013) and to a significant drop in the marriage rate and an increase in the divorce rate. As a result, a growing number of children in the Czech Republic are born out of wedlock (45% in 2013 [CSO 2014b]). Together with the drop in marriage rates (from 90% of men and 95% of women at the beginning of the 1990s to 51% of men and 59% of women in 2013), unmarried cohabitation became a significant form of co-residential partnership [CSO 2014a]. Although the LAT phenomenon is not directly visible in the demographic data collected, the postponement of marriage and parenthood and the increase in the divorce rate create the space and possibilities in the life course for either unmarried cohabitation or other types of partnership arrangements such as LAT.

Some Czech sociologists [e.g. Rabušic 2001] explain the changes in socio-demographic behaviour as the result of a deep value transformation and the growth of opportunities leading in turn to the second demographic transition [van de Kaa 1987] already identified in Western European countries, where it occurred earlier. Other scholars describe the changes in fertility rates and marriage behaviours as a reaction to the corrosion of social security and economic decline [e.g. Rychtaříková 2002]. Hašková [2009] stresses the low trust in opportunities for work/life balance and gender equity in her explanation of demographic changes and especially the postponement of parenthood, which anticipates co-residential partnership. From the beginning of the transformation, the economic decline led to the promotion of policies that encouraged women with small children to stay at home [e.g. Formánková and Dobrotić 2011] (the result of sharp decrease in the availability and affordability of childcare services, parental leave for up to three years, and the unavailability of part-time and flexible working hours) [Blum, Formánková and Dobrotić 2014; Křížková and Vohlídalová 2009]. As a consequence of these policies and the gendered norms of a traditional division of work and care in couples and families, in the Czech Republic we can see the motherhood has a significant negative impact on female employment [Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006; Křížková and Vohlídalová 2009].

As Hašková has explained [2009], when discussing changes in partnership behaviour in Czech society, it is important to take into account the specific situation that supports the traditional division of labour between men and women in families and co-residential partnerships. In the context of the strong gendered norms of breadwinning for men and caring for women, while both are at the same time expected to be successful in highly competitive labour market [Maříková 2012], LAT might represent a subversion of these gendered norms and the inequalities connected to intimate partnership and to work/life balance in a co-residential partnership in Czech society. Our aim is to explore this in the life course perspective because gender norms might apply differently in various stages of the life course.

## **Defining the LAT partnership**

In studies dealing with the phenomena of non-residential partnerships, we find diverse understandings and definitions of living apart together (for a discussion of the variety of definitions, see Upton-Davis [2012]). Levin and Trost [1999: 281] define these partners as 'a couple which does not share the same household; both of them live in their own households, in which other persons might also live; they define themselves as a couple; and they perceive that their close social network also does so. LAT relationships can be constituted by people of same or of opposite gender'. The authors distinguish LAT couples from commuter marriages or from couples that share a common household but one or both partners leave it regularly for one or a few nights a week. In contrast to the definition by Levin and Trost [1999], Stoilova et al. [2014] suggest using the term 'living apart relationship', as they aim to emphasise to the same extent both 'apartness' and 'togetherness'.

Some authors define LAT according to the length of the relationship and the level of commitment. Haskey [2005] and Duncan and Phillips [2010] distinguish between casual dating and partnership. Dating LAT is defined by Duncan and Phillips [2010] as the type of partnership in which partners keep separate households because they feel they have been dating for only a short period or are not prepared for such a step as living together. Haskey [2005] excludes teenagers, young adults living with parents, and students from the sample, assuming that these couples are not deciding freely with whom they will share a household.

## **Why do people live apart together?**

The question arises as to whether LAT represents a phase in the life of the couple followed by cohabitation or marriage, or whether it is a new partnership form. The changing standards of family relations are, according to Levin [2004], the reason LAT has become an accepted new form of partnership. Similarly, Roseneil [2006] sees LAT as a new form of partnership, but goes even further when she argues that these relationships deconstruct the role of intimate partnerships and family relations by increasing the importance of friendships. Upton-Davis [2012] stresses the emancipatory character of LAT, enabling a breakaway from institutionalised heterosexuality. LAT provides a way for women to subvert the traditional patriarchal division of power in the household [Upton-Davis 2015]. Jackson [1999: 26, quoted in Upton-Davis 2015] notes that 'everyday heterosexuality is not simply about having sex, but is perpetuated by the regulation of marriage and family life, divisions of wages and domestic labour, patterns of economic support and dependency and the routine everyday expectations and practices through which heterosexual coupledness persists as the normative ideal'. By contrast, Duncan [2014] finds little evidence for the assumption that women are choosing the LAT partnership reflexively to subvert gender expectations. He argues that

women in LAT partnerships are often seeing cohabitation as a desired form of partnership and rather are revising gender norms in an 'incidental, non-strategic and non-reflexive manner' [Duncan 2014: 17]. A great body of research focuses on how LAT partners experience their partnership and what factors influence their satisfaction with being in such an arrangement. Roseneil [2006] distinguishes between people who are (a) regretfully apart, (b) undecidedly apart, and (c) gladly apart. The couples living 'regretfully apart' were the least common in Roseneil's sample. Often these couples had shared a household with their partner before, but circumstances, which were perceived as beyond their control (e.g. illness, career choices or discriminatory housing policy), divided them. On the other hand, in the 'gladly apart' group, the partners highlighted the importance of individual independence. The 'undecidedly apart' group, which was the most numerous, stated the reasons for their uncertainty were doubts about whether they were ready to cohabit or whether they were with the right partner. The members of this group had in common a fear of sharing a household, which often stemmed from previous bad experiences. Almost all of them had experienced disappointment at the end of their previous relationship. The LAT relationship reflected their doubts about their ability to maintain a sustainable relationship and an attempt to avoid further emotional injury. Characteristic of this group was an emphasis on other close relationships, especially their circle of friends.

Another research by Duncan et al. [2013] on the British population found four types of LAT partnerships: (a) partners who willingly choose that they 'won't' live together, (b) couples who 'can't' live together owing to external constraints, (c) couples 'not now' living together who see LAT as just a stage, and (d) 'oughtn't' to live together, a group predominated by women, where cohabitation is not possible because of obligations to others. Cohabitation represented a desired form of partnership for the 'can't', the 'oughtn't to', and the 'not now' types. The 'won't' live together type was common among partners over the age of 40, in most cases living a distance of 20 minutes or less from each other, and with prior experience of marriage. Autonomy and independence were the main reasons for choosing this arrangement [Duncan et al. 2013].

Based on an international comparative analysis of qualitative interviews, Stoilova et al. [2014] revised the typology to divide the LATs as chosen, temporary, transitional, undecided, and unrecognisable. People perceiving LAT as 'chosen' represent a category of partnership where the LAT relationship is the result of preference; the 'temporary' LAT interviewees view their situation as a consequence of external factors; and the 'transitional' type see the LAT partnership as a stepping stone towards a more serious relationship. The 'undecided' and 'unrecognisable' partnerships represent a group of people rather unsure about the future of their relationship or acting based on a specific cultural norm [Stoilova et al. 2014].

In the Czech context, Očadlíková [2009] represents the only available research so far focused solely on LAT in the Czech population. She dealt with the internal motives for choosing 'separate cohabitation' (*oddělené soužití*) and identi-

fied the following factors as reasons for opting for a LAT partnership: (a) uncertainty in the relationship, (b) temporary career preference, (c) adjustment to a partner's needs, or (d) the need for autonomy. In contrast to Očadlíková [ibid.] we focus on external as well as internal motives for LAT and ask whether the partners consider LAT a choice rather than the result of external constraints and pressures.

To sum up, previous studies have shown the great diversity of types of, motives for, and ways of explaining and experiencing the LAT partnership. This is not a phenomenon that exclusively concerns the younger generation. At the same time, the current definitions of LAT partnerships vary, and the resulting typology is often dependent on the type of partnership included or excluded from the study. We argue that qualitative research on LAT from the life-course perspective will help shed light on the specific role LAT plays in individual life histories in Czech society. We shall also discuss the common norms and expectations related to partnership development.

### **Research method and sample**

This study builds on the life history approach and uses the biographical-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) developed by Tom Wengraf [2001]. The biographical-narrative analysis focuses on individual life strategies within contemporary cultural and structural settings [Rustin and Chamberlayne 2002]. We assume that circumstances, institutions, and personal relationships shape and limit individual agency in decision-making in one's personal life [e.g. Duncan 2011]. The method facilitates narratives of lived experience grounded in major societal events that are under way [Rosenthal 2004]. Sylvia Walby [1991] argues that a qualitative approach to life-course research helps us connect life events, periods, and turning points on the individual level with cultural, institutional, and structural contexts and with opportunities and barriers on the macro level. Regarding the lack of empirical evidence about LAT relationships in Czech society grounded in any quantitative representative research, qualitative research is on its own insufficient to provide a generalisable picture of this phenomenon in Czech society. However, qualitative research can provide an intermediate type of limited generalisation, 'moderatum generalisations' [Payne and Williams 2005: 296].

The biographical approach helps to take into account both the richness and variety of lived experience and its connection to social structures, contexts, and processes. During the process of collecting data using BNIM, an introductory question is used to initiate free narration on the research topic. Supplementary questions focus on concrete events, situations, and motives that emerge during the narration.

Our sample consists of 16 individuals living in LAT partnerships (11 women and 5 men), most of them in Prague or in other large cities in the Czech Repub-

**Table 1. A description of the demographic characteristic of the sample**

Interviews	Age	Gender	Status	Education	Relation- ship	No. of children
Petr (partner of Petra)	35	M	Never married	University	2 yrs	–
Petra	30	F	Never married	University	2 yrs	–
Karel (partner of Karla)	34	M	Never married	University	3 yrs	–
Karla	31	F	Never married	University	3 yrs	–
Sofie	30	F	Never married	University	3 yrs	–
Vlasta	82	F	Widowed	High school	4 yrs	4
Zuzana (partner of Zdena)	44	F	Never married	University	4 yrs	–
Zdena	29	F	Never married	University	4 yrs	–
Olda	28	M	Never married	University	6 yrs	–
Elen	40	F	Married	High school	7 yrs	2
Linda	32	F	Married	University	7 yrs	1
Adela	48	F	Divorced	High school	7.5 yrs	1
Martin (partner of Martina)	29	M	Married	University	8 yrs	–
Martina	30	F	Married	University	8 yrs	–
Filip (partner of Filipa)	35	M	Married	University	10 yrs	2
Filipa	34	F	Married	University	10 yrs	2

lic. The sample contains five couples; in these cases, we interviewed each of the partners separately. In some cases, having access to the accounts of both partners provided us with a more textured picture of the differences in the way LAT can be experienced in a couple. While some partners gave very similar descriptions of their situation, other couples expressed rather different or contradictory attitudes. This intensive qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of LAT experiences in Czech society. According to Payne and Williams [2005], a *moderatum* generalisation allows for generalisations about the lifeworld in its nature

and scope, provided the sample is described in detail and the generalisations are moderated based on the sample. This type of generalisation is moderate in the sense that it is open to change across time and cultures and is formulated in a hypothetical sense as a proposition open to testing on the basis of further evidence [Payne and Williams 2005: 297]. Given the composition of our sample, the results of our study cannot be generalised to all LAT partnerships. We rather present a case study on how LAT can be experienced in relation to a specific educational background (our communicational partners had mostly university education) and position in the life course (the sample included different age groups) and at various stages in a relationship (in terms of the length of the union and gendered expectations from the relationship).

A purposeful sampling method was applied to achieve the greatest diversity of LAT partnerships and a grasp of the influences of age, sexual preference, family situation, and education (see Table 1). In the sample we included couples that are already married and have children as well as unmarried couples and couples without children. We chose relationships separated by both small and large geographical distances. We strove to include both younger and older age groups and couples with different sexual preferences. We started out from contacts that we had through our personal networks, and naturally this had an impact on the fact that most of our communication partners had completed their university education. For the same reason the sample is also biased towards people in their late twenties and thirties. This may also be the result of our decision to include only unions that had existed for more than one year in order to allow for the partnership being recognised not only by the persons concerned but also by others [Levin and Trost 1999].

Each interview lasted two to three hours and the transcriptions of the recordings and our own field notes serve as the basis for our analysis. In the analysis of the data, we apply Rosenthal's [2004] biographical case reconstruction. Combining several methods of qualitative data analysis the method begins with an analysis of the formal biographical data and of the structure of self-presentation.

## **The results**

In the data we identified three approaches to how LAT partnerships are experienced and understood: satisfied apart together, unsatisfied apart together, and uncertain apart together (see Table 2 below). Contrary to the theories discussed above, we focus on the influence of gender norms on how LAT is experienced and whether it is understood as an individual choice or a constraint.

Also, keeping in mind our methodological approach and the dataset we used, our aim was to extract the understanding of LAT from the data rather than to test the relevance of existing typologies. Moreover, it is not our ambition to



**Table 2. The distribution of partnerships and communication partners according to their approach to LAT**

Approach	Specification of the interviewed couples	Interviews
<i>Satisfied</i> apart together	Couples of middle and higher age, experience with cohabitation/marriage	Adéla Vlasta
	Dual-career lesbian couple	Zuzana & Zdena
<i>Unsatisfied</i> apart together	Relationships across a long geographic distance	Petr & Petra Martin & Martina Karel & Karla
	Weekend marriage	Filip & Filipa
<i>Uncertain</i> apart together	Marriages with problems	Elen Linda
	Uncertainty in a relationship, not ready for co-residential cohabitation	Olda Sofie

cover all the possible ways in which LAT can be experienced and understood. The three approaches cannot be seen as the definitive varieties of a LAT experience, but rather as the set of ways in which LAT was experienced by our communicational partners at different stages of their relationship and at various periods in the life course.

### **‘Satisfied apart together’**

‘Satisfied apart together’ represent a category of partners who prioritise autonomy over sharing a household. They do not understand co-residential unions as an ideal or the most appropriate approach to relational intimacy. The focus on independence and autonomy is consistent with the finding that people willingly choosing to live apart, which has been identified by Stoilova et al. [2014], Upton-Davis [2015], Duncan et al. [2013], and Roseneil [2006]. In our sample, there were two older women and one lesbian couple who declared a clear preference for a non-residential relationship. Adéla and Vlasta both favour LAT so that they can maintain their own households, which they each share (or shared until recently) with their children, and so that they have enough time for their friends and hobbies. The lesbian couple (Zuzana and Zdena) favour the LAT relationship owing to their career orientations: they work in cities hundreds of kilometres apart [Formánková and Křížková 2013]. Below we focus in detail on the older women, as they are the ones who most clearly favour a LAT relationship over co-habitation and preserve strictly divided households.

*Satisfied with the distance and time together*

Adéla, who is 48, has been with her partner (Alex, 55 years old) in a LAT relationship for seven years. When they met, he had recently divorced, while Adéla had been divorced for more than 20 years and shared a flat with her grown-up son (now 30). She only had a brief experience with a co-residential partnership: she had lived with her husband for several months after they got married. The husband left the family shortly after the son was born. Before meeting her current partner, Adéla had been involved in several romantic relationships but had never shared a household with any of them.

Vlasta, 82, has also been living alone for more than 15 years. She had previously lived with her husband in one household for almost 50 years. Now she lives with the family of one of her four children, while she is in a LAT relationship with her high-school sweetheart, which has been going on for more than four years (Václav, 83 years old).

An important aspect of non-residential relationships is the amount of geographical distance that separates the partners. Both the temporal and the spatial availability of a partner play a role in contentment in a relationship. While Adéla and Alex live approximately 10 minutes apart, Vlasta has to travel long hours by air to see her partner, who lives in the United States. Adéla and Alex see each other on the weekends, spend most holidays together, and go on two vacations a year. The geographic proximity has been very important for Adéla:

Adéla: Maybe it also helped the relationship that when we go somewhere in the evening he can take me home or we just go in the same direction. This is nice for the relationship, even though we have separate homes, they're only a short way away. (Adéla, 48, divorced, one child, employed)

Vlasta and her partner are in contact every day, but they meet personally only on Vlasta's visits to the United States for about four months each year.

Vlasta: He calls every day, he is very talkative ... we talk for hours, or at least half an hour a day. (Vlasta, 82, widowed, four children, retired)

The demanding flights and the fact that she has to leave her own environment for many months are difficult for Vlasta. She often has to deal with some issue at the airport because of the language barrier. And owing to her age, she always needs a member of the family to accompany her. At the same time, she doesn't want to move to live with Václav, as she wants to maintain her autonomy and be in contact with her family.

Geographical closeness was also shown to be an important implication for a functioning LAT relationship in Great Britain [Duncan et al. 2014]. Vlasta and her partner make up for the geographical distance through frequent contact by

telephone or e-mail. Adéla and Alex, by contrast, stay within walking distance of each other, but usually contact each other only at the end of the week to plan the weekend together. Vlasta's behaviour is consistent with the findings of Duncan et al. [2014] that geographical distance and diverse daily rhythms are overcome in LAT partnerships by frequent telephone and internet contact; more than 50% of the surveyed British LATs' partners contact each other more than once a day.

*The importance of other close relationships—friends and family*

Friends have played an important role in Adéla's life; in Vlasta's, it has been primarily her large family and two dogs that she loves. Roseneil [2006] argues that people who prioritise partnerships in two separate homes have a tendency to place less importance on sexual and love relationships and far more importance on friendships 'than conventional relationship mores dictate' [Roseneil 2006: 92]. However, Adéla's partner does not share this position. According to Adéla, he sees the time spent together as an absolute priority, and so Adéla started seeing her friends primarily during the week:

Adéla: He was faced with the fact that since I'd been divorced the whole time I had accumulated all these divorced friends with whom I'd go on vacation and spend weekends, go biking, and exercise. And I had a tendency to bring them along on the weekend. He would call to say let's take a hike, and I'd come along with two friends. I know that he didn't like it; he wanted to be alone with me. (Adéla, 48, divorced, one child, employed)

It thus appears that a relationship without a shared household allows Adéla to experience full autonomy during the week, when she pursues her hobbies and sees her friends, followed by an 'intense relationship' on the weekend. Adéla does not reject co-residential living altogether. She thinks that such relational arrangements can be achieved at a younger age and/or when people have a family and the related need to build a proper environment for the children. Adéla's attitude to a shared home corresponds to the findings of Liefbroer et al. [2011] that people around the age of 50 and older are not interested in moving in with their partner as opposed to younger LAT age groups. Like Adéla, Vlasta also prefers to preserve her independence from her partner. She has repeatedly refused his attempts to get married:

Vlasta: He wants me to marry him and stay with him. But I don't know, because I have my whole family here and the minute I come back from the US [where Václav lives—authors' note], I feel like I'm in my element. (Vlasta, 82, widowed, four children, retired)

In line with findings from other research studies, it appears that, next to the emotional closeness and support that comes from an intimate relationship, older women living in a LAT relationship want to hold on to their previous habits [Karlsson and Borell 2002]. Similarly, Upton-Davis [2012] has discussed the importance of a LAT relationship in older age as a safeguard against loneliness without the need to give up the network of alternative social relationships.

### *Exclusivity and commitment*

Exclusivity in a relationship, the need for the relationship to be monogamous, comes up in the interviews right alongside autonomy. Like Adéla, Vlasta demands exclusivity in her relationship. She makes the continuation of her relationship with Václav contingent upon absolute trust and fidelity, irrespective of the geographic distance. The most difficult aspect of their relationship is that her partner does not endure loneliness well, and in the months without Vlasta he occasionally sees another woman:

Vlasta: He told me that he had an acquaintance there. They either meet for a coffee or to go shopping. That it's just a friend, not love. This has been going on for four years. But now he asked me if he could invite her to his ranch, and I said not overnight. If she were to sleep there, I would not come anymore. (Vlasta, 82, widowed, four children, retired)

Similarly Adéla values the romantic gestures her partner makes in their relationship and the fact that he gives her the sense of being the most important person in his life during the time they are together.

Adéla: I had to tell myself that it's worth it. That he still likes me and wants to be with me and that he will hold my hand the entire weekend ... I know with him that I always come first. His friends and even his children do not exist for him when we are together ... it's completely crazy. (Adéla, 48, divorced, one child, employed)

Studies of older couples show that it is primarily women who prioritise LAT relationships because it allows them to secure emotional support without losing their independence and the ability to live their life 'their own way' [cf. Karlsson and Borell 2002, 2005; Hasmanová Marhánková 2012]. In Adéla's and Vlasta's cases, we did not have a chance to interview their partners, which limits our findings with respect to the question of to what degree the LAT relationship is the shared preference of both partners. Adéla declares that she and her partner consider this arrangement to be ideal. They would move in together only if they could not afford to finance two households. In Vlasta's case, there is no clear harmony between the partners. Her partner would like to get married and for Vlasta to move to the United States where he has been living for decades.

*Subverting the gender division of labour?*

Next to having enough time for her hobbies and friends, Adéla welcomes the fact that the everyday problems associated with running a household and having one budget do not arise in her relationship. This allows Alex and her to be free from a gendered division of roles in a couple:

Adéla: He [the boyfriend—authors' note] does not help me in my household. First, I got used to doing everything myself, and second, there's been my son up until now. And conversely he [the boyfriend—authors' note] does not assume that I will come to wash his windows or do some ironing. He is used to doing it himself ... and I think that since he won't pay for me, I don't see any reason why I should look after him in any way. (Adéla, 48, divorced, one child, employed)

Through non-residential cohabitation Adéla has freed herself from the continued male dominance that is reproduced though the gendered norm of care and unequal division of labour in the home.

The issue of who should pay, however, is a key source of tension and conflict in Adéla's relationship. While Adéla does not expect her partner to support her financially, she does mind that her partner does not pay her part of the bill when they are out together and instead divides the costs equally. In other words, the gendered norm of breadwinning (in this case showing affection by covering the costs) interferes with their relationship. According to Borell and Karlsson [2003], separate finances and the related division of expenses incurred together is typical of most of the older couples who live apart together. However, their research was performed on the Swedish population, which may be more sensitive to issues of gender equality. Adéla finds her boyfriend's unwillingness to pay on her behalf when they do things together hard to take, and at the beginning of their relationship in particular it bothered her so much that she broke off the relationship for some time.

Adéla: We have approximately the same income, but I was upset as a woman that he didn't pay for me. We went out to dinner and he didn't say: It's my treat. He just paid and then he said: give me half. At the beginning, it was such a disappointment, or source of friction. I thought that it would be gallant of the man to pay for me or buy me something. (Adéla, 48, divorced, one child, SE, employed)

Adéla's and Vlasta's relationships can be interpreted in line with Giddens' [1992] concept of a 'pure relationship'. When their boyfriends do not fulfil their ideal of romantic love, both Adéla and Vlasta think about the relationship as worthless and want to terminate it.

When a woman has her own household, she does not have to be constantly available to her close relations to provide services and care. This came out in a research study conducted among Swedish senior couples, in which women signifi-

cantly more often than men declared that the reason for living apart is their fear of the demands that come with sharing a household and living with a partner's (bad) habits [Borell and Karlsson 2003]. Hasmanová Marhánková [2012] reached similar findings for the Czech Republic in a research study of partnerships after widowhood. An important factor in women not wishing to enter into another marriage with a man is their aversion to reproducing the gendered division of labour [ibid.].

Consistent with the findings of Duncan et al. [2013] or Levin [2004], the 'satisfied apart together' were mostly women over 40 with some experience of marriage or cohabitation, who thus preferred LAT to a co-residential partnership. Their accounts reveal that LAT relationships may be a form of partnership that allows for a higher degree of autonomy, but they cannot be seen as a conscious subversion of traditional relationships such as marriage or cohabitation, as suggested by Upton-Davis [2012, 2015]. Since they are not (or are no longer) expected to procreate, the partners are allowed to extricate themselves from the norm of co-residential cohabiting, which contributes to satisfaction with the LAT relationship observed among the older couples and lesbian women in our sample. In Roseneil's [2006] research, the group 'happily apart' involved couples who emphasised individual agency and personal independence, which corresponds to our findings. A similar focus on autonomy and independence was found by Duncan et al. [2013] in the group of LAT partners who 'won't live together'. What is, however, important is mutual commitment and the partners' trust.

### **'Unsatisfied apart together'**

The 'unsatisfied apart together' relationships in our sample are couples who have a long-distance relationship as a result of external pressures, most notably the demands of building a career. We managed to get both partners to do the interview with us. The relational ideal they are striving to fulfil is to live together and share a home. An important topic is the time spent together and the need to be close to each other physically/geographically and mentally/socially. Couples who were planning to have a family in the near future and 'weekend spouses' with children were the ones who tended to be unsatisfied with their LAT relationship. This type represented the largest category in our sample, as four couples (eight persons) from our sample were unsatisfied with LAT. A typical feature of these relationships was a relatively large geographical distance separating the couple. In two cases, these were unions between Czech women and foreign nationals, while the other two couples were pairs of Czechs. All of them were in their thirties or early forties.

The spouses Martina (30) and Martin (29, English) met abroad on a study trip eight years ago. They have been married for one year and only briefly experienced living together in one household. While Martin lives in England, Martina stays in the Czech Republic. Martina and Martin usually see each other every

other weekend and occasionally more often. Martina has the chance to work from the London branch of her employer and so she goes to London for several workdays a month on top of their weekends spent together. Karel (34, Irish) and Karla (31) met three years ago when Karla was working in the same office as Karel. They have never lived together in one household, as Karel moved to Ireland shortly after they started dating. Now they are commuting between Austria and the Czech Republic. Petra and Petr lived apart together in Prague, while Petr has now moved for career reasons to England. Filip and Filipa have a 'weekend marriage'; they live in a small town in the vicinity of Prague and have two children. Besides living together for roughly one year, their entire relationship has been LAT. First, Filipa was commuting to Prague because of her university studies for a full working week. Since the birth of their first child, Filip has been the one commuting to Prague because of misto because of misto owing to his job.

### *The temporary versus the permanent stage*

In the history of a relationship the situation changes dynamically as the partners move between various types of partnerships including living apart together. The partners often change not only the form of partnership but also its geographical location. These changes were most pronounced in the partnership of Martin and Martina. Their relationship included periods of sharing a household, mutual break-ups, living apart together, and marriage and all this while living in different countries and cities.

What was initially a temporary plan to have a long-distance relationship while Martin did his internship in Brussels has become a permanent one. The couple has lived apart for more than three years now. Even getting married a year ago did not change anything about this arrangement. Martin admits that maybe by getting married the situation of a long-distance relationship appears to be more difficult.

Martin: I think it's increasingly more difficult. In the beginning it's understandable to a certain extent. When you look at it as a temporary solution, it's okay. But it's been so long that it has become more than temporary. So both of us are trying to find a way to get out of this situation, but I don't think that we have managed to find it yet. On the other hand, you get used to it in a way. (Martin, 29, married, no children, employed)

Still, Martin sees development in their relationship. He describes it as a 'sequence of events'—they started planning a family after their wedding. At the time of the interview they were trying to conceive a child.

Karel and Karla live also in two different countries, Austria and the Czech Republic, but meet regularly every weekend. The relative proximity was one of

the main reasons Karel applied for his current job and left Ireland. Like Martina and Martin, they condition moving in together on having a child.

Filipa and Filip, the married couple with children, considered living together the ideal for a family with children. Filip's breadwinner role is considered by both partners to be largely an external factor that their decision is not entirely dependent on. In their narrative, they both expressed the shared belief that they fulfil the heterosexual ideal of a nuclear family, where the man's role is constructed as a condition for its economical functioning [Warren 2007; Maříková et al. 2012]. Filip clearly expressed his feelings on this: 'I regret only one thing: that I cannot be with them right now.'

At the same time, they stressed the similarities to a co-residential partnership in terms of emotional closeness and security. Also, in their case, the period they were planning to spend the entire working week apart was originally limited by the possibility of finding a similarly lucrative job for Filip in or near their home town. They later set a new deadline: the birth of their second child. But even with that they made no change. The narratives of unsatisfied LAT partners show that the period of LAT tends to be constantly prolonged and what was originally set as temporary and clearly demarcated gradually becomes permanent.

What unites all these unsatisfied living apart relationships in our sample are the plans for a shared future (cohabitation, marriage, having a family); in other words, the perception that the long-distance relationship is just a temporary solution. The notion of LAT as a temporary stage is common for people 'regretful' about living in separate households [see Levin 2004; Roseneil 2006; Stoilova et al. 2014], as is also observed in the findings of Stoilova et al. [2014] on an international sample and Roseneil [2006] on British couples. Partners unsatisfied with LAT perceive their situation as due to external factors. Employment and study responsibilities, financial circumstances, and migration legislation represent the factors that prevent LAT couples from moving in together. The main theme of the narratives of the unsatisfied LATs was the emphasis on the importance of family and family values and the importance of co-residence in their lives. Similar to the findings of Duncan et al. [2014] on the British population, the LAT partners in our sample see marriage and cohabitation as a strong normative reference point.

#### *Unsatisfied with the time spend together—the frequency of visits and everyday virtual intimacy*

The main topic of the biographical narratives was seeking ways to be together or at least close to each other. For LAT relationships, and especially for long-distance relationships, modern technology is crucial for maintaining communication and intimacy in the couple. Martina indicated that she and her husband are in constant contact with each other during the day:



Martina: During the day we write each other a lot of e-mails at work. We write some 20 e-mails a day, with content like: I'm going to lunch or I'm back from lunch. And then we write SMSs in the evening before we go to sleep. And when we're not together on the weekend and it's raining outside, we're able to spend six, seven, or eight hours a day on the telephone. (Martina, 30, married, no children, employed)

It seems that long-distance relationships place greater demands on keeping in touch, which leads to the expansion of the partners' communication competencies. Psychological studies of long-distance relationships show that sharing everyday experiences, no matter how trivial, is an important aspect of a union and forms a basis for being able to maintain the relationship [e.g. Gilbertson et al. 1998].

Long-distance partnerships typically involve frequent commuting. Martin and Martina had less difficulty commuting when they were students, because both were more flexible than they are now that they are both working. Sharing a household is also rather rare among students. Research on university students [Guldner 1996] revealed that they share a household with their partner significantly less frequently than their peers who do not study. Another problem is the stress travel brings. For the second international couple, Karel and Karla, good, cheap, and fast connections between the places they live is an important factor that affects the quality of their relationship. For this reason, Karel moved to a town nearby, so that he and Karla could see each other more often because the connection is easier. During their three-year relationship, they have never lived together. Karel describes his decision in the following terms:

Karel: It's really hard to imagine how it would work some 15 years ago when there was no Skype and things like that. We saw each other on average every third weekend. Looking back at it, to keep at least this frequency was for us a huge, really huge financial burden. So it was important to find a solution as quickly as possible ... In any case, it was the first time when my personal life played an important role in my choosing a professional location. (Karel, 34, no children, single, employed)

While Karel was willing to make professional concessions because of his private life with Karla, Martin gives priority to moving ahead in his career. Martin admits that he works late at night and the idea of someone waiting for him at home would stress him out. He remembers when Martina was in London and he was under constant pressure to finish work early, which is not regarded well in his firm. Precisely because he has his evenings 'to himself' makes it possible for him to succeed in a highly competitive work environment and to work so fully on his professional career.

The situation was different in the case of the Czech couple. Petra will move abroad to be with Petr because he is going there only for a temporary work contract. A factor in their decision is that they both had a long-distance relationship

in the past and they do not want to repeat that experience. Petra's employer allowed her to work from their detached office abroad. In both cases, they came to the decision that they will move in together when the time comes for maternity and parental leave.

Regardless of the geographical distance, LAT partners show a great level of commitment and willingness to pursue their relationship. According to the findings by Smart [2007], commitment in the relationship represents a process that develops over time, often in the face of difficulties. The LAT partners in our sample are often not only dealing with the negative aspects of a LAT relationship such as loneliness or the lack of direct support from the partner, but also with negativity and pressure coming from their families and wider social networks.

Filip and Filipa are also often faced with negative reactions from those around them. The criticism intensified especially with the birth of their second child a couple of months ago. It is partly because of that that they express the need to define their relationship as opposed to those who practice living together and criticise them for LAT. Filip, for example, argues that he devotes enough time to the family and says: 'A lot of guys [who are living with their families—authors' note] are not taking care of their children at all.' The family creates rituals of regular telephone calls on the days they are separated and activities after Filip returns home, which the whole family can look forward to and which enhance their feeling of closeness.

The LAT relationship does, in the case of the unsatisfied LAT couples in our sample, serve as a possible subversion or redefinition of the heterosexual norm of cohabitation and marriage, as suggested by Levin [2004] or Roseneil [2006]. The couples were rather pragmatically negotiating the most suitable solution within the set environment. Given that both Karla and Martina were highly educated women with career ambitions, they were deciding between a career and the possibility of living with their partner. In the case of these two 'international' couples, living together in a single household is contingent upon parenthood. In other words, the woman is willing to move to live with her partner when she gets pregnant. Their future together is thus framed only by the period of several years of maternity and parental leave, and then their plans get blurred again.

### *Economic dependence/independence in LAT relationships*

Economic dependence and independence represented another important question in the interviews. In the cases of Martina and Martin and Karla and Karel, the issue of the young women being economically dependent on their partners made them repeatedly reconsider the idea of moving in together. Martina described how significant the experience of her full financial and emotional dependence on Martin has been for both of them:

Martina: When I look back at it, it was really difficult because I was at home just waiting for him. I was a bit of a 'jelly-fish', uncertain, being in a foreign country. I didn't have a job so I felt even more worthless. Martin tried to be with me as much as he could and didn't go out much because he felt sorry for me, he felt a responsibility. When I came back to the Czech Republic, I immediately found a job and stayed by myself in an apartment after my mom moved away. So, suddenly, I started feeling really great. It was a huge contrast to England where I was financially, relationally, and in all other respects dependent on my husband. (Martina, 30, married, no children, employed)

In the relationship, LAT represents the possibility of opting out of gender-traditional relations [Roseneil 2006], but only until the partners have children. The limited presence of the male partner in the household leads women to a traditional division of work: the woman becomes the primary caregiver. The same situation happened in the case of Filip and Filipa. This is also an issue in the relationships of Karel and Karla and Martin and Martina, where the women are expected to sacrifice their current career and to move and join their partner when they plan a family.

Filipa is currently the main carer and Filip is the primary breadwinner. Despite the fact that Filipa has certain career aspirations, she is not interested in moving the whole family to Prague, where she could work in a job that she did before having children—translating. Their partnership is not a dual career/dual breadwinner model, at least not in this period of their life. At the same time, Filipa did not become a 'trailing wife' following her husband to his place of work. Van der Klis and Mulder [2008] studied the partnerships of commuters and found that an emphasis on family, social networks, and place of residence is a solid foundation for the wife not to become a 'trailing wife', allowing her to continue her own job path and avoid becoming very dependent on her husband. Filipa has a large family network in her town, which enables her to work at least to some extent. Nevertheless, most of the childcare and housework lies on her shoulders and Filip's absence greatly hinders her career. She says: 'If he had a job from which he normally returned home, I could in turn have a job myself, I could translate from home ...'

Here we can see that LAT can be a way of not subverting gender norms [Upton-Davis 2012, 2015] but reinforcing them. Studies indicate that for working parents good experiences at work have positive effects on family life, and, conversely, that being happy at home makes one a more productive employee. This is a problem in the commuter families, where the career prospects of the home-based parent are disturbed. Green et al. [1999] found in their study of British commuting couples that the care burden remains solely on the shoulders of the mothers as the fathers are often away. This suggests gender inequality in commuter families is similar to other geographical living arrangements, which confirms that even though an egalitarian gender ideology may underlie this household arrangement, it is not a guarantee.

We can see that, rather than choosing an individualised romantic lifestyle, the LAT couples in our sample are manoeuvring within the limited possibilities open to them. Like the 'can't live together' cluster in the typology by Duncan et al. [2013], the 'unsatisfied apart together' partners see their situation as temporary and a result of severe external pressures. A recurrent topic for the 'unsatisfied apart together' unions was the issue of who will move to live with the other partner and when. In a long-distance relationship or commuter marriage, permanent co-residential cohabitation necessarily means that one or both members of the couple will move away permanently or at least long term from their current work and personal contacts. Duncan [2011] calls the way in which agency is limited and framed by a structural framing 'institutional bricolage'. In the system of Czech family policy, while the position of return is unsure, taking parental leave is often understood as the end of a career [Křížková et al. 2011]. In this manner the decisions made in a LAT relationship are the result of both personal agency and external pressures.

### **'Uncertain apart together'**

A LAT partnership may provide a solution to many problems or may bring dissatisfaction to a relationship when the partners do not want to or cannot either break up or live together. Some LAT partnerships are not certain about the future of their union. Elen and Erik and Linda and Leonard are married couples with children, who have been together for many years and who lived together for a certain period of time. Their uncertainty stems from the problems that have accumulated in their relationships. The result is that they live apart together. Olda and Sofie, young people in their late twenties and early thirties, did not experience long-term cohabitation, although they have been with their partners for several years. Their uncertainty also derives from the fact that living together is the first such commitment in their life course.

#### *Uncertainty about commitment and gender norms*

Olda (now in his late twenties) has been in a serious relationship with Olivia for six years. She was his first long-term girlfriend. This partially explains his feelings of immaturity and not being ready to move in together. Sofie just turned 30 and she lives alone in a friend's apartment. Her relationship with Simon, a 29-year-old university student and actor, has lasted for three and a half years thus far. Before Sofie, Simon only had short-term relationships. Simon prefers to live with his mother.

Both Olda and Simon are from a divorced family, and in his story Olda strongly reflects on his father's failure to fulfil his family roles, which he is afraid of repeating: '... I don't want to end up like my father, I am very cautious about getting married'. (Olda, 28, single, no children, employed)

Both Olda and Sofie discussed a lack of money as a factor preventing co-residential cohabitation and sharing one household. Olda does not want to live in his partner's apartment, and thus at her expense, until he has a job that will allow him to help cover the household expenses. Sofie and Simon decided that looking for a flat together would be too costly. It is not, however, only the financial cost, but the fact that, according to these young people's notions and plans, cohabitation and living together are the start of a sequence of other events: marriage and parenthood.

Olda: My girlfriend and I lived together in several apartments. But then I went back to live with my mother because of money; well, in the meantime my girlfriend and I bought an apartment on a mortgage, and maybe it was a little bad that I left her there alone, but I didn't have any money that I could contribute. I could live totally for free with my mother. (Olda, 28, single, no children, employed)

When Olda was unemployed and in debt and was unable to pay his share of the apartment mortgage, he left the short-lived co-residential cohabitation with Olivia. When he got a job, he suggested to Olivia that they live together, and, according to Olda, her refusal has to do with her expectation that this suggestion will go hand in hand with an offer of marriage. From Olda's narrative, it appears that marriage is important for Olivia.

Olda: So I say to her: Now I'm making some money, would you like to live with me? But she always passes on it. Not that she would say outright no, but I know that she doesn't want to. That she wants me to ask her to get married ... but I'm terribly undecided about this. (Olda, 28, single, no children, employed)

In line with the hypothesis about uncertainty in the theory of marriage timing developed by Oppenheimer [2003], we can say that men (Olda and Simon) tend to reject or postpone living together if they are uncertain as to whether they will be able to fulfil the breadwinner role. When testing the validity of this hypothesis in European countries, Kalmijn [2011] pointed to the fact that it is not 'only' about money, but more specifically it is the immaturity, uncertainty, and unpredictability of their career that causes men to postpone making their first commitments in the form of marriage and co-residential cohabitation. This norm, which she argues is largely class-contingent, affects the potential partners of these men as well, who then hesitate to enter into co-residential cohabitation or marriage and consider men about whom they are uncertain as to their ability to fulfil the breadwinning role to be 'unfit for a relationships or marriage' [Cross-Barnet et al. 2011].

In her narrative, 30-year-old Sofie also associates co-residential cohabitation with marriage. Moreover, the social norm about the age at which a woman should begin having children and the pressure from other people for women to fulfil this social norm is clearly visible in her story. The age norm for establishing a family is strongly gendered because it primarily concerns women.

Sofie: Well, I'm really starting to think about the age ... Of course, people can have children without being married, but I don't really want it that way. I want my child to grow up in a complete family where both partners have the same name ... I want to have children and at the age of 30 there's pressure somewhere: what if I won't be able to have children? ... 30, that's the limit .... (Sofie, 30, single, no children, employed)

The norm to become a mother by a certain age places women on an unequal footing with men, for whom the parenting norm related to age is weak [Hašková 2009]. If co-residential cohabitation is associated with a commitment to start a family among the couples who have yet to make a decision about starting a family, the women are the ones who feel the greater pressure to move in together, especially as their age approaches the socially defined age limit for having a family.

### *Uncertainty about staying together*

Couples who have already made the commitment and decided to live together and sometimes have children can also become LAT. Increasing problems in a relationship can result in an increasing 'personal' distance, which ultimately results in physical distance—LAT. Linda and Leonard and Elen and Eric chose LAT due to uncertainty about their relationships.

After Linda and Leonard met, they lived in a long-distance relationship for approximately 10 years. Linda lived in the Czech Republic and Leonard in England, where he is from. During this time, the longest time they spent together was approximately three weeks. After several years, they got married and Linda got pregnant, which was the motivation for her to move in with Leonard. Living together was a totally new experience for both of them, and it lasted less than three months. Right before she gave birth, Linda left after a quarrel to stay with Leonard's parents. After less than two years, Linda decided to return to the Czech Republic and move into a flat that the couple own there. Even though Linda and Leonard have long-term experience of living apart together, living together is a norm and an ideal to which they relate.

Linda: We did everything the other way around ... we got married, then we had a child, and only then did we move in together. Which I guess is not totally ideal looking back at it [laughs]. I think there's a reason why people move in together before they get married ... It's not that I want an alternative way of life ... we have known each other for a very long time, my husband and I, maybe 10 years, and we have always had a sort of relationship non-relationship, as in long-distance, and I sort of got used to it. (Linda, 32, married, one child, employed)

As Linda's account illustrates, in the Czech Republic, having (or planning to have) a child is still associated with moving in with your partner and getting married, though less so than during the state-socialist period [Hašková 2009].

Five years married, Elen has been living in a LAT relationship with her husband, Eric, for three years. They have a 4-year-old son together and Elen has a 12-year-old son from a previous relationship. The source of discontent that resulted in their LAT was a personal disagreement in their relationship, and Elen has long been bothered by the fact that her husband refuses to discuss the problem or seek any solution to it.

Elen: Once, when the situation was bad at home, I just said that it might be better if we lived apart for some time. And my husband said, well, okay. Making me terribly surprised, I did not expect it. So he moved out. (Elen, 40 let, married, two children, entrepreneur)

LAT does not represent the ideal or planned option for either of the two couples, but rather an emergency solution to problems and one that is perceived as temporary.

#### *The gendered division of tasks in couples with problems*

The arrangement of Elen's household can be described as traditional with a male breadwinner and female carer, in which the man makes the crucial financial contribution to the household and the wife assumes all the childcare and household responsibilities and her earnings represent a kind of 'bonus' [Maříková et al. 2012]. Elen no longer even expects any greater involvement from Erik in taking care of their child. Linda has realised that her being the exclusive caregiver for her daughter is largely a consequence of her own actions.

Linda: ... my husband said that he felt terribly pushed away ... And it seemed to him that I had taken possession of our daughter. Though I think that with a little baby you can't really do it differently ... And I am certain, looking back now, that it would have helped if he had felt more involved, that he was needed. Because ... I didn't really need him. And I still really don't need him. Except for money, which is now starting to be a hell of a problem. (Linda, 32, married, one child, employed)

The LAT partnership is not an ideal but an emergency solution for some partnerships. With growing problems in the relationship, the personal distance between these partners started to grow, too, together with a loss of intimacy, which in the end resulted in a physical/spatial distance. It seems that role of complementarity (man the earner and woman the caregiver) contributes to growing alienation and distance between the partners in the form of LAT.

### *Uncertainty about exclusivity in a relationship*

There is one more factor in the relationships that relates to the postponement or rejection of co-residential cohabitation: uncertainty that the relationship is exclusive. In Olda's story there is an ex-partner with whom Olivia may be having a simultaneous relationship. In the story of Sofie and Simon, Simon broke off the union temporarily because of his uncertainty about whether he wanted to stay in the relationship. This experience resulted in Sofie having a similar feeling of uncertainty. As a result, there is tension and uncertainty about the future of the relationship, which contributes to an uncertainty about planning co-residential cohabitation.

For many couples, a LAT relationship is an acceptable solution to problems and uncertainties in a relationship. Still, couples 'uncertainly apart together' share the belief that co-residential cohabitation is an ideal type of an intimate relationship. According to Roseneil [2006], the inability to decide whether or not to live with a partner ('undecidedly apart') is a frequent reason for couples to live apart and not share a household. The reason behind this is an uncertainty about whether they are ready to live together or whether the partner is the right one. In the case of the married couples in our sample, misunderstandings and doubts came up frequently, implying an indecisiveness or undecidedness about co-residential cohabitation. The younger couples in our sample do not yet have any experience with sharing a household; this first commitment is a crucial life step for them, which carries large personal costs. If, at the given moment, they are uncertain about whether they will be able to fulfil the roles that come with co-residential cohabitation and are uncertain about the durability or the exclusivity of the relationship, they extend the period during which they postpone this first commitment. Duncan et al. [2013] came to a similar conclusion when defining 'vulnerable' LATs with relational feelings of vulnerability, partnership problems, and at the same time no major external constraints on cohabitation.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we explored the role gender norms and the gendering of the life course play in the LAT experience in post-state-socialist Czech society with its specific demographic and family-policy history. Similar to other post-socialist countries, the Czech Republic has had a belated onset of the second demographic transition and a strong gender division of labour and refamilialised institutions. LAT represents a new form of partnership and we build on the explanations for demographic changes using the argument of persisting gender inequalities and problems with work/life balance [Hašková 2009].

In the analysis, we have focused on how the LAT experience is understood in terms of whether the partners involved actively seek autonomy and independence from traditional gender norms by avoiding co-residence, or if they see their



situations as a result of external conditions and pressures. This led to questions about whether, in the context of the different ways LAT is experienced and understood, LAT partners are actively redefining or subverting gender norms and the gendering of life courses. We showed how the diverse experiences with LAT depend on different stages in the life course, taking into account that the different gender norms concerning co-residence and the division of work and responsibilities in the couple are specific to various life-course stages. The individual understanding of the degree of choice and constraints as the reasons for LAT varied between the approaches of ‘satisfied apart together’, ‘unsatisfied apart together’, and ‘uncertain apart together’ couples.

The ‘satisfied apart together’ couples experienced LAT as a choice and a preference. These couples mostly value autonomy and an independent lifestyle, without the need to adjust to a partner’s habits. The women in our sample who have willingly opted to live apart together have largely done so in order to avoid the norm of sharing a household with their partner and to avoid the norm of the gender division of labour, which is still very strong in Czech society. Given this, we cannot confuse their choices with the conscious subversion of traditional relationships such as marriage or cohabitation. Rather, as partners who were not (or are no longer) expected to procreate, the ‘satisfied apart together’ couples are able to free themselves from the norms of co-residential cohabitation. At the same time, they want to allocate enough time to their family, friends, and even pets. However, this does not mean that the interviewed persons lacked commitment to their partners. The partners, on the contrary, highly value and demand the exclusivity of the relationship and regard that as the foundation of the relationship. Duncan et al. [2013] similarly defines the category of LAT who ‘won’t live together as partners who prioritise autonomy and independence. Like our interviewees, they are usually over the age of 40 and have prior experience with marriage and having a partner in relative proximity, which is not the case of all the partnerships in our sample.

In contrast, the ‘unsatisfied apart together’ partners regard their situations as the result of external pressures. Three out of four couples in our sample practice the dual-career partnership. Work and educational ambitions were frequently-mentioned factors preventing co-residential cohabitation. A LAT partnership allows couples to postpone making a decision about whose career to sacrifice so that they can live together. Czech family policy shapes the expectations of the women we interviewed towards having to give up their career when they decide to become mothers. LAT also gave the interviewees the possibility to opt out of the gender division of work in the relationship. Nevertheless, these couples perceive the LAT partnership as the result of constraints and express dissatisfaction with the arrangement and a desire to live together. Common to all the interviewed couples are therefore plans for a shared future—cohabitation, marriage, having children—which represent ideal arrangements they are striving to achieve. Seeing LAT as only a temporary stage or a stepping stone to cohabi-

tation, the 'unsatisfied apart together' partners represent a combination of the 'temporary' and the 'transitional' LAT type as defined by Stoilova et al. [2014].

For some couples in our sample, a LAT relationship is an acceptable solution to problems and uncertainties in a relationship. Couples 'uncertain apart together' also share the belief that co-residential cohabitation is an ideal type of relationship, which allows a couple to share expenditures and everyday experiences, as well as intimacy. 'Uncertain living apart together' couples perceive the decision to live together as a commitment that is related to a need to then take subsequent steps down the partnership path leading to marriage and children. In Czech society co-residence is still perceived as a trigger for a succession of further stages, marriage and parenthood, although these stages are not as concentrated within the space of such a young age and such a short period of time as they were under state socialism. At the same time, when the partners express uncertainty about the ability of the man to fulfil the norm of the breadwinner role or the ability or willingness of the woman to fulfil the norm of the mother and caregiver role, or are uncertain about the exclusivity of the relationship, they often hesitate to make the decision to move in together. As Roseneil [2006] also found, these partners share a fear of co-residence when the reproduction of traditional gender norms is expected.

Our data to a great extent reveal similar attitudes to LAT as they were found in the context of Western Europe. However, we can see that the gendered norms concerning intimate partnership cohabitation and division of work, which are closely tied to the familialistic design of the Czech family policy [Blum, Formánková and Dobrotić 2014], have a great impact on the decisions of women and men about partnerships and parenthood. Regardless of the change in intimate life towards greater diversity of partnership forms, co-residence still remains a norm to relate to. The biographic-narrative perspective led us to understand partnership trajectories less as the result of individual choices and more as the result of external conditions and pressures, in the form of a partner's preferences and needs, the needs of family members, and gender norms and stereotypes. Our research showed that in examining cultural changes in post-socialist Czech society, we must not underestimate the persistence of gender and social inequalities. These inequalities make individual choices more difficult, or even impossible, both in private-life arrangements and in the possibilities for combining them with work. The diverse experience with LAT partnerships is the result of a choice made under the constraints of gendered norms and the expectations connected to different phases of the life course in the historically and socially specific Czech context.

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