

JUST A MATTER OF TIME. OUTCOMES OF FIRST COHABITATIONS AMONG WOMEN IN SPAIN AND ITALY.

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Abstract (150 words)

In Spain and Italy cohabitation has not acquired the same role that it has accomplished in Northern Europe, but the prevalence of cohabiting couples in both countries is not longer marginal. Not only the incidence but also the nature of cohabiting couples is diverse: in Southern Europe cohabitation is considered a temporal alternative that generally ends with the formalization of the union (marriage).

Within a western context of changes in union formation patterns, is it accurate to talk about a shared pattern of cohabitation in Mediterranean countries like Italy and Spain? The purpose of this paper is to examine the incidence, duration and development of cohabitation using a life course comparative approach, identifying also the profiles of those women who split up against those who decide to marry. For the analysis we apply competing-risks regression models (two for each country) for the transition from temporal cohabitation to marriage or to the dissolution of the union.

1.Introduction

The diffusion of consensual unions registered during the last decades constitute one of the most important characteristics of demographic change on the familiar sphere experienced by modern societies since the so called “Golden Age of Marriage”. Before 1960, consensual unions were marginal phenomena. Nowadays, most part of Europeans (especially the youngest) has lived in cohabitation at some point of their life course (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2005).

In Italy and Spain, cohabitation has not acquired the same role that it has had in Northern Europe and some authors attribute the rising proportion of non-partnered at a “crisis in union formation” (De Sandre et al., 1997; Barbagli et al., 2003; Cabré & Miret, 2005; Castro et al., 2008). However, the prevalence of cohabiting couples is not longer marginal: at 2006, 12% of co-residential unions in Spain were cohabitations while the value for Italy in 2009 was around 5.9% (ISTAT, 2011).

The recent increase in consensual unions involves major changes regarding population and family issues (Manting, 1996; Mills, 2000; Heuveline & Timberlake, 2005). As mentioned before, among European countries has been identified a considerable heterogeneity that has been related to substantial differences in both the incidence and the meaning of cohabitations (Kiernan, 1999; Liefbroer & Dourleijn, 2006). Unlike Northern Europe, where cohabitations have been configured as definitive alternatives to marriage, in the South the literature have treated such unions as a phenomenon characterized by a very small scale, and only practiced by a specific group of people (Pinelli & De Rose, 1995; Prinz, 1995; Tobío, 2001; Baizán et al., 2003; Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Castro-Martín & Domínguez, 2008; García Pereiro, 2011).

The evolution of the proportion of cohabiting women in Spain and Italy is increasing over time, even if there are some differences that should be necessarily highlighted. In this sense, before the nineties, consensual unions were not so much practiced and were defined by a post-marital status (a typical union of divorced, separated or widowed women, mostly in Spain). Conversely, after the nineties it is possible to identify a clear turning point which is due to the diffusion of cohabitation among younger and still single women.

When considering the constitution of first partnerships, it is confirmed the peak of the spread of cohabitation as a first union. The expansion is clear in the increase of women who have chosen to cohabit rather than marry (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna, 2009; Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010; García Pereiro, 2012). Although it is true that such expansion is characterized by a clear lag if compared to the spread of cohabitation in other European countries: is just since the beginning of the new millennium that cohabitation finally competes with marriage as an alternative to start the first union in the younger cohorts.

In order to study the nature of first unions started under cohabitation, three transitions are possible: from cohabitation to 1) marriage; 2) separation or death of the partner; or 3) the continuation of cohabitation. Each one of them can be interpreted as a diverse kind of union according to the specific meaning attached to it. Certainly each outcome has a particular implication for the familiar sphere (policy and planning) and could also be read as a reliable sign of social change.

This paper compares cohabitation dynamics in Spain and Italy. The main purpose is to analyze the outcomes of first cohabitations in both countries and to establish differences or similarities between them answering: in a Mediterranean context in which consensual union are gaining importance, which are the outcomes of such first unions? Is cohabitation a real or a temporal alternative to marriage? Which couples get married and who are those dissolving their unions?

2. New models of partnership formation: the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy and Spain

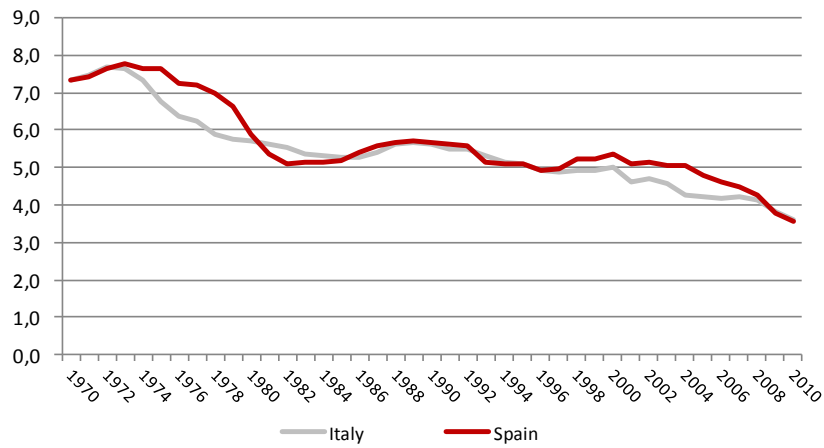
Over the last decades the greatest autonomy to build the own life history in a more liquid society (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003) has support the emergence of alternative living arrangements by changing couples' life course and the biographies of its protagonist. Also in Spain and Italy, countries still attached to a strong family model typical of the Mediterranean Europe (Reher, 2004), union formation dynamics have been gradually modified, giving space to partnership-alternatives to marriage and facilitating the spread of cohabitation and other living arrangements, such as LAT's (Living Apart Together). In particular, the gradual increase of consensual unions can be considered the consequence behaviors that, if first appeared marginal and limited in number, nowadays are expanding

both in Italy and Spain. In other words, the new models of partnership formation in these countries are part of a demographic picture characterized by a persistent decline of marriage, low fertility (with a TFR oscillating between 1.2 and 1.3 in the last 15 years) and a generalized postponement of reproductive and union decisions (at 2008 women's age at first child reached 31 years in both countries).

Nuptiality models have changed profoundly since the end of the seventies, in general the number of marriages has gradually decreased: if at the beginning of the seventies were celebrated almost 8 weddings per one thousand inhabitants today are celebrated less than 4 in both countries (Figure 1). However the aspect that distinguishes the most the current Spanish and Italian model is the postponement of first marriages and its fragility (the age at marriage is 33 years for men and 30 for women in Italy in 2008, AISP, 2011; 29.8 years and 32 years in Spain in 2007, Eurostat). The divorce rate is growing fast since the nineties, particularly in Spain where in 2006 the value reached 3 divorces per one thousand inhabitants (Figure 2). In Italy, although the degree of marital instability is still significantly lower than the European average, the phenomenon of the marital disruption entered into a phase of accelerated growth at the end of the nineties, favoring an increase in the absolute number of divorces that has growth 100% between 1995 and 2008 (AISP, 2011).

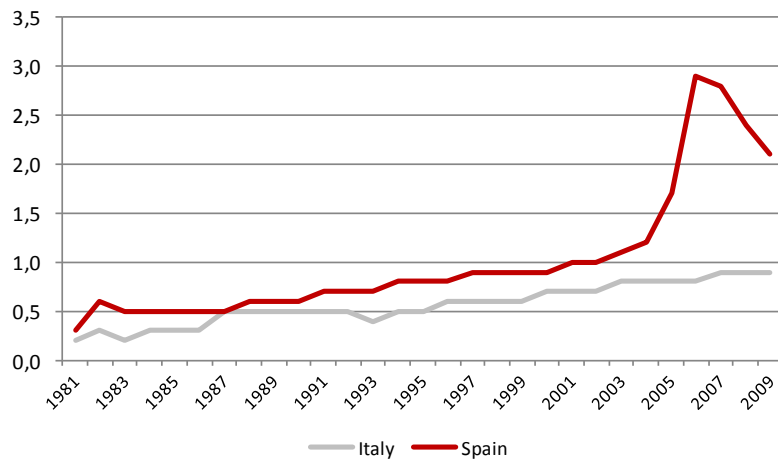
One of the proxies that confirm the spread of consensual unions is certainly the rise in the births occurred outside marriage. In Spain the percentage of births born of unmarried mothers has increased progressively and intensely from 10% in the early nineties to 33.3% in 2010 (Figure 3). In the same period in Italy this indicator has also increased, but certainly at a slower pace reaching 25.4%. The different growth rates and the higher incidence of extra-marital births in Spain could confirm a more widespread diffusion and a higher number of cohabitations in this country if compared to Italy, as shown by the analyses run with census and survey data of the two countries under observation.

Figure 1. Crude Marriage Rates. Italy and Spain, years 1970-2010.



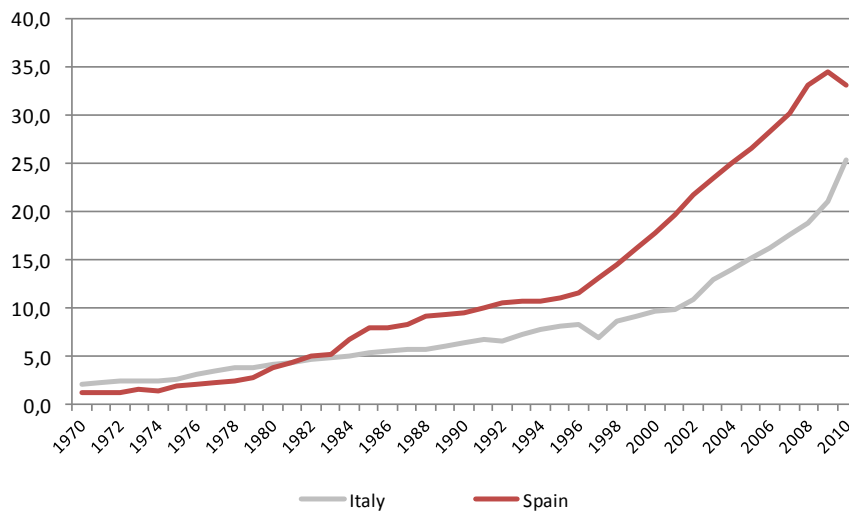
Source: Own elaboration. Eurostat.

Figure 2. Crude Divorce Rate. Italy and Spain, years 1981-2009.



Source: Own elaboration. Eurostat.

Figure 3. Proportion of live births outside marriage. Italy and Spain, years 1970-2010.



Source: Own elaboration. Eurostat.

The evolution of couples that were cohabitating by the time of the census have followed a modest but continuous growth¹. At 1981 in Spain only 1% of individuals was in a consensual union, 2% in 1991, and reached 5.4% ten years later. In Italy, the percentage passed from 1.5 in 1991 to 3.7 in 2001.

In this section of the paper the focus is on the marital status of cohabiting women and men in 1981, 1991 and 2001 so that it is feasible to determine the role of both post-marital and pre-marital cohabitation within the diffusion process of consensual unions.

As shown in Table 1, post-marital cohabitation for women has been crucial only in the first phase of the analysis of cohabitation in Spain. In 1981, 48% of divorced/separated and widowed women were living in a co-residential union other than marriage while 52% was single. Since the nineties it is possible to identify a crucial conversion: a significant reduction of post-marital cohabitation followed by an increase of pre-marital cohabitation. Such change is illustrated by the raise of single women that were cohabiting between 1981 and 2001, while the percentage of cohabiting women for the group of divorced/separated and widowed decreases to 26.4% in 2001 (Table 1). In this country some interesting gender differences are observed: unlike women, the percentage of single men in cohabitation experience a decline of 22 points on the first period (1981-1991) in favor of an increase in number of divorced cohabiters. In 1981 this category accounted for only 7.7% of the male population while on the 2001 census the value reached about 24%.

In Italy are not observed substantial differences between men and women: from 1991 to 2001 the increase in single cohabiters regards both males and females, but to a lesser extent than in Spain. In contrast, the percentage of divorced/separated cohabiters on the Italian territory has not changed significantly over time, and remains higher than the Spanish case.

The analysis of cohabitation as one of the alternatives of family-life configuration in Spain and Italy through census data has shown that in the eighties (and probably even before) consensual unions, although practiced, certainly were a marginal phenomena. At the beginning of the observation period was evident a typical post-marital character. However,

¹ It is important to consider that the proportion of cohabiting couples at one point is not the best incidence indicator because tends to underestimate the number of individuals that began cohabiting but then transform their union.

the higher growth over time points out to the expansion of cohabitation among young single women.

A more detailed exploration of the specific elements of first unions by birth cohort will provide a deeper understanding of changes on couple life arrangements on both Mediterranean countries.

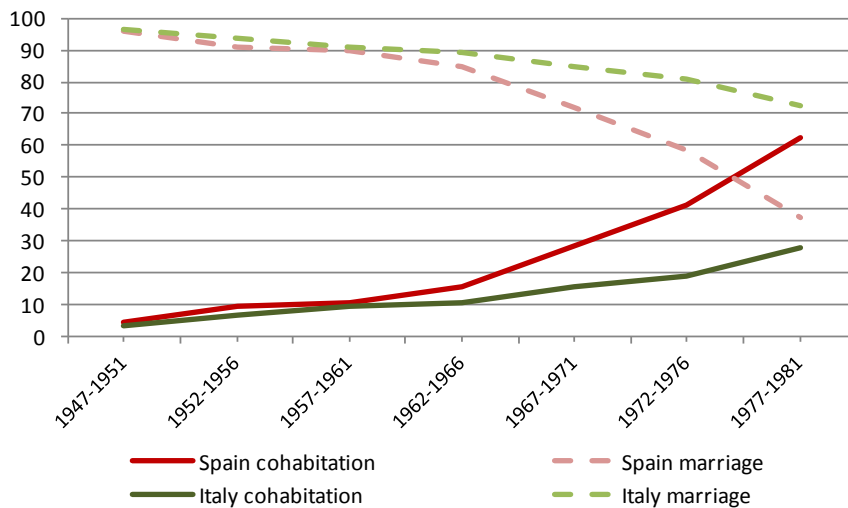
Table 1. Percentage distribution of cohabiters by gender and marital status (excluding married). Spain and Italy, years 1981, 1991 & 2001.

	SPAIN						ITALY			
	Women			Men			Women		Men	
	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Single	52,0	68,0	73,6	88,1	66,5	72,8	53,3	62,1	57,2	63,8
Divorced/Separated	24,4	21,3	19,2	7,7	27,8	23,6	29,8	28,3	34,8	31,1
Widowed	23,6	10,7	7,2	4,2	5,7	3,6	16,9	9,6	8,0	5,1

Source: Own elaboration. 1981, 1991 & 2001 Census.

Concerning life within co-residential partnerships has been possible to observe the growth of cohabitation as an arrangement. It has also been shown that a significant proportion of this increase is due to the cohabitation of young-single women, and that is why this part of the article is devoted to the description of the diffusion of cohabitation as first union. This section identifies in which generations cohabitation as first union has begun to gain importance toward marriage and establishes its magnitude.

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of women by first union type and birth cohort. Italy and Spain.



Source: Own elaboration. EFFV 2006 and Multiscopo 2003.

With regard to the choice of type of co-residential union by generations, the prevalence of marriage compared to cohabitation remains an irrefutable fact of women regardless of age in

Italy. However, Figure 4 clearly shows the steady and progressive growth of consensual unions in the case of Spain, which are preferred by 62% of women born in 1977-81. The former proportion can be compared against the 72% of women in Italy of the same cohort who continues to choose marriage as the preferred form of union. In general, the tendency to choose a life together based on cohabitation is much more pronounced in the case of Spain even for women belonging to the older generation who show a propensity to marriage much lower than on the Italian case.

These intergenerational differences, and so the strategy of the postponement on union formation could be conceived as a result of the delay of other events that occur before on the life course and that evidently, more in Italy than in Spain, occur with a lag. First, it has been prolonged the period of life devoted to education and elongated the entry into the labor market, which also leads to a longer stay on the parental home.

The so called diffusion process of consensual unions is far more advanced in Spain than in Italy. Concerning a period perspective, after 2000 the majority women in Spain initiate their first unions not as marriages but as cohabitations. In Italy consensual unions have increased as well since the nineties (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010), but have not reached so far the magnitude gained in Spain.

Previous research on the subject (García Pereiro, Pace & Didonna, 2012; García Pereiro, 2012) has confirmed the existence of significant changes regarding first union formation dynamics in Spain and Italy. The entry into first unions is characterized not only by women that enter their first partnerships less and at older ages, but also by a rising and constant increase of women who choose cohabitation as the first step to start life within couple.

The cumulative incidence curves for Spain and Italy regarding the entry into first union via marriage or cohabitation demonstrated that at 35 years old around 18% of all women decided to start their life in couple cohabiting in Spain. Italy, instead, displayed half of the Spanish cohabitation incidence and a higher rate for direct marriage (80%). The same figures by birth cohort reflected: first, a decrease on the occurrence of marriage in both countries, which is to some extent less pronounced in Italy; and second, an elevated rate of first cohabitations in Spain.

The short-term outcomes of those first unions started as cohabitations both in Italy and Spain follow a general trend over the transformation of the union rather than its permanence over time. After five years of cohabitation, most part of consensual unions in Italy is converted into marriage (53%), while the value for Spain is 42%. Also, the percentage of couples that stay cohabiting is much higher in Spain than in Italy.

The documented differences regarding both the lower rates of first cohabiting unions and the higher incidence of marriage following cohabitation in Italy if compared to Spain are surely a consequence of several causes at which results difficult to attribute their fair relative weight. Together with socio-economic and cultural factors, there is also the contrasted legislative framework. In Italy, unlike Spain, partners are unable to form a civil union. It is not contemplated the legalization of their relationship while unmarried, and here the impossibility to enjoy some of the rights displayed by marital unions. There are, in fact, in Spain three different forms that can transform a free union in a civil one².

In Italy there is not a unified and explicit regulation concerning civil unions. In fact, the rights enjoyed by non-married couples are either totally absent or, if present, are somehow attenuated with respect to the rights of a married couple. In Spain, instead, the constitution recognizes legally full legitimacy to all family forms, conferring exactly the same rights to both marital and non-marital unions.

Given that the spread of first cohabitations is more advanced in Spain, demonstrating a higher incidence, and considering the effective existence of a most favorable legal context; it would be expected that the transformation of this unions into marriages will be less rapid and intense than in Italy.

3. Theoretical background and research hypothesis

Typically, literature on either marriage entry or separation has overlooked the role played by premarital cohabitation. Moreover, studies often refer to only one of the possible transitions instead of considering both as events that compete with each other. There is, however, a growing body of literature that examines the character of the transformation of

² The consensual union together with a declaration of will to create such a union, the constitution of the union by a public document and the inscription in the register established for this purpose.

cohabiting unions (Wu & Balakrishnant, 1995; Smock & Manning, 1997; Duvander, 1999; Brown, 2000; Litcher et al., 2006; Moors & Bernhardt, 2009).

In order to cope simultaneously with cohabiters that transform their first union into marriage and those who decided to end their relationship, a more general perspective is needed. Thus, to understand the transformations of first cohabitation, in this paper are introduced two different (but associated) theoretical frameworks that could be considered analogous to the occurrence of the events under observation: one regarding union formation, more specifically marriage entry; and the other about union dissolution. The theoretical support for both outcomes is based on the selection of the covariates included in the comparative analysis for Italy and Spain.

3.1. Factors associated with marriage and separation

The Italian and Spanish union formation dynamics have shown a clear trend towards the decline and postponement of marriage (Kiernan, 2000; Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Cabré & Miret, 2005; Muñoz & Recaño, 2011). Previous research on the subject demonstrates a pattern characterized by a decreasing incidence of entering marriage among birth cohorts (De Sandre et al., 1997; Barbagli et al., 2003; Domínguez, 2011; García Pereiro, Pace & Didonna, 2012; García Pereiro, 2012;), giving to the younger generations an innovative position that consolidates new union formation patterns. As shown by Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001), the youngest have increasingly fewer restrictions on remaining single or breaking a union, and attribute limitations to a life within the marriage institution.

H1: Based on the decreasing marriage and increasing cohabitation and separation tendencies in both countries, it will be expected that the cumulative incidence of getting married will decrease while the rate of cohabitation's dissolution will increase significantly by birth cohorts.

Following the theoretical assumptions regarding the Second Demographic Transition, family transformations are strongly linked to ideational changes (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 1995). In this sense, the greatest importance of the individual autonomy in the religious sphere leads to a higher secularization of the private life and a growing skepticism towards institutions.

Considering the strength that is still given to the church and its influence on family matters in Italy and Spain, individuals with a declared religious affiliation may have a more positive attitude towards marriage. Following such line, a number of studies have demonstrated that those individuals more involved in religious beliefs have a lower probability of cohabiting and separating (De Sandre & Dalla Zuanna, 1999; De Rose & Rosina, 1999; Dalla Zuanna et al., 2005; Castiglioni, 2004; Caltabiano et al., 2005; Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Muñoz & Recaño, 2011).

H2: As far as the religiosity (as opposite to secularization) is concerned, in countries with a far recognized strong catholic tradition (like Italy and Spain), the self-reported secularism of women's will increase the prevalence of a transition to being single (separation) and decrease the will of getting married.

In Southern European countries union formation is characterized by several peculiarities, hand by hand with the postponement of the union is the latest-late departure from the parental home and the high correspondence between home leaving and entry into marriage (Billari et al. 2000; Baizán et al., 2003; Ongaro, 2003; Moreno Mínguez, 2003, De Rose et al. 2008). Liefbroer et al. (2004) suggest that those who live with their parents are more likely to engage in serious relationships and, as a consequence, move out of the parental home to do so. Instead, those who live independently gain also in personal autonomy and evaluate differently the costs of being in union.

H3: In countries such as Spain and Italy in which most part of young adults leave the parental home in order to form an union (mostly marriage), those who have experienced some kind of autonomy living by themselves before entering their first union will be less likely to get married and more likely to break-up their cohabitations.

Most previous studies about transition to marriage among cohabiters have emphasized the economic factors underpinning the decisions to marry or to separate. Some theories point to the importance of the accumulation of resources within the couple in facilitating union formation process (McLanahan & Casper, 1995; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Sweeney, 2002) while others support the idea that human capital accumulation for women tends to deter entering a union (Becker, 1981). Other scholars have found that among cohabiters only men's and not women's economic characteristics matter both in transition to marriage and

separation (Oppenheimer, 1994; Smock & Manning, 1997; Brown, 2000). Although this trend began to show signs of change, the analysis by Sassler and Goldscheider (2004) confirms that the link marriage-male earnings is weakening due to the increasing presence of women into the labor market with wages more comparable to those of their partners.

The work experience captures the already gained assets, but also the attachment and future opportunities into the labor market and, in combination with the educational level, describes an individual's income potential. It could be seen also as an indicator of human capital accumulation in the labor market, reflecting both an income effect on the transitions from cohabitation, and the opportunity costs of having children (Cigno & Ermisch, 1989; Kravdal, 1994). Regarding dissolution, studies by Vignoli and Ferro (2009) for the Italian case and by Simò and Solsona (2003) for the Spanish one, confirm that women's degree of economic independence is one factor which plays an essential function in the real possibilities to cope with a separation.

H4: In Spain and Italy, characterized by unfavorable economic and housing contexts faced by young adults, the acquisition of relative economic stability is practically a prerequisite for the establishment of a more formal type of co-residential union such as marriage. Working women are more economically strong, so they have had the opportunity to pool a greater amount of economic resources than women who have not enter the labor market. Thus, against the theory of women's economic independence, it is expected that measures of women's work experience will be associated with higher marriage prevalence. In this way, the economic confidence and autonomy gained by women who already worked will, on one hand, amplify transition to marriage; and on the other, help them to overcome the financial obstacles involved in the separation. Therefore, in Spain and Italy women with more economic resources -women who have been able to accumulate some work experience before transforming their unions- will have a higher risk of dissolving their cohabitation and making the transition to marriage.

It has been widely demonstrated that fertility related variables are significantly associated to both marriage and separation among cohabitators (Smock & Manning, 1997; Wu & Balakrishnan, 1995; Lichter et al., 2006; Moors & Bernhardt, 2009). In this sense, the literature has frequently shown that a conception/birth of a child drastically raises the risk

of entering in union. In the Mediterranean Europe most part of births takes place within marriages, an institution that normally implies a certain level of commitment, which brings stability (Kiernan, 1999, 2001). In Italy and Spain, despite the increasing trend of children born outside marriage, the prevalence of institutional models concerning nuptiality and fertility are thus far powerfully linked to the idea that the environment of a marital union is the most appropriate situation for bearing children, being both events strongly interrelated (Marí-Klose & Nos Colom, 1999; Jurado Guerrero & Naldini, 1997; Barbagli et al. 2003, Baizán et al. 2003; Dominguez, 2011).

H5: Regarding the pregnancy/birth status, it will be assumed to found a high degree of interrelationship between transition to marriage and premarital childbirth in Italy and Spain. Women who get pregnant or have a child may transform the cohabitation into marriage desiring to offer their child a higher social, emotional and economic protection and with the aim of fulfilling the normative and social pressures. The same association will be expected for the dissolution of the cohabiting union: children will deter couples from breaking up their relationship. Finally, if there were already children in the household, the incentive for getting married will be significantly reduced.

Several analyses have established that the age at the start of the cohabiting union is related to both transition processes in diverse ways (Brown, 2000; Smock & Manning, 1997; Wu & Balakrishnan, 1995). Regarding the age at first cohabitation, are expected differences among women in the strength and in the compliance to the norms concerning the legitimization of the cohabitation through marriage.

H6: For the transition to marriage, an increase on the age at the initiation of the cohabitation will cause a decrease on the rate of getting married. The normative and social pressure to legitimize cohabitation will vary with women's age at the union formation, being superior for younger ages. For separation are also expected lower ratios, in line with the studies regarding marital dissolution: those who enter the union at younger ages will have a greater chance of disruption than women who formed a union at older ages (Wu & Balakrishnan, 1995; Brown, 2000).

It has been demonstrated by the literature that parental divorce affects the development of the life course. Research on the topic explain differential attitudes as well as behaviors

related to family life of individuals who have experienced parental divorce, compared with those who come from intact families. Thus, persons that experienced the divorce of their parents are more likely to dissolve their unions (Teachman, 2002); they do not believe in marriage as a lasting and more stable institution and more frequently adopted nontraditional family behaviors (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Ongaro and Mazzucco, 2009).

H7: Given the Italian and Spanish context, it will be presumed that parental separation affects attitudes and behaviors towards the transformation of first cohabitations. It is expected that women whose parents are divorced develop different tolerance levels regarding live within couple: first, by believing less in the transition to marriage and approving more living in cohabitation; and second, by being more inclined to break-up the union.

4.Methodology

The general purpose of this paper is to examine the incidence, duration and outcomes of cohabitation in Mediterranean countries as Spain and Italy using a life course comparative approach. The former in order to identify the socio-demographic profiles of those women who decide to transform their cohabitations into marriages (cohabitation as a trial marriage) against those who dissolve it.

Usually, studies on this field have treated marriage as the only possible transition from cohabitation using the methodology of a single-event transition. But even if marriage can be considered the most popular outcome in countries where the diffusion of cohabitation is still moderate, to run an analysis just looking at it is surely biased. Matrimony is not the only outcome, indeed, women who start a consensual union can also decide to breakup or to continue their life in couple under such figure. This is the motivation underlying the methodology chosen: to analyze the outcomes of first cohabitations on a competing-risks framework in which more than one type of event plays a role.

4.1.Data

Spanish data-set

The data used in this paper is the Spanish Survey on Fertility, Family and Values (Encuesta de Fecundidad, Familia y Valores 2006), EFFV06 hereinafter. It was conducted by the Centre for Sociological Studies in 2006 and considered a target population of adult female residents (over 15 years old). The total sample size was 9,737 women. The data contains information about dynamics and histories of partnerships, births and employment and other socio-demographic variables of interest. In this sense the EFFV06 dataset allows the reconstruction of complete (up to the moment of interview) partnership histories, even though the interest of this research is only on the outcome of first cohabitations.

Interviewed women report the beginning and ending dates of every relationship they have had. By considering only first unions started as cohabitations, it has been constructed a set of variables that indicate: the year in which cohabitation began as the origin time, the ending year compute as the year in which the cohabitation was transformed into marriage, was dissolved or continued as cohabitation (censored) up to ten years following the origin time, and the variable containing the respective states.

Unfortunately, the information about the precise moment when women finished their education has not been correctly captured in the survey, and as a result we may not compute a more specific variable to identify the exact educational level before the occurrence of the event of interest.

Italian data-set

For Italy, data is drawn from the Italian Household Multipurpose Survey “Family and Social Subjects” (Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie e Soggetti Sociali) carry out in November 2003, IMFSS03 hereinafter. The IMFSS03 is a quinquennial social survey carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics. It is part of a more complex system of multipurpose social surveys which are conducted yearly with five special rounds that rotate every five years. One of the thematic rotating issues is related to the families, social subjects and childhood conditions. It is the most representative and complete survey in Italy up to date and the major advantage is the registration of complete retrospective partnership histories. The last survey was carried out at 2009, but unfortunately the micro-data is not available yet.

The IMFSS03 provides a detailed description of family structures, kinship networks; the permanence of children in the family of origin; social mobility and other information of special interest as retrospective information on partnerships, jobs and children; among other socio-demographic variables of interest. The survey has a total sample of over 49,541 persons living in private households. For comparative reasons, it was selected only the female population aged 15 and over for a total of 22,181 women.

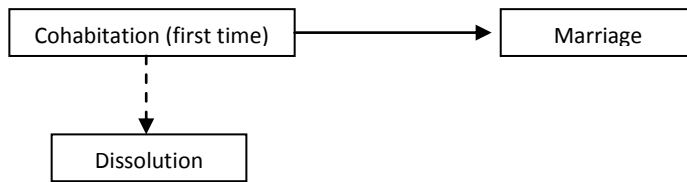
4.2.Methods

Developed as the continuation of a research on first union formation in Spain and Italy (García Pereiro, Pace & Didonna, 2012), this paper deals with the subsequent development of cohabitation as the first union choose by women. The starting point is the beginning of cohabitation, considering three possible outcomes of the cohabitation state: marriage, dissolution/death of partner, and no subsequent transformation. Here are discussed the results for both marriage formation and separation after cohabitation (treated as competing events) since our theoretical considerations focus on the nature of cohabiting unions based on their possible outcomes. So censoring occurs ten years after the formation of the union always if the respondent remains in the cohabiting status. This method gives information on the pure propensity of partners in consensual unions to transform their union into marriage in a real situation where they could also face the dissolution of their union.

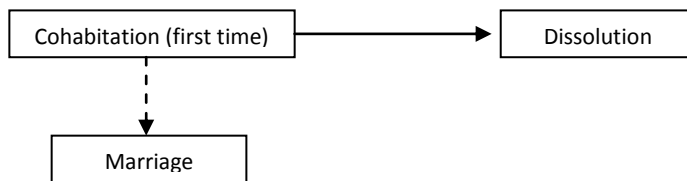
In this research, a woman remains in the origin state “cohabiter” (as first union) until the transition to the destination state “transformation of the first union”. Since there are two possible destinations, namely entry into marriage (marriage preceded by cohabitation) or separation, it is used a competing risks framework. At the moment women transform their first union into marriage, they are not exposed to the risk of a separation that follows cohabitation. Similarly, women splitting up their cohabiting unions are no longer exposed to the risk of marrying after their first cohabitation. Where neither separation nor marriage occurs, the respondent’s life history becomes censored 10 years after the union was formed.

The following are the graphical representation of both transitions:

1. First cohabitation transformed into marriage as the event of interest, separation as the competing event.



2. First cohabitation dissolved through separation as the event of interest, marriage as the competing event.



This study aims to answer the above-mentioned questions, both for the Spanish and the Italian case, performing a two step competing risks analysis: first, by describing the cumulative incidence functions of failure due to marriage or dissolution, and next by performing semi-parametric regression modeling (separately for each country).

The first part of the analysis is dedicated to the estimations of the cumulative incidence curves for the transition from cohabitation to marriage and cohabitation to dissolution in order to display changes in the outcomes of first cohabitations over the countries under examination and also the birth cohorts considered. The calculation of the cumulative incidence curves in the presence of competing risks, considers the function of the hazards of both competing events instead of the hazard of the event of interest –marriage- (Coviello & Boggess, 2004; Cleves, M. et al., 2010).

This paper is more interested in assessing the impact of certain socio-demographic covariates on the choices of transforming first cohabitations respectively in marriages or dissolutions given the existence of alternatives. The hazards of the sub-distribution in a competing risk setting deals with this issue in a much more straightforward manner. It is already widely used in epidemiology (Pintilie, 2007; Bakoyannis and Touloumi, 2011) and is relatively easy to implement. In such situations, competing risks models with mutually

exclusive non-repeated transitions are the most appropriate type of Event History Analysis (Pintilie, 2007; Cleves, M. et al., 2010).

Following the method developed by Fine and Gray (1999), competing risks regression posits a model for the sub-hazard function of a failure event of primary interest via maximum likelihood³. According to the authors, in the presence of competing events that impede the event of interest, a standard analysis using Cox regression computes incidence-rate curves that are appropriate only for a hypothetical universe where competing events do not occur. When competing risks are present the most accurate is to focus on the cumulative incidence function (CIF) –or failure function- because it is unclear what type of event will occur until after it has occurred. The competing risk regression deals with a semi-parametric method to model covariates effects on cumulative incidence functions. As for the alternative Cox regressions, there is an assumption regarding the proportionality of the sub-hazards (Cleves, M. et al., 2010). In the estimated models for Spain and Italy, the proportional sub-hazards assumption holds for all the covariates included.

In the second part of the analysis, the focus is to measure time from first cohabitation to marriage or separation in relation to several socio-demographic factors. The aim is to fit two competing-risks models for each country, the first treat marriage as the event of interest, while in the second the focus is on the dissolution of the cohabiting union, in both cases treating the opposite as the competing event. Based on the Fine and Gray's method, the competing risk refers to the chance that instead of marriage, it will be observed a competing event, such as the dissolution of the union. The dissolution of the first cohabitation impedes the occurrence of the event of interest (marriage preceded by first cohabitation). This is not to be confused with right-censoring, because when women are censored due to the no subsequent transformation of their first cohabitation, they are still considered at risk of marriage or separation. Quite the opposite, the interruption of a first cohabitation is a condition that prevents at that time the following marriage within the context of the first cohabiting union. Whereas censoring does not allow observing the occurrence of the event of interest, a competing event prevents the event of interest from occurring. Thus, this

³ Such models can be estimated using the software Stata11 by the function *stcrreg*.

particular model works by keeping women who experience the competing event at risk so that they can be adequately counted as having no chance of failing again.

One of the disadvantages of using the Fine and Gray's approach (via *stcrreg*) is the addition of time-dependent covariates. This objection relies on the character of a competing risks regression in which subjects remain in risk-pool calculations past the time when they fail, if they fail due to competing reasons. It is not recommended to model time-varying coefficients because the extrapolation of covariates past failure unlikely reflect any real data situation. However, the outcome obtained for each of the covariates remains a useful test of the proportional sub-hazards assumption (Cleves, M. et al., 2010). In this sense, in the cases where this was possible, an effort has been made to reconstruct covariates which are time constant but simultaneously are characterized by a precise timing, which is directly related to the occurrence of the event.

Competing risk regression analyses were conducted using the Fine and Gray's approach which extends the Cox model to competing risks data by considering the sub-distribution hazard. In such model the strength of the association between each specific covariate and the event of interest (outcome) is reflected by the sub-hazard ratio (SHR), which is the ratio of the hazards associated with the Cumulative Incidence Function under different values of the covariates. The SHR can be interpreted similarly to hazard ratios estimated in standard Cox models, with the main difference that also account for the hazard of the competing event.

The focal point is on first time cohabiting women and, as a consequence, our dependent variable is the first partnership transformation: marriage or separation treated as competing risks. Unions that have not experienced ulterior transformation after ten years of its constitution have been coded as censored. Thus, the dependent variable has three categories: 1.-for marriage; 2.-for separation; and 0.-for censored. Two semi-parametric competing risks models have been constructed considering the time elapsed (duration of cohabitation in years) since entry into first cohabitation until the occurrence of one of these events. Given that the study is on the transformation of first cohabitation, the process time is stopped at 10 years after entering the union. The models group several covariates which were built following the exactly same logic and that were common to both datasets.

- Cohort (time-constant): with five categories before 1950, 1951-1960, 1961-1970, 1971-1980, and 1981-1990. The last one is an incomplete cohort in which the oldest women had reached only 22 years old in Italy and 25 in Spain by the time of the surveys. Since this only provides information regarding the early adulthood, models exclude it to avoid distortions in the results.
- Religious beliefs (time-constant): a dummy variable in which categories can take only two values depending on the self-consideration of the religious status of respondents, understanding religiosity as opposed to secularization.
- Lived by themselves before entering cohabitation (time-related): measure whether if women have lived independently (out of the parental home) or not at least once before entering the first union via cohabitation.
- Educational attainment at the time of the survey (time-constant): in the datasets were not registered completed educational histories, but only the highest educational attainment reached at the moment of the interview and the date when this level was attained. Thus was divided on 3 categories following the ISCED in order to facilitate comparisons: 1.- primary education or less; 2.- secondary; and 3.- university.
- Age at cohabitation (time-constant): categorical, express two age-categories at which women entered into their first cohabiting unions. Those who start cohabiting before and after their 30th birthday.
- Work experience (time-related): is an indicator of human capital accumulation in the labor market and captures the opportunities women face in the labor market and their attachment and achievements (Baizán et al., 2003; Turcotte & Goldscheider, 1998). The variable groups two categories: 1.- for those who never enter the labor market and those who have not worked before the transformation of the union; and 2.- for women who have had a job previous to the change of their union status.
- Pregnancy/birth status (time-related): captures both conception/birth before and during the first cohabitation. It was divided in three categories: 1.- if the woman does not have children at all or have them after transforming their first cohabitations (without children); 2.- if the woman had a child before entering the first union (already had a

child); and 3.- if the child was born one year before, one year after or the year in which the transformation of the union occurred (pregnancy/birth).

- Parental divorce (time-constant): it is the only covariate that refers to the family background, computing if women parents were or not divorced.

The number of siblings and the foreign born status were included initially in the models but their inclusion did not substantially improve the fit of the model, or have a significant impact on the coefficients and, therefore, were dropped from the final specification.

Information on union histories on both surveys is monthly given, but the loss of cases due to missing month of union formation was important, thus data is analyzed only on yearly basis.

After excluding cases with missing values on the main variables and some necessary data cleaning, was obtained a sample of 1,501 women's first cohabitations in Spain and 1,410 in Italy that were under the risk of union transformation (marriage) or dissolution by the time they started such union.

5.Results

5.1.The transformation of first cohabiting unions: getting married or splitting-up?

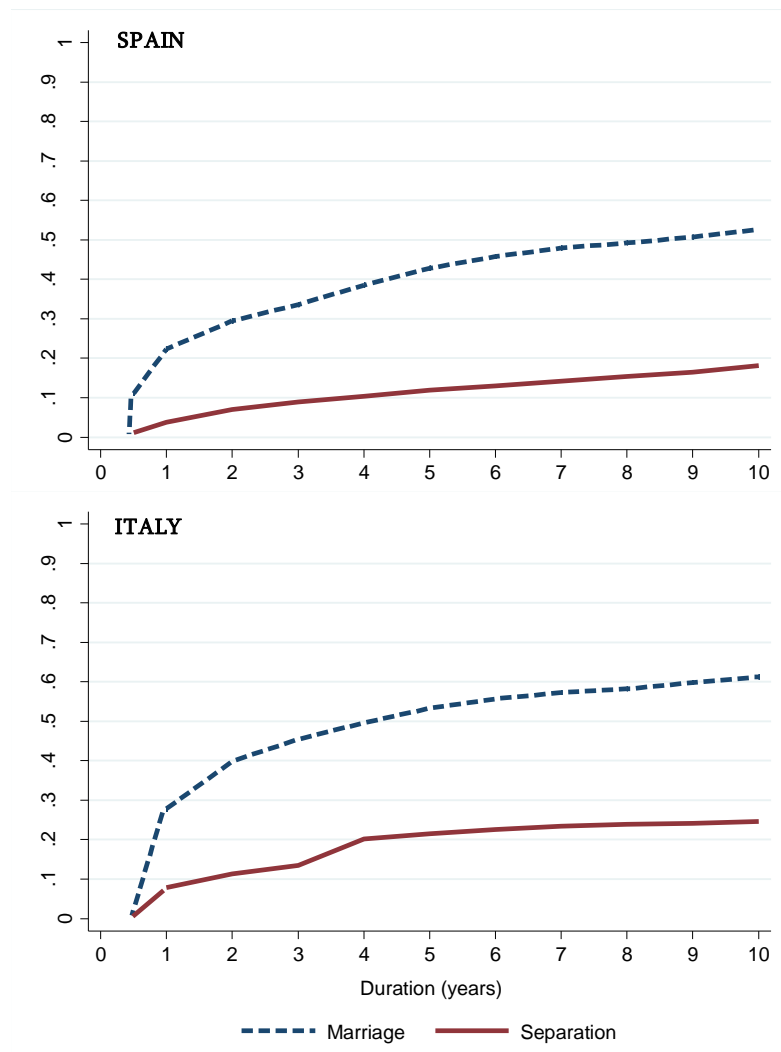
In a Event History Analysis setting where competing risks are present the most accurate approach is the estimation of the cumulative incidence curves, because computes directly the risks of first cohabitations to be transformed not only into the event of primary interest (marriage), but also into the competing event (dissolution). Then, this curve is a function of both the marriage and separation sub-hazard rates and, as a consequence, it is altered by the changes that take place in either rate.

Figure 5 shows the cumulative incidence curves for Spain and Italy regarding the transformation of first cohabitations due to marriage and separation. The respective curves for Italy illustrate that, 10 years after the union was constituted, around 61% of all cohabitations were followed by marriage, while 24% were dissolved and 15% remain unchanged. The situation reported for Spain differs significantly; the corresponding figures evidence lower rates for both marriage (53%) and dissolution (19%), and a subsequent higher likelihood for staying in cohabitation (28%).

The results for Spain are somehow expected. According to Domínguez (2011), who studied changes undergone by Spanish couples between 1995 and 2006, the probability of marriage following cohabitation is higher than the break-up⁴. Moreover, by the year 2006, both marriage and dissolution took longer to occur if compared to 1995.

In both countries, the transition to marriage occurs much more rapidly if compared to the dissolution of the union.

Figure 5. Cumulative incidence of marriage and dissolution (first cohabitations). Spain (n=1,501) and Italy (n=1,410).



Source: Own elaboration EFFV06 and IMFSS03.

It has been demonstrated how the outcomes of first consensual unions differ between Italy and Spain, but even within the territorial framework of both countries there is some

⁴ In this research Kaplan and Meier survival curves were calculated separately for each outcome (marriage and break-up) without considering transformations as competing risks.

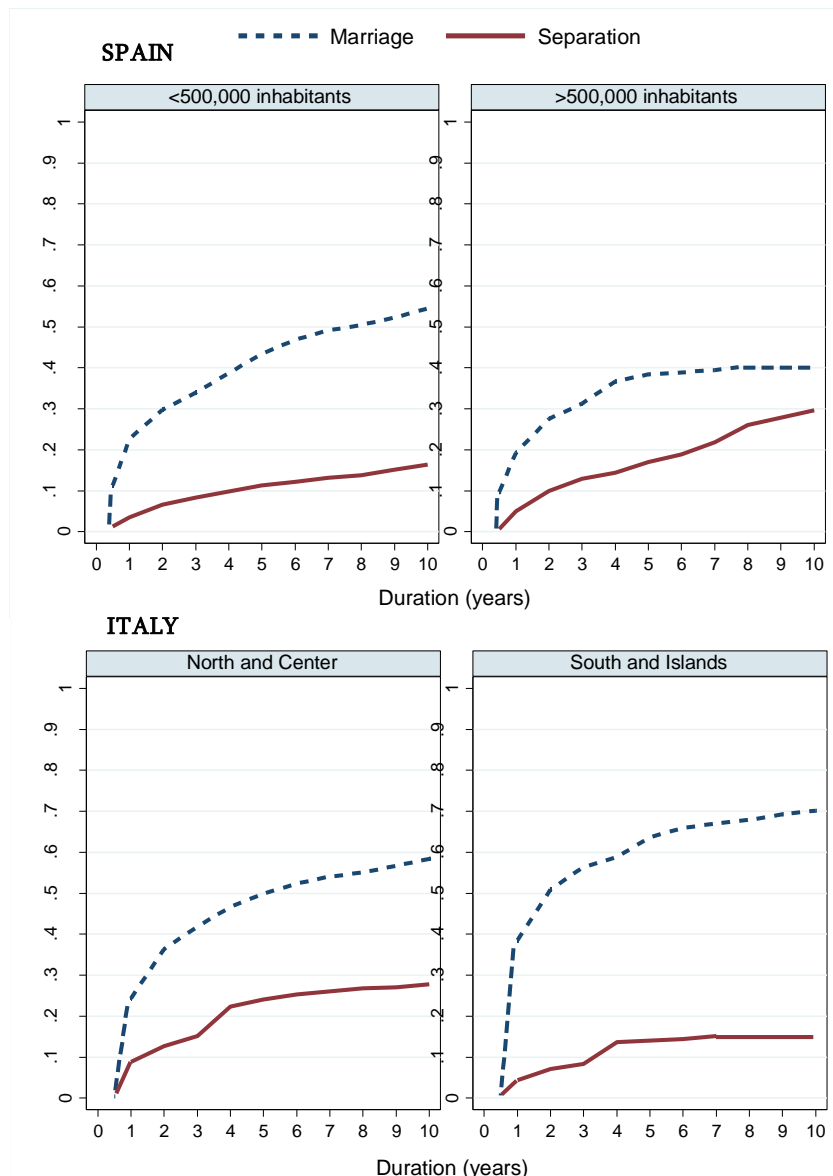
internal heterogeneity that deserves to be highlighted. Unfortunately, the criteria applied for each country also diverge⁵. Initially, the idea was to compare differences regarding Spain and Italy based on the number of inhabitants of the respondents' place of residence at the time of the survey, a clue particularly important for the Spanish case where family-related behaviors are influenced by the nature of big metropolitan areas (Dominguez, 2011; Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002). In Italy instead, significant differences have been observed mostly on regional basis, more specifically, between the areas of the North/Center and the less developed and more traditional regions of the South and Islands (De Rose & Vignoli, 2011; Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna, 2009; Billari & Kohler, 2002).

Following such criteria, were estimated the cumulative incidence curves of marriage and dissolution of cohabitations distinguishing by the number of inhabitants in the Spanish case and the above mentioned regional division in Italy (Figure 6). The figure evidence a clear pattern which favors, on one hand, superior rates for the transition to marriage both in cities with less of 500,000 inhabitants in Spain (54%), and in the South and Islands in Italy (70%); and on the other, a higher incidence of break-ups following cohabitation in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (30%), and in the regions of the North and Center Italy (29%). Despite such differences, and as a consequence of them, the continuation of cohabitation is more homogeneous among regions and cities within each country. The higher heterogeneity is observed on the events considered as transformations, not in the continuation of first cohabitations.

It is also important to highlight that the rate's divergence between cohabitations followed by marriage or separation is significantly lower in the North/Center for Italy and in cities which count more than 500,000 inhabitants in Spain. The reduction of the distance between curves could indicate a diverse character of cohabitation in these areas, which even if still favors marriage, gives to the dissolution of the union a further imperative role.

⁵ For this reason, the estimated models do not include a territorial indicator of heterogeneity within countries. However, individual models run separately for each one confirm their significance.

Figure 6. Cumulative incidence of marriage and dissolution (first cohabitations) by number of inhabitants and region. Spain (n=1,501) and Italy (n=1,410).



Source: Own elaboration EFFV06 and IMFSS03.

5.2. Determinants of marriage and break-up following first cohabitations

The Spanish study sample contains 1,281 women first time cohabiting, and there are 773 events: 581 marriages and 192 separations. In the Italian sample 296 dissolved their union and 777 get married, for a total of 1,073 events and 1,374 first cohabitations.

The results of the competing risks regression analysis are summarized in Table 2. Effect parameters (sub-hazard ratios) indicate the force of the association between the covariates (and its categories) and the cumulative incidence of marriage or separation relative to the

corresponding competing event. The reference category of the covariates is indicated within parenthesis.

From cohabitation to marriage

Regarding the transformation of consensual unions, the cumulative incidence of the transition to marriage decreases with birth cohorts. In Spain and Italy, respectively, the rate linked to marriage is 37% and 28% lower for respondents born between 1971 and 1980 relative to the reference category (1961-1970).

Being only significant for the Spanish case, there is a negative association between women who have lived independently (out of the parental home) before entering the consensual union and the cumulative incidence of marriage. The rate is 16% inferior relative to those who have not left the parental home or left it at the time of the union.

Secular women (not religious) have a smaller cumulative incidence of marriage than religious ones, confirming the argument that those who stay in cohabitation will probably be those with a less traditional background. The negative impact of secularization on the SHR for marriage is much more significant in Spain (42%) than in Italy (21%).

Women who formed their consensual unions after their 30th birthday have lower risks of transition to marriage compared with women who formed the partnership before computing 30 years old, but the value is even minor in Italy (40%) than in Spain (32%).

The effect of the pregnancy/birth covariate is as expected, but significantly smaller in Spain if compared to Italy. Relative to not having children, those who had a child had also a superior risk of transforming the union into marriage: almost 1.9 times higher in Spain, while in Italy the figure increases in two and a half times. On the contrary, having the child born already in the consensual union lowers the risks to transform the partnership into marriage by 71% in Spain and 36% in Italy.

In Italy and Spain cohabiting women who have been able to accumulate some kind of experience in the labor market relative to those who have never been employed or have not worked before transforming their unions have also a higher prevalence of transition to

marriage. The SHR linked to the work experience is significantly positive both for Spain (1.39) and Italy (1.13), but superior in the first country.

The background characteristic accounting for parental divorce show that women who did not experience the divorce of the parents have higher risks of marriage, compared with women who lived the separation. The incidence is ever higher in Italy with a positive effect that reaches 55%, while the risk for Spain is 27%.

Table 2. Competing risks regression analysis of the transition to marriage or separation among cohabiting couples in Spain and Italy.

COVARIATES	Event of interest=marriage Competing event=dissolution		Event of interest=dissolution Competing event=marriage	
	MARRIAGE (SHR)		DISSOLUTION (SHR)	
	SPAIN	ITALY	SPAIN	ITALY
Birth cohort				
<1950	1.64 **	0.62 **	0.34 *	0.42
1951-1960 (1961-1970)	1.42 *	1.04	0.58 *	0.88
1971-1980	0.63 **	0.72 **	1.56 *	1.83 **
Have lived independently	0.84 *	1.03	1.92 **	0.99
Educational attainment				
Primary or less (Secondary)	0.92	1.12	1.07	0.99
University	0.96	0.90	0.98	1.33
Not religious	0.58 **	0.79 *	1.80 **	1.20 *
Age at cohabitation (>30 years)	0.68 *	0.60 **	0.76 *	0.74 **
Work experience				
(Never/not employed)				
Employed	1.39 **	1.13 *	1.94 **	1.51 **
Pregnancy/birth status				
(Without children)				
Pregnancy/child	1.85 **	2.52 **	0.43 **	0.22 **
Already have a child	0.29 **	0.64 **	0.50 **	0.32 **
Parents not divorced	1.27 *	1.55 **	0.97	0.49 **
n	1281	1374	1281	1219
Event of interest (failures)	581	777	192	296
Log pseudolikelihood	-3981.79	-5290.11	-1233.95	-2062.83

**p<0.001 *p<0.05

Source: Own elaboration EFFV2006 and Multiscopo 2003.

From cohabitation to separation

Regarding the dissolution of cohabitation, the risks are highest for the last cohort under observation in both countries. Other variables that show a positive effect on the cumulative incidence of separation are the individual's characteristics concerning the secular orientation on beliefs and the work experience accumulated on the labor market.

Women who started their consensual union later present a minor risk of separation if compared to those who start at younger ages, following the hypothesis also valid for the dissolution of marriages in which the youngest the age at the start of the union, the greater the risk of dissolution.

In terms of pregnancy/child status, conceiving and giving birth to a child while in consensual union lower the risk of separation (Spain: 57%, Italy: 78%), compared with women without children. Having conceived or born the child prior to union formation shows as well an inferior effect on the risk of separation, but the association is smaller relative to the previous category.

Only significant for Italy, living with both parents during childhood decreases by 51% the risk of separation. While for Spain, have lived independently increases the risks of separation in 1.92 times.

6. Concluding remarks

Consensual unions in Spain and Italy are not longer a rare model of partnership formation, both census and survey data display a clear rising tendency. However, such trend is characterized by two explicit phases: a post-marital cohabitation that was popular in the eighties, when the phenomenon was not so frequent; and a pre-marital one which showed a growing incidence, involved the younger generations and began to disseminate since the nineties.

In spite of the raising trend on the choice of entering the first union through cohabitation, once the union is established marriage remains the preferred form of co-residential living arrangement for the most part of women in both Mediterranean countries.

The empirical analyses here presented confirm the temporal nature of first cohabitations, characterized by a quick and preponderant transformation into marriage. However, such transformation is much more accentuated in Italy than in Spain. Indeed, after 4 years of cohabitation, in Italy 50% of unions have experienced the transition to marriage while in Spain the value reaches 38%. Even if the mainstream regards the passage to the marital institution, Spain shows a not negligible cumulative incidence of cohabitations that continue under such figure over time, which could be interpreted in two different ways: as a

way to wait until the arrival of the moment to get married (favoring its postponement) or as the establishment of a form of union a little bit more closer to the marital institution that lose somehow its transitory character.

The profound regional and metropolitan differences observed in Italy and Spain are somehow analogous to the historical territorial evolution of the demographic transformations experienced in Mediterranean countries, where the leading position is taken by the big metropolitan areas, in the case of Spain, and the cities of the North/Center in Italy.

This paper also contributes to the understanding of the transitional dynamics of cohabitations in Italy and Spain by identifying the socio-demographic characteristics of cohabiters that, eventually, get married or dissolve their union. The results of the competing risks regressions illustrate a pretty much similar pattern of effects for both countries. On one hand, it has been demonstrated how belonging to the youngest cohorts, having secular beliefs, having formed the union after the 30th birthday and having a child before entering cohabitation are negatively linked to the incidence of marriage; while this transition is positively affected by the intact nature of the family of origin, the employment experience accumulated before the transition and, especially, by the conception or birth of a child. On the other hand, the disruption of consensual unions is higher among younger women who had formed their union before computing 30 years old, have been directly involve within the labor market and do not have children.

The changes occurred to first cohabitations over the years passed since their conformation give important clues about its fragile and transient nature. In this phase of diffusion, where the transition to marriage is the most practiced, it is accurate to describe the transitional model of consensual union in Italy and Spain as a trial or a prelude to marriage (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990; Heuveline & Timberlake, 2005), a simple stage on the marriage process strongly determined by the birth of a child, in other words, just a matter of time.

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