



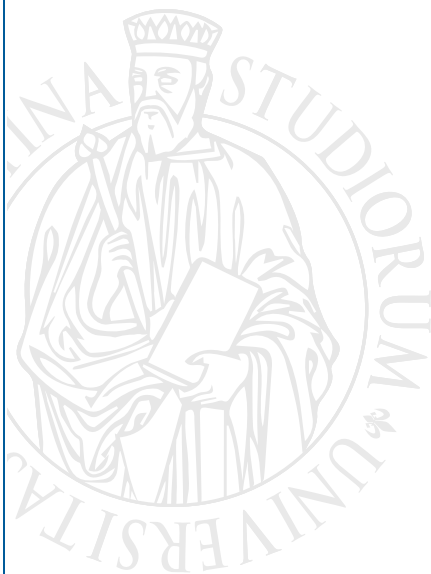
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**Similar incidence, different nature?
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relationships in France and Italy**

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Similar incidence, different nature? Characteristics of Living Apart Together relationships in France and Italy

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate on the prevalence and determinants of Living Apart Together (LAT) relationships by focusing on two contrasting family settings such as France and Italy. First, corroborate the view that being “single” in residential terms does not mean being “without a partner” in relationship terms. This is an incorrect assumption in more than one quarter of cases in both countries. Second, despite a similar incidence, we show that the nature of LAT relationships differs between the two societies. In Italy, LAT relationships are popular in the early phases of the life course, when young adults often must face a difficult economic situation as well as an overall social pressure to marry. In France, LAT relationships are more the result of a conscious choice, especially in the older phases of the life course. Overall, we found traces of both the Second Demographic Transition and the Pattern of Disadvantage narratives in our findings.

Keywords: Living Apart Together; Life course; Relationships; Italy; France; Generations and Gender Survey.

1. Introduction

In the social landscape of Europe, family life courses have become more and more diversified over the last decades (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Kiernan 2002; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010, 2012; Vignoli et al. 2014). The increasing alternatives to life-long marriage contributed to a growing range of family arrangements, and they have provided stimuli for new research, such as whether the boundaries of a family are exclusively identified by the physical space of a single household (Saraceno 1994; 2012). For a long time, surveys only considered a tripartite model of intimate relationships in which individuals were classified as “single”, “cohabiting” or “married”. However, this assumption is incorrect or, at most, incomplete. On the one hand, being married or cohabiting does not always mean still being in a couple; Martin et al. (2011) labeled this situation as *Living Together Apart*. On the other hand, being “single” in residential terms is not necessarily a synonym of being “without a partner” in relationship terms (Castro-Martín et al. 2008; Duncan et al. 2013a). This recognition challenges the common assumption that living together in the same household is a requirement for being considered a couple and it calls into question the standard family categorizations in several socio-demographic works. Hence, the study of Living Apart Together (LAT) relationships – i.e., intimate relationships between two persons who reside in different households (Duncan and Phillips 2010) – is increasingly gaining relevance among family scholars (Levin 2004; Casper et al. 2008; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Stoilova et al. 2014).

Previous qualitative and quantitative evidence for Europe suggest that reasons for forming LAT relationships may be related to a *choice* or a *constraint* and are likely to vary across family life courses (Haskey and Lewis 2006; Levin 2004; Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009). Living apart may be a *choice* based on a desire for greater independence and freedom, or it may be a *constraint* due to circumstances arising from housing availability, employment opportunities, or family circumstances such as caring for children of previous unions or for elderly parents (e.g., Strohm et al. 2009; Liefbroer et al. 2012). Constraints related to difficult housing and growing labor market uncertainties are likely to play a critical role during the early phases of the life course. Alternatively, partners who are older may choose to live apart in order to facilitate contacts with adult children from previous unions and to maintain privacy and autonomy (Caradec 1997; de Jong Gierveld 2004; Karlsson and Borell 2002). Overall, increasing levels of healthy life expectancy, rising divorce rates, improved transportation and travel as well as increased use of the internet are all reasons to suspect that LAT unions will become more

common in the years to come, and will thus contribute to extending the household boundaries of the family (Haskey and Lewis 2006; Levin 2004; Saraceno 2012).

Research on LAT, especially comparative-oriented research, is very recent (e.g., Liefbroer et al. 2012; Sanchez and Goldani 2012). This paper adds to the ongoing debate about LAT relationships by focusing on the characteristics and determinants of LAT in Italy in comparison with France. We know very little about the prevalence and the determinants of LAT relationships in modern Italy. To the best of our knowledge, only two studies focused on Italian LAT relationships. The first was conducted by Paola Di Giulio (2007), who looked at the phenomenon through the Italian 1995 *“Fertility and Family Survey”*. The second was made by Billari et al (2008), who focused on young adults living apart together using data from the 1998 multi-purpose survey on *“Households, Social Subjects and Childhood Conditions”*. We know nothing about the incidence and the determinants of Italian LAT in more recent years. In addition, Italy is not included in published or ongoing comparative European studies (Liefbroer et al. 2012; Sanchez and Goldani 2012; Tai et al. 2014). We however believe that Italy is a very interesting case study for assessing incidences and correlates of LAT relationships. Despite the tendency to place a high value on traditional marriage, contemporary Italy faces an increasing breakdown of marriage, the flexibility of union patterns is growing (Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013), and family changes are developing hand in hand with a slow but continuous process of secularization (Sansonetti 2009). Thus, the Italian setting is important for eliciting the role of LAT relationship when a society is undergoing secularization and revolutionary family changes. As a benchmark scenario, we compare the situation in Italy with that in France, a neighboring country in which cohabitation is institutionalized and the process of family diversification is much more profound (Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009). In addition, research on LAT has a long tradition in France¹. This comparison represents an interesting strategy to test if the differences in incidences and correlates of LAT relationships in Italy as compared to France can be viewed better in terms of delays or, instead, of different routes.

In the following, we first adopt a premise about the main narratives seeking to explain the diffusion of new family behaviors. The paper continues by focusing on the characteristics of the

¹Ined carried out the first French survey including specific questions aimed at identifying LAT relationships already in 1985.

Italian and French contexts that are relevant for our research. The presentation of data, methods, and results follows. We conclude by elaborating on our findings.

2. A premise

In this research, we have been guided mainly by our curiosity regarding LAT behaviors in contemporary Italy and France, more so than by any general theory or by a drive to formulate and answer theoretical hypotheses; in our opinion it is too early to attempt such an approach. The closest we have come to a general theory is in addressing the question of whether LAT relationships exhibit any traces of the two popular narratives regarding the diffusion of “new” family patterns: the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002; Sobotka 2008) and the Pattern of Disadvantage (POD) (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011).

Based on the theoretical considerations of the SDT, one might expect the higher educated, the young, and those who are not or not very religious to be at the forefront of adopting new behaviors, such as making the *choice* to be in a LAT relationship (Strohm et al. 2009). This is because they may maintain more liberal values and may be more resistant to prevailing social stigmas. Higher educated people could be overrepresented among people in a LAT relationship also due to other factors (Di Giulio 2007). First, opting for a LAT arrangement may prevent the domestic and family responsibilities associated with co-residence and maximizes their life-long professional career. Second, it could reflect a desire of independence among the better-educated. Finally, residing in two separate homes requires greater financial resources, and education is often considered a valid proxy for labor market characteristics and prospects.

According to the narrative of the POD, it is those groups who are rather more disadvantaged in society (i.e., those with low education and fewer resources) who are more likely to experience “new” types of demographic behaviors (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011). In situations where individuals face blocked opportunities and uncertainties, they may need to remain in a LAT relationship until they feel they have a clearer outlook on life. According to this view, people who live in a LAT relationship are not radical pioneers of family changes, but are cautious and conservative (Haskey and Lewis 2006). The narrative of POD, is in line with a “continuist” interpretation of LAT relationships (Haskey and Lewis 2006; Duncan and Philips 2010; Duncan et al 2013b; Duncan 2014). In this vein, LAT is just another stage in the

more and more difficult transition from singlehood to cohabitation or marriage; that or it is an interruption in cohabitation that has been forced by circumstances such as job relocation for one of the partners (Haskey 2005; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Ermisch and Seidler 2009). These latter situations have always existed, but their relevance may have been amplified in recent years: Today, a higher degree of specialization in on-the-job skills is required, and fewer people can easily decide to relocate and assume that they will be able to find a suitable job (Levin 2004: 237).

European cross-national studies on the LAT phenomenon do reveal that, similar to the initial spread of unmarried cohabitation (Kiernan 2004), LAT partnerships are currently more prevalent in Northern and Western Europe than in Central and Eastern Europe (Liefbroer et al. 2012; Sánchez and Goldani 2012). This may be linked to the level of diffusion and institutionalization of “new” family arrangements. In particular, Irene Levin (2004) suggested that “[C]ohabitation, as a socially accepted institution, was a prerequisite for the establishment of LAT relationships” (p. 238)². By exploring the prevalence and determinants of LAT relationships in two contrasting settings, the France-Italy comparison offers a privileged position for exploring whether the diffusion of cohabitation within a society represents a prerequisite for the emergence of LAT relationships. Thus, in addition to focusing on the similarities and differences in LAT relationships between France and Italy, in the following we will look at our findings also in light of the prevailing narratives of the SDT and POD. The key question is: Are we dealing with a new development of family relationships that family scholars should explore deeply, or are we simply looking at a modern variant of the old-fashioned dating arrangement in times of rising economic uncertainty?

3. The France–Italy comparison

Over the last decades, France and Italy displayed different developments in the diffusion of “new” family patterns. In France, the institution of marriage has been profoundly transformed in the last forty years. The number of marriages has fallen (from 390,000 in 1975 to 240,000 in 2012), while that of cohabitations has increased (11% of couples were not married in 1990 compared to one in four twenty years later). At the same time, unions have become more unstable (while less

² Note that she considers LAT as “a couple that does not share a home. (...) The two partners (...) define themselves as a couple and they perceive that their close surrounding personal network does so as well” (p. 226-227).

than 5% of couples formed in the 1950s had broken up after 10 years, the same situation had occurred for one out of five couples formed in the 1980s: Vanderschelden 2006). Consensual unions can no longer be considered in France to be a marginal phenomenon or a transitional form of relationship (Toulemon 1996), and marriage is no longer a prerequisite for the arrival of a child – 56% of births now occur outside marriage in France (Insee 2012) versus 24% in Italy (Istat 2012). Up to the latter half of the 1970s in Italy, family patterns were characterized by very rigid life courses, with marriage at the center. Following that, several signs of change began to emerge. Marriage rates declined slightly, while cohabitation and marital dissolution were spreading throughout the population. These changes intensified in the 1990s and peaked in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the pace of change rose dramatically. In less than 20 years, between the early '90s and the first decade of the 2000s, the proportion of cohabitation over the total number of co-resident unions increased from 2 to 10% (Pirani and Vignoli 2014). Thus, the proportion of unmarried cohabiting couples is non-negligible in Italy in recent years, but the phenomenon remains marginal compared to France. In addition, recent qualitative explorations of family formation practices in Italy revealed that familial and social pressure to marry remains strong (Vignoli and Salvini 2014).

The institutionalization of cohabitation is more advanced in France than in Italy also in light of a different normative environment. In 1999, France created a civil union, the “Pacte civil de solidarité” (civil solidarity pact, known as Pacs), in order to establish an institutional framework for cohabiting couples who do not wish to marry, or for homosexual couples who cannot (Rault 2009). The success of Pacs continues to grow, and in 2013 nearly 168,000 such unions were celebrated (Ministry of Justice) compared to 225,000 marriages (Insee). In contrast, no real establishment of legal regulations devoted to unmarried couples exists in Italy. Legal judgments are essentially made case by case, on the basis of the partners' situation (Zanatta 2008). Individuals living in cohabitation have less protection in the case of separation or the partner's death, because they do not have access to alimony or to the partner's old age pension benefit. In addition, these legal judgments are complex, especially when unmarried partners split up after neglecting to specify who paid which amounts of money for what purpose.

Apart from the institutional context, also labor market opportunities and housing costs shape young peoples' ability to move in with a partner (Kohler et al. 2002; Blossfeld et al. 2005; Kreyenfeld et al. 2012; Vignoli et al. 2013). Uncertain forms of employment (temporary, linked to

specific projects, and so forth) are increasingly widespread, and none of them are very “protective” for the worker. In 2013, among the countries with the highest incidence of temporary workers within the total number of workers, we find Spain (about 24%) and Poland (about 26%). Italy and France, with 14-16% of temporary workers in the first decade of 2000's, are in line with the majority of Western European countries. These contracts are offered almost exclusively to the youth, whose traditionally high unemployment has not declined significantly in the meantime (Bernardi and Nazio 2005; Barbieri and Scherer 2009). These developments have progressively led to an increased climate of economic uncertainty that has progressively invaded the private life of individuals as well. Recent findings suggest that economic uncertainty has a negative influence on family formation in Italy (Vignoli et al. 2012), as well as in France, although to a lesser extent (Pailhé and Solaz 2012).

The housing situation in France and Italy is not the same. Mulder and Billari (2010) made use of a set of housing-market indicators to cluster four major “home-ownership regimes” based on the share of owner-occupied housing and access to mortgages. According to their categorization, France (together with other continental countries such as Austria and Belgium) belongs to the so-called *elite home-ownership regime*, where home-ownership is not universal and mortgages are not very widespread. Consequently, home-ownership is traditionally a matter for the better off. Italy (together with other Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Greece) belongs to the so-called *difficult home-ownership regime*, characterized by a high share of property-ownership as well as low access to mortgages. There, home-ownership is almost the only way for families to obtain housing.

In a nutshell, contemporary Italy is facing non-negligible changes in family demography patterns, but the institution of marriage still maintains a central role compared with France – e.g., 6% of couples aged 18-49 in 2005 were not married in Italy in contrast to 34% in France. Complex labor market changes and adverse housing regimes do not facilitate young peoples’ ability to move in with a partner in none of the country. But in Italy the young adults’ exit from parental home is much slower than in France (in 2005, 13% of French lived with their parents at ages 25-29 *versus* 60% of Italians). This is not only due to economic difficulties, but also to a culturally-rooted behavior that Massimo Livi Bacci (2008) labeled as the “delay syndrome”. Thus, the France-Italy comparison represents a privileged, so far unexplored, room for exploring

similarities and differences in the incidence and correlate of LAT relationships in two contrasting societies.

4. Data and methods

Individuals engaged in LAT partnerships are not registered in any official statistics, and there is no generally accepted definition of precisely what LAT constitutes. Thus, providing estimations about their prevalence, their development and the reasons behind them is a complex task. In addition, comparative studies on LAT relationships are often based on surveys that do not dispose of sample weights. Nevertheless, when the aim of a study is to evaluate the strength of a certain phenomenon in different societies, it is crucial to dispose of reliable estimates that are corrected for biases due to sampling-errors. In this study we rely on two large-scale socio-demographic surveys for France and Italy, which allow us to identify LAT relationships as well as to weight their estimates in order to infer their incidence at the population level.

The "Étude des Relations Familiales et Intergénérationnelles" survey (ERFI), the French version of the 2005 "Generations and Gender Survey" (GGS) (Vikat et al. 2007), included questions on LAT relationships. It was carried out in France by INED (the French National Institute for Demographic Studies) and INSEE (the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) in the autumn of 2005 on a sample of 10,079 men and women aged 18-79 (for more details, see Sebille and Régnier-Loilier 2007). In our analysis, we focused on the answers to the questions: "*Are you currently having a stable, intimate relationship with someone you're not living with? Yes / No*³" and "*Are you living apart because you and/or your partner want to, or because circumstances prevent you from living together? I want to live apart / Both my partner and I want to live apart / My partner wants to live apart / We are constrained by circumstances*⁴". The Italian analysis is based on data stemming from the 2009 Household Multipurpose Survey "Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali" (FSS). This survey was conducted by ISTAT (the Italian National Statistical Office) on a sample of about 24,000 households, corresponding to approximately 50,000 individuals of all ages. Also, this survey included a section on LAT relationships derived

³ In French: "*Avez-vous actuellement une relation amoureuse stable avec quelqu'un avec qui vous ne vivez pas ? Oui; Non.*"

⁴ In French: "*Vivez-vous séparément par choix ou parce que les circonstances vous empêchent de vivre ensemble? Je veux vivre séparément; Mon conjoint et moi avons décidé de vivre séparément; Mon conjoint veut vivre séparément; Les circonstances nous y obligent.*"

from the core GGS questionnaire. In particular, we used the answers to the questions: "Are you currently having a couple relationship with a partner you're not living with? Yes / No⁵" and "Are you living apart because you and/or your partner want to, or because circumstances prevent you from living together? I want to live apart / Both my partner and I want to live apart / My partner wants to live apart / We are constrained by circumstances⁶". We note that the definition of a LAT relationship in Italy is more restrictive than the French one, because it embodies the concept of being a "couple" rather than of being only in a stable and intimate relationship⁷.

In the following, we first present a series of descriptive analyses. Then, through a logit regression model, we contrast LAT vs. co-resident couples net of age (grouped into a progressive five-year group categorization); gender; legal marital status (clustered into "single", "married", "separated/divorced", "widowed"); a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent has ever had a child; respondent's education (grouped into the three standard levels "low", "medium", "high", which correspond to, respectively, basic education; secondary and upper secondary education; and post-secondary and tertiary education); employment status (divided into "permanently employed", "temporarily employed", "unemployed", "housewife/inactive", "student", "retired"); a subjective indicator of economic difficulties⁸ (juxtaposing those with difficulties and those without); and the education of the respondent's parents (grouped following the same logic as the respondent's education). Unfortunately, information was unavailable for Italy in regards to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondent's partner, who was living apart.

Finally, in a subsequent analysis, we focus on people who are currently experiencing a LAT relationship. Again, through a logit regression model, we contrast those who are in a LAT

⁵ In Italian: "Attualmente Lei ha un rapporto di coppia con un partner col quale non vive insieme? Sì; No."

⁶ In Italian: "Lei non vive insieme al partner perchè Lei e/o il Suo partner non vuole o perchè le circostanze vi impediscono di vivere insieme? Né io, né il mio partner vogliamo convivere; Io non voglio convivere; Il mio partner non vuole convivere; Siamo costretti dalle circostanze; Non ci abbiamo mai pensato."

⁷ To appreciate the importance of the wording used in the LAT surveying, we can compare two surveys conducted in France. In the French GGS (2005), the estimated number of people (18-79) who declared they were in a "stable intimate relationship with someone who lives elsewhere" was around 3,800,000, while in the *Famille et logements* survey (2011), the number of people (18-79) who declared themselves to "be in a couple with someone who does not live in the household" was about 1,200,000. Although the wording of the question in the *Famille et Logements* survey is closer to the Italian FSS survey, it was not possible to use it for our comparison because of the lack of information about the characteristics of LAT relationships.

⁸ In French: "Pour ce qui est des revenus de votre ménage, vous diriez que vous avez des fins de mois... Très difficile; difficiles; assez difficiles; assez faciles; faciles; très faciles". In Italian: "Con riferimento agli ultimi 12 mesi e tenendo presente le esigenze di tutti i componenti familiari, come sono state le risorse economiche complessive della famiglia? Ottime; Adeguate; Scarse; Insufficienti."

relationship by choice with those who are in a LAT relationship by constraint net of a similar set of confounders. In this case, we could also control our estimates for the distance between the partners' homes (classified into "very short", "short", "long", "very long", and measured in terms of time in France and space in Italy) and for the respondent's intention to cohabit within the next three years (with modalities: "definitely not", "probably not", "probably yes", "definitely yes"). In order to compare France and Italy, we tried both a separate analysis solution and a joint model with an interaction solution.

4. LAT versus living together relationships

4.1. Descriptive findings

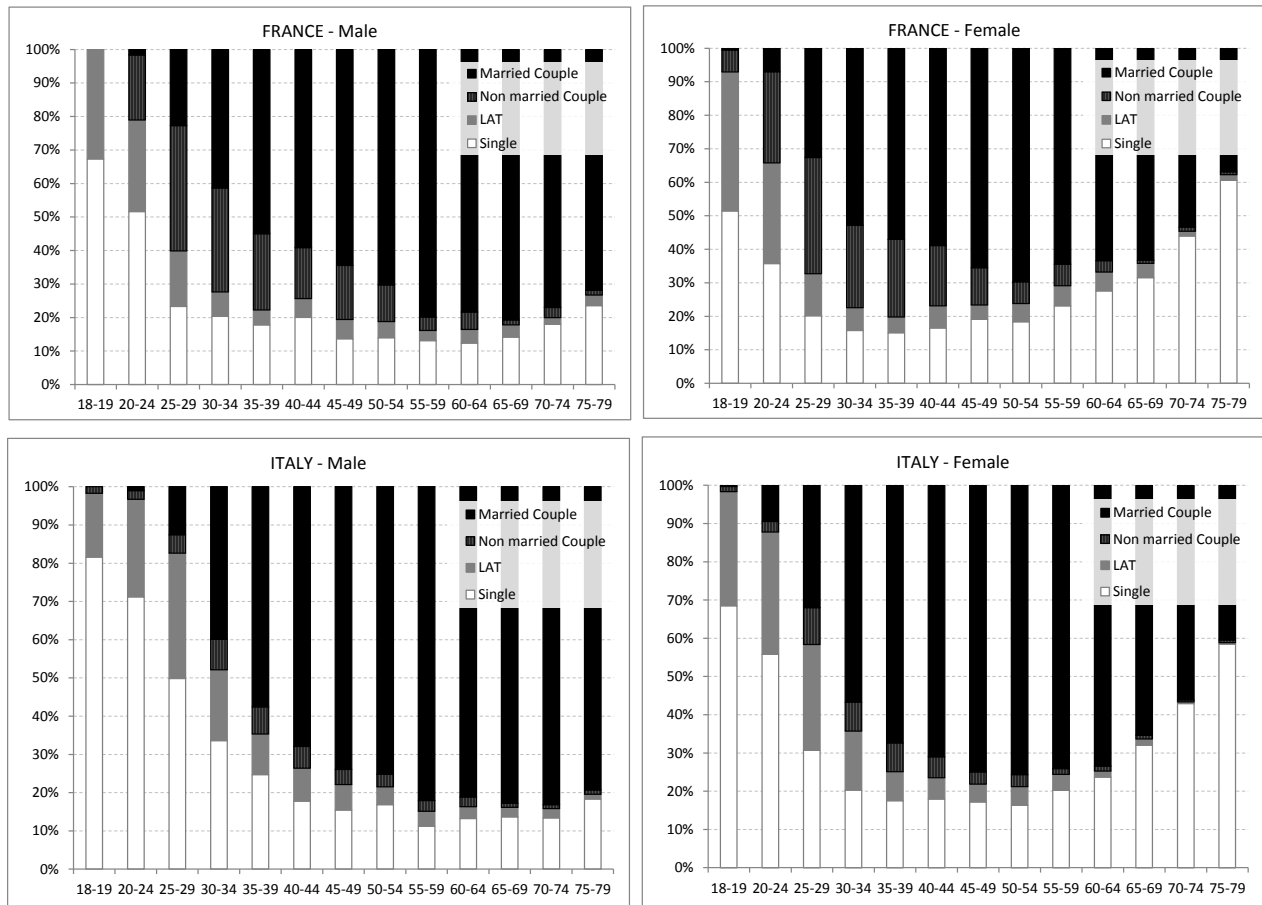
Overall, the proportion of LAT relationships among people 18-79 years old is very similar in Italy (10%) and France (9%), despite the more restrictive definition in Italy. Importantly, among those who are "single" in residential terms, in about 26% and 27% of cases, respectively, in Italy and France, people are not "without a partner", but do actually experience a LAT relationship. Figure 1 shows the women's and men's partnership status by age groups in France and Italy. In both countries, the proportion of people living alone or in a LAT relationship decreases with age, up to about 30 years, reflecting the progressive entry into a co-resident couple. The proportion of single men at a given age is consistently higher than the proportion of single women up to the age of 30, because of the age-specific difference between partners (on average, women form unions at younger ages). After the age of thirty, women are more frequently single. This is essentially attributable to two reasons. First, repartnering is less common for women than for men (Ivanova *et al.* 2013). Second, beginning in the Sixties, the proportion of singleness among women in fact started to increase with age, due to the gender-specific gap in life expectancy (women live longer than men).

Beyond these similarities, France and Italy are opposed in terms of partnership arrangements. Among people aged 18-79 living in cohabiting couples, 22% of French are not married versus only 6% of Italians. And, among people aged 25-34 living in a co-resident couple, 46% of French are not married, while this is the case for less than a quarter of Italians (17%). At the same time, the transition to adulthood of young Italians is much slower than that of their

French counterparts (in 2005, 13% of French lived with their parents at ages 25-29 *versus* 60% of Italians). Consistently, the proportion of LAT among all couples is markedly higher in Italy among young adults. For instance, at ages 25-29, 51% of Italians are in a LAT relationship compared to only 19% of French. Thus, the absence of consensual unions in Italy is partly offset by a higher proportion of LAT relationships. This view is consistent with the conceptualization of LAT as a modern variant of a dating arrangement. This result questions the idea that the diffusion and institutionalization of cohabitation is a prerequisite for the emergence of LAT relationships in modern societies. The social stigmas associated with cohabitation remains popular in Italy (Vignoli and Salvini 2014), and our results suggest young Italians tend to prolong their LAT relationship before moving together and marry. Thus, the remarkable presence of LAT relationships during the early phases of the life course partly “compensates” the still limited diffusion of cohabitations.

After the age of 50, the proportion of LAT among all relationships is higher in France – e.g., although small, the proportion is twice that of France compared to Italy at ages 60-69 and three times higher at ages 70-79. This is especially true for women after the age of 60, with a proportion that is nearly four times higher in France than in Italy. The interpretation of these figures is not straightforward, because of the less restrictive definition of LAT in France (“intimate relationship” *versus* “couple relationship” in Italy). Nevertheless, such macroscopic differences cannot be attributed only to the different definition of being in a LAT relationship, and we can assume that after separation or widowhood, having a new romantic relationship without living with one’s partner is better accepted and thus more common in France than in Italy.

Figure 1. Partnership status by gender and age group in France and Italy



Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79

4.2. Multivariate findings

Clearly, not only age and gender are related to partnership status, but other factors may influence the likelihood of being in a LAT. Thus, we estimated a logit model predicting the probability of being in a LAT relationship versus being in a co-resident union (either cohabitation or marriage). Three models are presented (Table 1). *Model 1* takes into account gender, age, father's education and a subjective indicator of economic difficulties. All other things being equal, age remains a significant predictor of LAT, but with some differences between countries. Compared to ages 35-39, the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship is higher for younger people. However, no significant difference was recorded in France after ages 35-39; while in Italy the probability of being in a LAT relationship decreases steadily with age. Interestingly, Italian women have a lower

likelihood of being in a LAT relationship than men. This finding may reflect gender-specific differences in the surveying of LAT. In Italy, women and men indeed may have varying views on what constitutes being in a “*couple with someone who lives elsewhere*” (women and men may systematically differ in their definition, as suggested in other studies, e.g., Haskey 2005). No significant difference is found in France.

Beyond demographic factors, we observe a similar effect of subjective economic difficulties in France and Italy. Financial autonomy is a key factor in accessing an independent home and thus moving in with the partner. There is also a marked effect of the respondent’s educational qualification, with LAT relationships seeming to be more common among the higher educated. This result seems to be in line with the narrative of the SDT theory, where higher educated individuals are seen as pioneers in the diffusion of “new” family arrangements.

The inclusion of age in *Model 1* does not allow us to insert other important variables because of collinearity problems (e.g., age is evidently collinear with being a student or living with parents). Hence, *Model 2* includes the same variables as *Model 1*, except for age, and it additionally includes marital status, number of children and respondent’s employment status. Previous results are generally confirmed, but the effect of education no longer plays a role in France, all other things being equal. The role of education in France is thus likely to be mediated by the respondent’s employment status. The new variables included in *Model 2* have a similar effect in both countries. Firstly, the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship is higher for people who experienced divorce or widowhood. Without refusing to repartner, widowers will not like to impose their new partner on the family, in order to maintain a good relationship with relatives and preserve the memory of the deceased spouse (Caradec1997). A similar explanation can be advanced for divorcees, especially when they have children with their ex-spouse/partner: Levin (2004) found that the responsibility and care for children still living at home is one of the reasons behind LAT. Moreover, after a separation, some people wish to keep independence and avoid falling into habits they associate with their previous relationship (Haskey and Lewis 2006). As expected, having children is strongly associated with co-residence (parents are less likely to be in a LAT relationship)⁹. Indeed, the stability of the couple, often identified by several years of co-residence, remains a precondition to entering parenthood (Régnier-Loilier and Sebille 2015).

⁹ Here, it would have been useful to control also for the partner’s number of children. This information is not collected for Italian LAT, however.

Furthermore, our outcomes suggest that there is a higher likelihood of being in a LAT relationship when individuals experience economic difficulties. In addition to the subjective indicator of economic difficulties, this is likely to be reflected by the respondent's occupational status. Individuals with temporary contracts and, especially, those who are unemployed have a significantly higher likelihood of having a non-resident partner when compared with their counterparts who possess a job with a permanent contract. Students are also more likely to experience a LAT relationship, again reiterating the importance of having a stable economic situation before moving in together. This finding seems to be in line with the narrative of the POD and, thus, maintains a more "continuist" perspective on the meaning of LAT relationships. Interestingly, we note that living or not living with parents (*Model 3*) fully mediates the effect of unemployment and a fixed-term contract. Indeed, economic instability is intertwined with the difficulties in accessing an independent home. As stated at the beginning of the paper, the housing regime, although different, is not easy in either France or Italy. More and more often, individuals remain or come back to live with their parents, a situation which partly conflicts with a co-resident partnership (Istat 2011).

Table 1. Logit model predicting the probability of being in LAT versus in a co-resident relationship in France and Italy (coefficients and significance)

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		France	Italy	France	Italy	France	Italy
Intercept		-3.18 ***	-2.17 ***	-0.60 ***	0.79 ***	-1.29 ***	-0.32 **
GENDER	Male (ref)						
	Female	-0.12 -	-0.57 ***	-0.07 -	-0.21 ***	-0.06 -	-0.14 *
AGE	18-19	5.47 ***	5.04 ***				
	20-24	2.80 ***	3.45 ***				
	25-29	1.27 ***	2.08 ***				
	30-34	0.42 **	0.83 ***				
	35-39 (ref)						
	40-44	0.37 *	-0.27 ***				
	45-49	0.14 -	-0.47 ***				
	50-54	0.26 -	-0.63 ***				
	55-59	0.15 -	-0.79 ***				
	60-64	0.23 -	-1.29 ***				
65-69	0.16 -	-1.31 ***					
70-74	-0.60 -	-1.62 ***					
75-79	-0.02 -	-2.03 ***					
MARITAL STATUS	Single (ref)						
	Married			-3.09 ***	-3.93 ***	-3.18 ***	-3.37 ***
	Divorced			1.13 ***	0.59 ***	1.19 ***	1.12 ***
	Widowed			2.04 ***	1.73 ***	2.12 ***	2.35 ***
HAVING EVER HAD A CHILD	No (ref)						
Yes			-1.72 ***	-1.83 ***	-1.32 ***	-1.41 ***	
FATHER'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Low	-0.11 -	-0.24 ***	0.05 -	-0.03 -	0.12 -	0.07 -
	Medium (ref)						
	High	0.24 -	0.39 ***	0.19 -	0.10 -	0.20 -	0.26 -
	Don't known	0.07 -		0.03 -		0.08 -	
RESPONDENT'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Low (ref)						
	Medium	0.42 ***	0.62 ***	0.03 -	0.52 ***	0.13 -	0.41 ***
	High	0.50 ***	0.94 ***	-0.15 -	0.69 ***	0.35 **	0.79 ***
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	Permanent contract (ref)						
	Fixed-term contract			0.61 ***	0.32 **	0.19 -	0.17 -
	Unemployed			0.76 ***	0.67 ***	0.31 *	0.11 -
	Inactive			0.49 ***	-0.53 ***	0.54 ***	-0.60 ***
	Student			1.91 ***	2.09 ***	0.97 ***	0.77 ***
FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES	Easy (ref)						
	Difficult	0.34 ***	0.25 ***	0.19 *	0.22 ***	0.43 ***	0.22 ***
LIVING WITH PARENTS	No (ref)						
	Yes					3.97 ***	2.93 ***
N	LAT	1033	3270	1033	3270	1033	3270
	Cohabiting couple	6088	21117	6088	21117	6088	21117

Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 living in a co-resident couple or in a LAT relationship

Interpretation: a positive (resp. negative) and statistically significant coefficient indicates a factor which increases (resp. decreases) the probability of being in a LAT relationship, all other things being equal. The stronger the coefficient (positive or negative), the greater the factor's influence on that probability.

Statistical significance: *: 10%, **: 5%, ***: 1%, -: non-significant

5. LAT by choice or constraint?

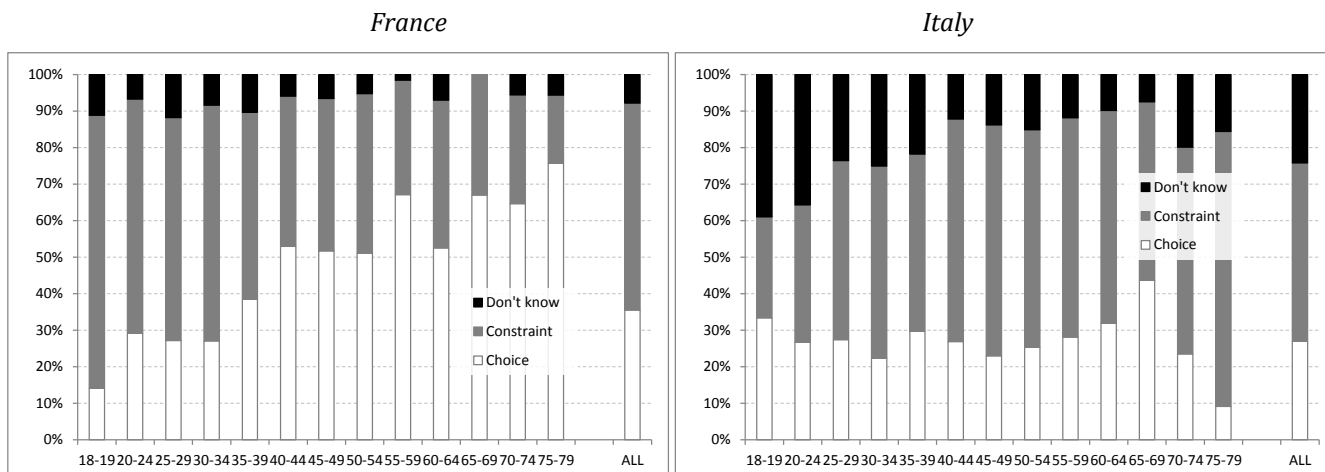
5.1. Descriptive findings

Not living with the partner may be due to a *constraint*, but it can also be the result of a conscious *choice* (temporary or permanent). To make inference about the nature of LAT relationships, individuals were asked if they lived apart because they wanted to or because circumstances prevented them from living together. A conception of LAT as a deliberately chosen form of living arrangement is in line with the SDT perspective. We note that LAT relationships appear to be more often a choice in France (36%) than in Italy (28%)¹⁰. The distribution by age groups reveals a meaningful difference between countries (Figure 2). In France, being in a LAT relationship seems to be often the result of a choice, especially at older ages: while only 30% of people aged 20-24 declare that LAT is a choice, this proportion increases up to 53% for those aged 50-54, and reaches 65% for those aged 70-74. On the other hand, there is no clear-cut pattern by age in Italy. The modality “*I’ve never asked myself this question*” is more popular among the young: Before the age of twenty-five, more than a third of Italians fall into this category. For a large majority of young adults, their relationship is quite recent and, at this stage, probably most of them have never seriously thought about the possibility of moving in together.

In France, LAT unions by choice are strongly linked to the length of the relationship (see Figure 3): less than a third of short-term LAT relationships (i.e., couples who are together for less than four years) are chosen, while more than two-thirds of ongoing relationships lasting at least 10 years are by “choice”. This agrees with a recent study carried out in Canada, in which Martin Turcotte (2013) observed the same correlations as in France, which occur between age or duration of relationships and the proportion of LAT unions by choice. Surprisingly, there is no influence on the length of relationship in Italy. This difference between France and Italy shows what appears to be an Italian specificity.

¹⁰ The France-Italy comparison is not straightforward in this context because of the inclusion of a distinct modality in the Italian survey (“*I’ve never asked myself this question*”).

Figure 2. Reason for living apart by age group in France and Italy

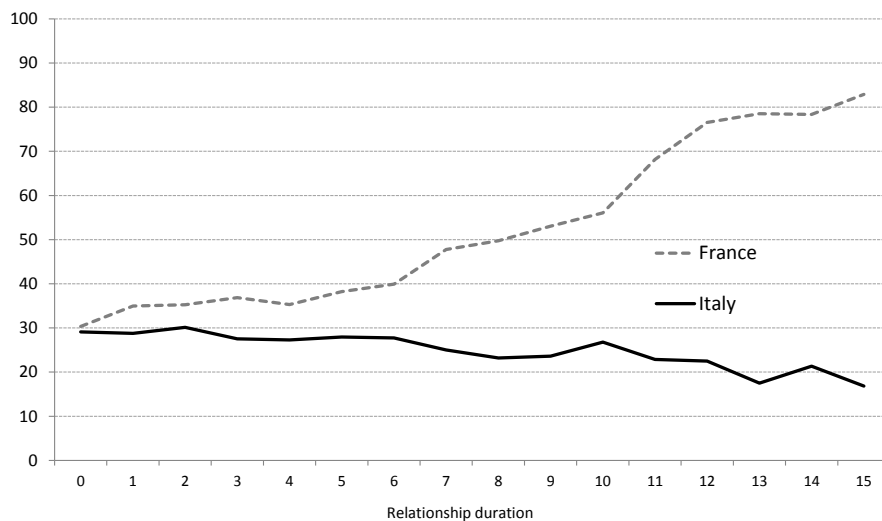


Note: The “don’t know” category in Italy also includes the answer “I’ve never asked myself this question.”

Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 in a LAT relationship

Figure 3. Percentage of LAT “by choice” according to the relationship duration in France and Italy



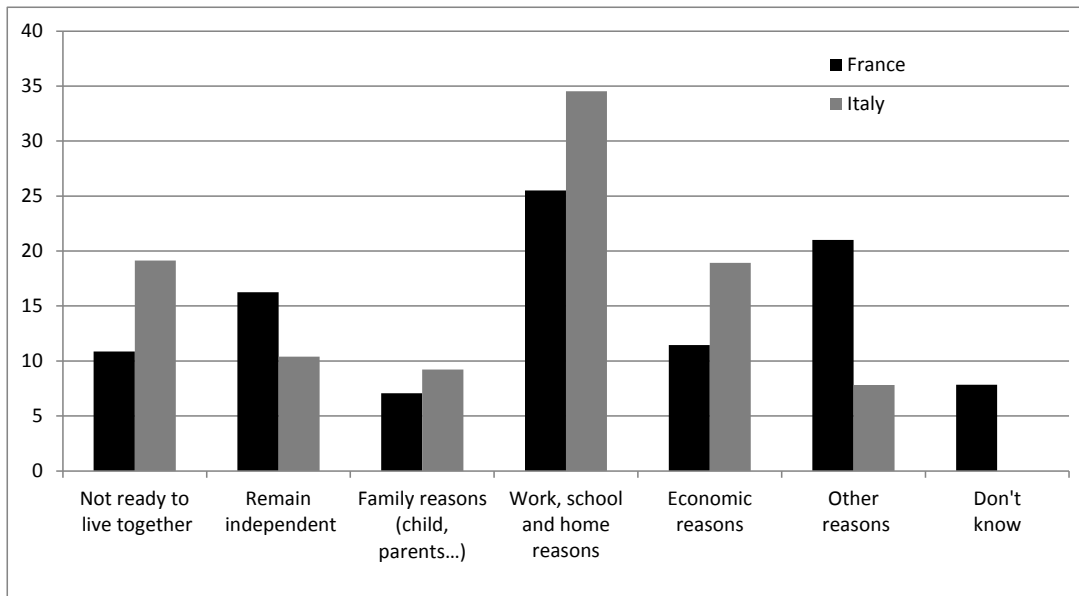
Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 in a LAT relationship

Similarly, in France we observe a strong correlation between living with parents and being in a LAT relationship by choice. While a quarter (23%) of individuals who live with their parents define their relationship as a choice, the same case applies to one of every two (47%) who are living alone. On the other hand, there is no correlation in Italy in this respect: in both cases, 27% of LAT relationships are defined as a choice.

The differences between France and Italy can be addressed by also looking at the reasons given by people to explain their LAT status (Figure 4). For instance, the proportion of people who indicated that they wish to “keep independence” is higher in France than in Italy: 17% *versus* 10%. Conversely, economic reasons are more frequently advocated in Italy: 35% of Italians cite education-, work-, or housing-related reasons (compared to 25% of French), and 18% cite financial circumstances (compared to 12% of French)¹¹.

Figure 4. Detailed reasons to explain non-resident partnership in France and Italy



Source: France, Ined-Insee, *Erfi-GGS1*, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, *Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali*, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 in a LAT relationship

¹¹We do not describe in depth the reasons for not living together, because of their relative imprecision. As stated by Duncan *et al.* (2013a), several reasons can often explain simultaneously why people are in a non-cohabiting relationship. In addition, the same situation can be seen by someone as a constraint and by someone else as a choice.

5.2. Multivariate findings

These descriptive findings lead us to model the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by “choice” versus “constraint” (Table 2), especially in light of their residential status (living or not living with parents) and economic situation (occupational status and financial difficulties). In the multivariate framework, four models were estimated: one for each country (*Model 1* and *Model 2*), and a third one including France and Italy together, with the country as a control variable (*Model 3*). This latter model has been replicated with the addition of an interaction between each variable and the country of residence, in order to bring into play country-specific differences in the effects (*Model 4*). For this fourth model, only the significance level of the estimated interactions is shown in Table 2.

All other things being equal, *Model 3* confirms the lower likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by choice in Italy compared to France. The direction and the significance of some factors associated with being in a LAT relationship by “choice” are similar in the two countries. The intention to not live with the partner within the next three years correlates with a higher probability of being in a LAT relationship by choice, especially in Italy. Similarly, living far or very far from the partner is chosen less often in association with a LAT relationship, with an effect that seems greater in France; and living near the partner correlates with a lower likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by choice, but only in Italy. Overall, this result corroborates the view that LAT relationships in Italy tend to be confined to the early phases of the life course, when young couples who live relatively nearby wait to move in together (and probably to marry), because they are confronted with difficult employment and housing situations, as well as with general social pressure to marry. The subjective perception of economic difficulties has no effect, neither in France nor in Italy; but the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by choice is weaker for individuals working with a fixed-term contract than for those with a permanent job. A similar effect of educational level appears in both countries (but it is not significant in France, probably due to a smaller sample size than in Italy): the higher educated see their LAT situation more frequently as a choice.

Table 2. Logit model predicting the probability of being in LAT “by choice” versus for another reason in France and Italy (coefficients and significance)

		France	Italy	France and Italy : results from the model without interaction	Model France and Italy with interaction between the country (ref=France) and all variables : significance of the interaction
Intercept		0,11 -	-0,53 ***	-0,24 -	
GENDER	Male (ref)				
	Female	0,07 -	0,12 -	0,13 *	-
MARITAL STATUS	Single (ref)				
	Married	-0,11 -	-1,33 ***	-1,07 ***	**
	Divorced	0,68 **	0,08 -	0,17 -	*
	Widowed	0,95 **	-0,38 -	-0,13 -	**
HAVING EVER HAD A CHILD	No (ref)				
	Yes	-0,28 -	-0,28 *	-0,21 -	-
RESPONDENT'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Low (ref)				
	Medium	-0,20 -	0,16 -	0,10 -	-
	High	0,27 -	0,31 **	0,33 ***	-
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	Permanent contract (ref)				
	Fixed-term contract	-0,48 *	-0,29 *	-0,37 **	-
	Unemployed	-0,11 -	0,16 -	0,13 -	-
	Inactive, retired	0,11 -	0,30 *	0,33 **	-
	Student	-0,38 -	-0,03 -	-0,17 -	-
FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES	Easy (ref)				
	Difficult	-0,04 -	-0,06 -	-0,01 -	-
LIVING WITH PARENTS	No (ref)				
	Yes	-0,77 ***	-0,09 -	-0,20 **	***
TIME (France) DISTANCE (Italy) TO REACH THE PARTNER'S HOUSE	Very short	-0,01 -	-0,30 **	-0,26 **	-
	Short (Ref)				
	Long	-0,42 **	-0,62 ***	-0,55 ***	-
	Very Long	-1,83 ***	-0,99 ***	-1,15 ***	**
RELATIONSHIP DURATION (continue)		0,01 -	0,00 -	0,00 -	-
INTENTION TO LIVE WITH PARTNER IN THE FUTURE (Italy) NEXT 3 YEARS (France)	No	0,81 ***	1,83 ***	1,45 ***	***
	Probably Not	0,78 ***	0,65 ***	0,67 ***	-
	Probably Yes (Ref)				
	Yes	-0,79 ***	-0,81 ***	-0,80 ***	-
COUNTRY	France (ref)				
	Italy			-0,23 ***	
n	Choice	421	892	1313	1313
	Other reason	612	2378	2990	2990

Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 in a LAT relationship

Interpretation and statistical significance: see Table 2.

Other characteristics related to the family situation do not have the same effects in France and Italy. In France, widowed and divorced people see their LAT relationship as a choice more often than singles do, while no difference was found for Italy. Conversely, married Italians are less likely to be in a LAT relationship by choice than single people; this difference was not recorded in

France. Having children appears to decrease the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by choice, but the effect is modest. This finding is not surprising if we refer to the analysis of Duncan *et al.* (2013a), who showed that the same reason, including having children, could be both perceived as a choice (“*I prefer to live apart in order to not disturb my children*”) or a constraint (“*because of my children, I can’t live with my partner*”). Last, *ceteris paribus*, there is a strong effect of people’s residential status in France; namely, those living with their parents have a much lower probability of considering their LAT relationship as a choice. The lack of effect already observed in Italy via the descriptive analysis is confirmed in the multivariate framework.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to increase our understanding of LAT relationships, a union type that has only recently begun to gain attention from social observers. Our intent was essentially exploratory, but at least three findings clearly emerged from the study. First, although it is usually taken for granted that “single” in residential terms means “without a partner” in relationship terms, we showed that this assumption is incorrect in about 27% of cases in France and 26% in Italy. Thus, apart from their scientific relevance, it is important to consider LAT as an additional form of living arrangement in order to avoid meaningless classifications of family living arrangements. We hope that family surveys will systematically include questions to identify LAT relationships in the years to come, and that they will ideally also include specific questions to distinguish LAT individuals from those in more casual or fleeting relationships (see, for instance, Haskey 2005).

Second, despite the fact that the prevalence of LAT relationships is practically the same in France and Italy, their nature seems to differ profoundly between the two societies. In Italy, LAT relationships are essentially relegated to the early phases of the life course, among young couples who wait to move in together and marry. This situation seems to be relatively stable over time, because the findings agree with the work of Billari *et al.* (2008), who analyzed data that was 10 years older than ours. In addition, over recent years, these young couples have also been increasingly confronted with adverse employment and housing situations. The absence of the legal recognition of civil unions combined with familial and social pressure to marry further contribute to leaving little room for cohabitation and, therefore, to facilitating the diffusion of LAT as an alternative to marriage among young adults. From this perspective, LAT relationships

in Italy do not differ much from old-fashioned dating arrangement. Interestingly, the Italian situation is similar to the one of another Southern European country: Spain (see Castro-Martín et al. 2008). The great majority of LAT relationships are formed by young individuals aged 25-29 still living in the parental home (among women, 83% in Italy and 91% in Spain), while this is the case for only one-third of their French counterparts.

Hence, we note that LAT relationships are occurring both in settings in which cohabitation is institutionalized, such as in France, as well as in settings where cohabitation is relatively uncommon, such as Italy. We conclude that high levels of cohabitation do not appear as a prerequisite for the occurrence of LAT unions, but when cohabitation is not yet diffused and institutionalized, LAT couples experience this form of union at younger ages, and often as a result of a constraint. LAT relationships in France seem to be much more the result of a conscious choice, especially in the older phases of the life course.

Third, we found traces of both the SDT and the POD narratives in our findings. The difficult housing and labor market conditions faced by the youth, especially in Italy, suggests that the POD perspective represents a possible explanation beyond the prevalence of LAT throughout the early phases of the life course. Also the positive and significant effect of fixed-term contracts on the probability of being in a LAT relationship can be interpreted as a symptom of POD. At the same time, however, we showed that being in a LAT relationship by choice is more popular among individuals who in the last decades have always anticipated family developments in Western societies: the better-off or, in terms of an SDT interpretation, the forerunners of new family behaviors. This interpretation seems to apply particularly to the French context. We therefore question an interpretation of LAT relationships solely made in light of a “continuist” perspective. The examination of the French case further suggests that being in a LAT by choice represents the result of a conscious choice made especially at older ages.

Some limitations in our study need to be addressed. First, we relied on a slightly different wording in the question used to identify a LAT relationship. In Italy, the word “couple” was included in the definition, while in France, we referred to “stable intimate relationships”. As a consequence, although the proportion of LAT obtained in France and Italy is more or less the same, we probably underestimate their prevalence in Italy. To be sure, in any quantitative research it is also a difficult – if not impossible – task to grasp what “being in a couple” means exactly in different contexts. Secondly, the French and Italian surveys do not always offer the

same information. For instance, in Italy we have no information on the characteristics of the non-co-resident's partner. This is a usual drawback in comparative-oriented research: We need to stick to what the data actually provide us.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this analysis raises important questions about family changes in post-industrial societies. Even if the trend toward “new family forms” comes to a halt, a return to a traditional family model is in fact unlikely. Thus, focusing on the emergence of new (potential) family typologies, such as LAT relationships, in order to understand their meaning is increasingly important. We found that for young Italians a LAT relationship appears as a natural arrangement for “being intimate”, when they might face difficulties in entering the housing and labor market and, at the same time, are confronted with the (still) low social acceptance of cohabitation. To date, Italian LAT cannot be considered as a new, long-lasting family form of living arrangement. Indeed, in Italy non-cohabiting conjugality differs from cohabitation in at least two aspects: it is less often voluntary and does not appear as “anti-establishment” (e.g., Guibert-Lantoine et al. 1994). As a consequence, a LAT relationship in Italy is linked with the postponement of co-residence between partners, which in turn also contributes to a delay in having the first child, and ultimately to very low Italian fertility. Despite similar incidences of LAT in France, they are not of the same nature as in Italy. LAT relationships in France seem to be much more the result of a conscious choice, and they possibly do constitute an emergent, new and different way of “being intimate”, especially at older ages. This group is demographically and sociologically important and deserves attention.

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