

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

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate about the prevalence and determinants of LAT relationships in two contrasting family settings such as France and Italy. First, we 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 25% of cases in both countries. Second, we show that the nature of LAT relationships differ between the two societies. In Italy, LAT relationships are popular among young couples, often confronted with a difficult economic situation on the one side, and an overall social pressure towards marriage on the other. In France, LAT relationships are more the result of a conscious choice, especially in the older phases of the life course. We conclude by interpreting our findings in light of the dominant narratives aiming to explain the diffusion of new family patterns.

1. Introduction

On 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 a life-long marriage contributed to a growing range of family arrangements and has provided stimuli for new research, such as the fact that the boundaries of a family are no longer exclusively identified by the physical space of a single household (Saraceno 1994; 2012). Living apart together (LAT) relationships – i.e., intimate relationships between two persons who reside in different households (Duncan and Phillips 2010) – are therefore gaining relevance among family scholars (Casper et al. 2008; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Levin 2004). For a long time, surveys only considered a tripartite model of intimate relationships in which individuals are 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 being still in a couple (Martin et al. 2011, labeled this situation as *Living Together Apart*) and, on the other, 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 required for consideration as a couple and questions standard family categorizations in several socio-demographic applications.

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. Differently, at older ages, partners may choose to live apart 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 internet are all reasons to suspect that LAT unions will become more common in the years to

come, thus contributing to extend the household boundaries of the family (Haskey and Lewis 2006; Levin 2004; Saraceno 2012).

In this research, the closest we have got to a general theory is to address the question of whether in LAT relationships we can find traces of the two popular narratives on 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 highly educated to be at the forefront in adopting new behaviours such as the *choice* of a LAT relationship, because they may hold more liberal values and may be more resistant to prevailing social stigmas. Thus, the higher educated, the young, and those who are not or not very religious could be expected to be overrepresented among people in a LAT relationship (Strohm et al. 2009). This could be due to several factors (Di Giulio 2007). First, opting for a LAT arrangement might represent a more common choice for people (especially women) with a higher level of education because it prevents domestic and family responsibilities associated with the co-resident relationship and thus can maximize 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 as a valid proxy of labor market characteristics and prospects. According to the narrative of the POD, it is rather the more disadvantaged groups in the 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 are faced with 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, or is an interruption to cohabitation forced by circumstances such as a job relocation of one of the partners (Haskey 2005; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Ermisch and Seidler 2009). These latter situations always existed, but their relevance may have been amplified in recent years: Today, a higher degree of specialization 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).

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 as compared to France. We know very little about the prevalence and the determinants of LAT relationships in modern Italy. To the best of our knowledge, the two studies we located on Italian LAT are the one made by Paola Di Giulio (2007), who looked at the phenomenon through the Italian 1995 “*Fertility and Family Survey*”, and the one 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 and in progress comparative European studies (Liefbroer et al. 2012; Sanchez and Goldani 2012; Tai et al. 2014). Nevertheless, we believe that Italy is a very interesting case study to assess the incidence and the correlates of LAT relationships. Despite the orientation towards the high value placed on traditional marriage, contemporary Italy is faced with a rising breaking-down in marriage and a growing flexibility of union patterns (Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013). Interestingly, the family change is developing hand in hand with a slow, but continuous, process of secularization (Sansonetti 2009). Thus, this setting is important for showing 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 the one in France, a neighboring country in which cohabitation is institutionalized, the process of family diversification is much more profound (Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009), and research on LAT has a long tradition¹.

This comparison represents an interesting strategy to test if the differences in the incidence and correlates of LAT relationships in Italy as compared to France can be better read in terms of delays or, instead, different routes. We have been mainly led by our curiosity about LAT behaviors in contemporary Italy and France more 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. Nevertheless, we will also look at our findings in light of the prevailing narratives of

¹ The first French survey including specific questions aimed to identify LAT relationships was carried out in 1985 by Ined.

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 variant of the old-fashioned dating arrangement in times of rising economic uncertainty? We continue by focusing on the characteristics of the 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. The France–Italy comparison

Over the last decades, France and Italy displayed visibly 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 against one out of four, twenty years later). At the same time, unions have become more unstable (while less than 5% of couples formed in the 1950s were broken after 10 years, it was the case for one out of five couples formed in the 1980s: Vanderschelden 2006). However, these changes are not associated with a rejection of childbearing as such, and the majority of couples continue to have children: only one woman out of ten remains childless at the end of her reproductive life. In Italy, up to the latter half of the 1970s, family patterns were characterized by very rigid life courses, with marriage at the center. Following, 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 2000s, the number of cohabiting unions increased from 227,000 to 972,000 and, among them, the number of cohabiting never married partners increased from 67,000 to 578,000 (Istat 2011). In addition, the diffusion of cohabitations is no longer confined solely to certain social groups or to certain geographical areas (Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013).

The institutionalization of cohabitations is more advanced in France than in Italy also in light of a different normative environment. In France in 1999 a civil union was created, 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 ones who cannot (Rault 2009). The success of Pacs continues to grow and in 2013 when nearly 168,000 of such unions were celebrated (Ministry of Justice) compared to 225,000 marriages (Insee). On the contrary, in Italy, no real establishment of legal regulations devoted to unmarried couples exists. 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 case of separation or 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.

Labor market opportunities and housing costs shape young people's ability to move in with a partner (Kohler et al. 2002; Blossfeld et al. 2005; Kreyenfeld et al. 2012; Vignoli et al. 2013). Uncertain form of employment (temporary, linked to specific projects, and so forth), all of them little "protective" for the worker, are increasingly widespread. In 2013, among the countries with the highest values of temporary workers among 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, in the meantime, has not declined significantly (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 have a negative influence on their family formation in Italy (Vignoli et al. 2012) and also, although to a lesser extent, in France (Pailhé and Solaz 2012).

The housing situation in France and Italy is not the same. Mulder and Billari (2010), making use of a set of housing-market indicators, clustered 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 universalistic, and mortgages are not much 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 a low access to mortgages. There, home-ownership is almost the only way of obtaining housing for families.

Overall, although contemporary Italy is facing not-negligible changes in family demography patterns, the institution of marriage still maintains a central role – e.g., in 2005 6% of couples aged 18-49 were not married in Italy contrary to 34% in France. In addition, recent qualitative explorations of family formation practices in Italy revealed that the familial and social pressure towards marriage remains strong (Vignoli and Salvini 2014). At the same time, the transition to adulthood of young Italians is much slower than the one of their French counterparts (in 2005, 13% of French lived with their parents at ages 25-29 *versus* 60% of Italians). 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 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. The France-Italy comparison, by exploring the prevalence and determinants of LAT relationships in two contrasting settings, will help to verify the validity of such statement.

3. Data and Methods

Individuals engaged in LAT partnerships are not registered in any official statistics and a generally accepted definition of what precisely LAT constitutes is absent. 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, disposing of reliable estimates, corrected for biases due to sampling-errors, is crucial. In this study we rely on two large-scale socio-demographic surveys for France and Italy that allow us to identify LAT relationships as well as to weight their estimates in order to infer about their incidence at the population level.

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).

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 and INSEE in the autumn of 2005 on a sample of more than 10,000 men and women aged 18-79 (for more details see Sebillé 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?*"³ and "*Are you living apart because you and/or your partner want to, or because circumstances prevent you from living together?*"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 the Italian National Statistical Office (Istat) on a sample of about 24,000 households, corresponding to about 50,000 individuals of all ages. Also this survey included a section on LAT relationships derived 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?*"⁵ and "*Are you living apart because you and/or your partner want to, or because circumstances prevent you from living together?*"⁶ 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", and not only of being in a stable and intimate relationship. To appreciate the importance of the wording used in the surveying of LAT, we can compare two surveys conducted in France: in the French GGS (2005), the number of people (18-79) declaring to have a "*stable intimate relationship with someone who lives elsewhere*" was about around 3,800,000, while in the *Famille et logements* survey (2011) the number of people (18-79) declaring to "*be in couple with someone who does not live in the household*" was about 1,200,000⁷.

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; Autres raisons.*"

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 perché Lei e/o il Suo partner non vuole o perché 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 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.

In the following, we first present a series of descriptive analyses. We then contrast, through a logit regression model, 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 have ever had a child, respondent’s education (grouped into the three standard levels “low”; “medium”; “high” that correspond, respectively, to 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 respondent's father education (grouped following the same logic of respondent’s education). Unfortunately, some information were unavailable for Italy; namely the partner’s demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and the respondent’s nationality.

In a subsequent analysis, we focus on people who are currently experiencing a LAT relationship and contrast, again through a logit regression model, those who are in a LAT 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 tested both a separate analysis solution and a joint model with interaction solution.

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.”

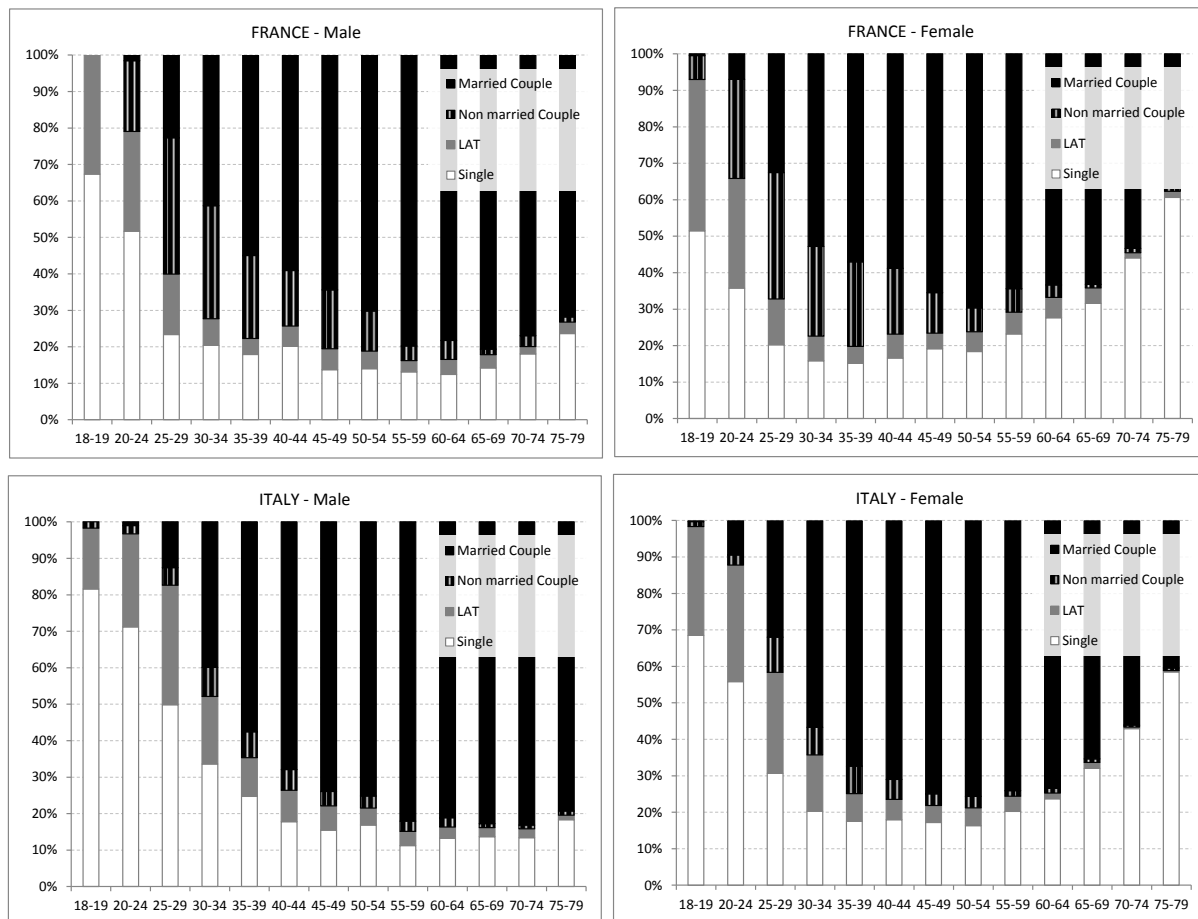
4. LAT versus living together relationships

4.1. Descriptive findings

The proportion of LAT relationships among all couples is 11.5% in France and 13.4% in Italy. There are differences by age and gender, however. 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. From the Sixties, in fact, the proportion of singleness among women started to increase with age due to the gender-specific gap in life expectancy (women live longer than men). In addition, repartnering is less common for women than for men (Ivanova *et al.* 2013).

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. Consensual unions can no longer be considered in France as 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). In Italy, the proportion of unmarried cohabiting couples is also not-negligible among the young, but the phenomenon remains marginal compared to France. For instance, 56% of French aged 25-29 living in a couple are not married, while this is the case of less than a quarter of Italians (24%).

Figure 1. Partnership status by sex 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

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 against 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. After the age of 50, the proportion of LAT among all relationships is higher in France – e.g., although small, the proportion is twice higher in France than in 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 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). However, such macroscopic difference cannot be attributed only to the different definition of being in a LAT relationship, and we can assume

that after a separation or widowhood, living a new romantic relationship without living with his/her partner is better accepted and thus more common in France than in Italy. 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. This result questions the idea that the diffusion and institutionalization of cohabitation is a prerequisite to the emergence of LAT relationships in modern societies. Our results suggest that being in a LAT relationship partly “compensate” the social stigmas associated to live together without being married, which remains popular in Italy (Vignoli and Salvini 2014).

4.2. Multivariate findings

Clearly, not only age and sex 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 to be in a LAT relationship versus being in a co-resident union (either cohabitation or marriage). Three models are presented (Table 2). In addition to gender and age, *Model 1* takes into account father’s level of education and a subjective indicator of economic difficulties. All others things being equal, age remains a significant predictor of LAT, but with some differences between countries. Compared to the ages 35-39, the likelihood to be in a LAT relationship is higher for the younger persons. However, no significant difference was recorded in France after 35-39, while in Italy the probability of being in a LAT relationship decreases steadily with age. Interestingly, Italian women have a lower likelihood to be 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 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 – the higher the economic difficulties the higher the likelihood to be in an intimate relationship without sharing the same dwelling. Financial autonomy is a key factor to access 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 that seem 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 as seen as the 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 of *Model 1* except for age, and additionally includes marital status, number of children and respondent’s employment status. Previous results are generally confirmed, but the effect of education does no longer play a role in France, all other things being equal. The role of education in France is thus likely to be mediated by 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 to the family in order to maintain good relationship among relatives and preserve the memory of the deceased spouse (Caradec 1997). A similar explanation can be advanced for divorcees, especially when they had children with their ex-spouse/partner: Levin (2004) find that the responsibility and care for children still living at home is one of the reasons beyond 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 cohabitation (parents are less likely to be in a LAT relationship). Indeed, the stability of the couple, often identified by several years of cohabitation, remains a precondition to the entry into parenthood (Régnier-Loilier and Sebille 2015).

Furthermore, our outcomes suggest that there is a higher likelihood of being in a LAT relationship when individuals experience economic difficulties. This is likely to be reflected by respondent’s occupational status. Individuals with temporary contracts and, especially those who are unemployed, have a significantly higher likelihood to have a non-resident partner compared to 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, with a more “continuist” perspective of the meaning of LAT relationships. Interestingly, we note that living or not with parents (*Model 3*) fully mediates the effect of unemployment and fixed-term contract. Indeed, economic instability is intertwined with the difficulties to access an

independent home. As stated in the front of the paper, nor France neither Italy are facing an easy housing regime. More and more often, individuals remain or come back to live with their parents, a situation which partly conflicts a co-resident partnership.

Table 2. Logit model predicting the probability to be in LAT *versus* in a co-resident relationship in France and Italy

		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 ***				
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?

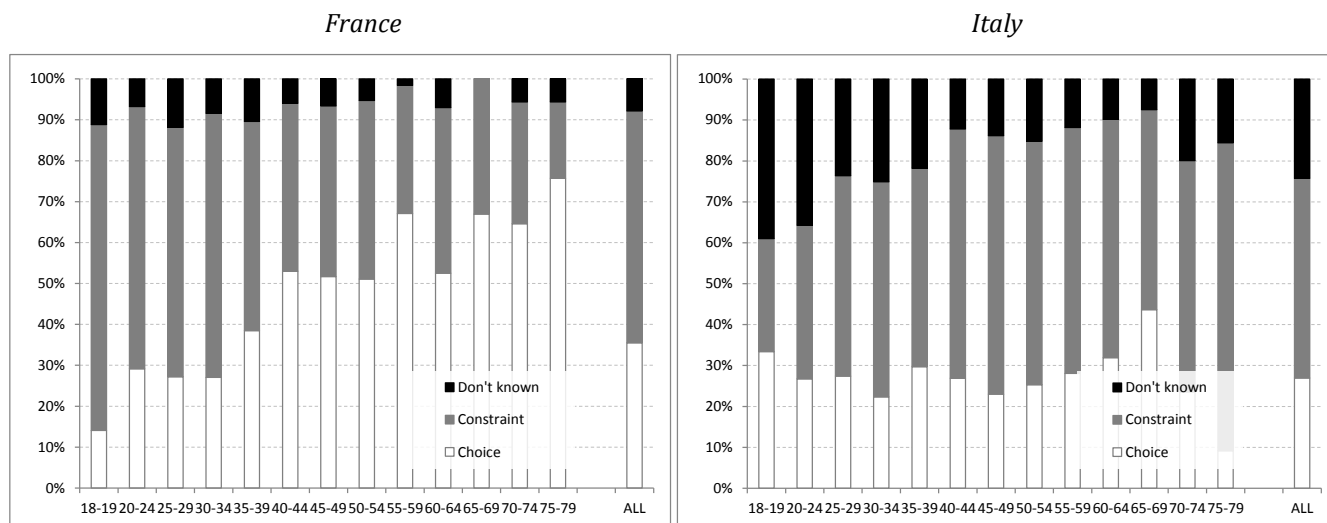
5.1. Descriptive findings

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 infer on the nature of LAT relationships, individuals were asked if they lived apart because they want to or because circumstances prevent them from living together⁹. 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%). The distribution by age groups reveals a meaningful difference between countries (Figure 2). In France, being in a LAT relationship seems being the result of a choice especially at older ages: while 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 side, in Italy there are no significant differences by age, with the exception of the modality “*I’ve never asked myself this question*” that is more popular among the young. Before the age of twenty-five, more than a third of Italians is located in this category. For a large majority of young adults their relationship is quite recent and, at this stage, 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 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 accords with a recent study carried out in Canada, Martin Turcotte (2013) observed the same correlation as in France between age or duration of relationships and the proportion of LAT unions by choice. Surprisingly, there is no influence of the length of relationship in Italy. This difference between France and Italy shows what appears like an Italian specificity.

⁹ 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

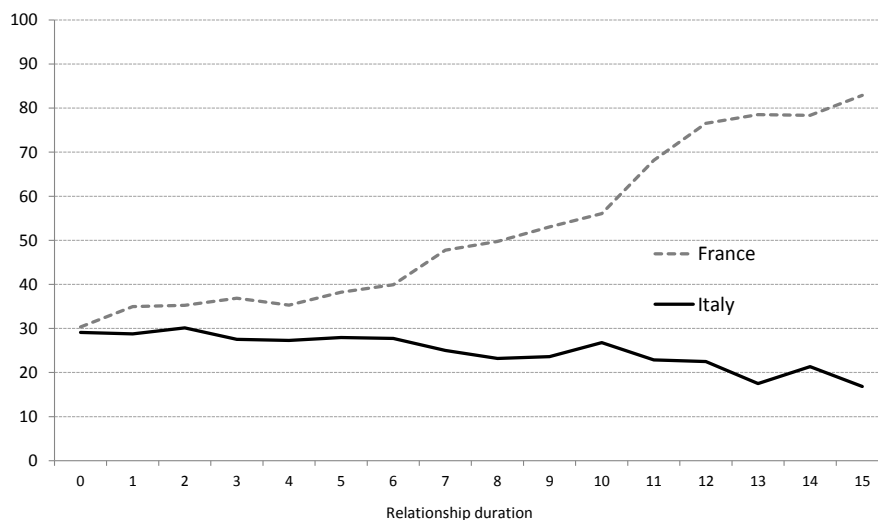


Note: the “don’t known” category in Italy also includes the answers “I’ve never asked myself this question.”

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



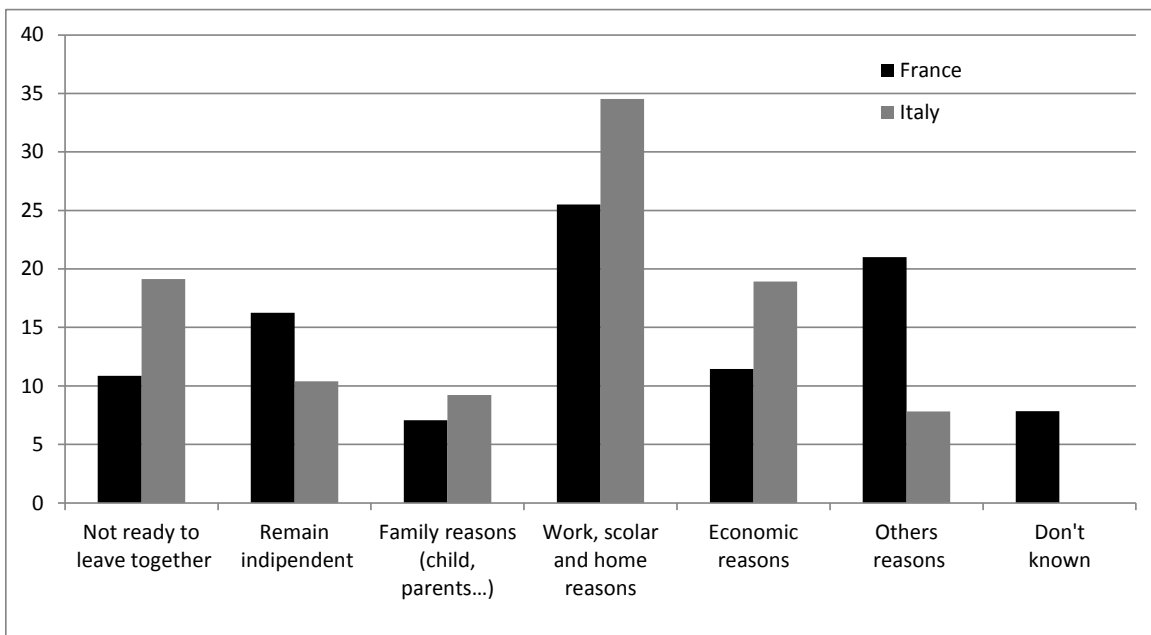
Source: France, Ined-Insee, Erfi-GGS1, 2005; Italy, ISTAT, Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali, 2009

Sample: Individuals aged 18-79 in a LAT relationship

Similarly, in France we observe a strong correlation between living with parents and the reason beyond a LAT relationship. While a quarter (23%) of individuals who live with their parents define their relationship as a choice, it is the case of one every two (47%) living alone. On the other side, in Italy there is no correlation 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 evoke education-, work-, or housing-related reasons (compared to 25% of French), and 18% cite financial circumstances (compared to 12% of French)¹⁰.

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

¹⁰ We do not describe deeply the reasons for not living together because of their relative imprecision. As stated by Duncan *et al.* (2013a), often several reasons can 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 3), especially in light of their residential status (living or not with parents) and economic situation (occupational status and financial difficulties). In the multivariate framework, three 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*). The latter model has been replicated adding an interaction between each variable and the country of residence in order to appreciate country-specific differences in the effects into play (*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 a 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 is correlated 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 associated with a LAT relationship less often chosen, with a greater effect in France, and living nearby the partner is correlated to a smaller likelihood of being in a LAT relationship by choice, but only in Italy. Overall, this result corroborate the view that LAT relationships in Italy tend to be confined in the early phases of the life course, when young couples, living relatively close, wait to move in together (and probably to marry) because they are confronted with a difficult employment and housing situation as well as with a general social pressure towards marriage. 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 3. Logit model predicting the probability to be in LAT “by choice” versus for another reason in France and Italy

		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 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 effect in France and Italy. In France, widowed and divorced see their LAT relationship as a choice more often than singles, while no difference was found for Italy. Conversely, married Italians are less likely to be in a LAT relationship by choice than singles 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). The authors 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 to consider their LAT relationship as a choice. The lack of effect already observed in Italy with the descriptive analysis is confirmed in the multivariate framework.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to add to our understanding of LAT relationships, a union type that has only recently begun to gain attention from social observers. At least three findings clearly emerged from our France-Italy comparative 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 for their scientific relevance, it is important to consider LAT as an additional form of living arrangement to avoid meaningless classifications of family living arrangements. We wish that family surveys will systematically include questions to identify LAT relationships in the years to come, ideally also including 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 in 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 in time because the findings accords with the ones of Billari *et al* (2008) who analyzed data 10 years older than ours. In addition, in recent years, these young couples are also increasingly confronted with an adverse employment and housing situation. The absence of a legal recognition of civil unions and the familial and social pressure towards marriage further contribute to leave little space for cohabitation and therefore to facilitate the diffusion of LAT as an alternative to

marriage among young adults. From this perspective, LAT relationships in Italy do not differ much from the old-fashioned dating arrangement. The Italian situation is similar to the Spanish one (see Castro-Martín et al. 2008): The great majority of LAT are formed by young individuals aged 25-29 still living in the parental home (among women, 83% in Italy and 91% in Spain), while it is the case of only one third of their French counterparts. LAT relationships in France seem to be much more the result of a conscious choice, especially in the older phases of the life course. Overall, we note that LAT relationships are occurring both in settings in which cohabitation is institutionalized, such as in France, as well as in setting where cohabitation is relatively uncommon, such as Italy (but also Spain: Castro-Martín et al. 2008). 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 are experiencing this form of union at younger ages, and often as a result of a constraint.

Third, we found traces of both the SDT and the POD narratives in our findings. The difficult housing and labor market condition faced by the young, especially in Italy, suggest that the POD perspective represents a possible explanation beyond the prevalence of LAT along the early phases of the life course. The positive and significant effect of fixed-term contracts on the probability of being in a LAT relationships can be interpreted as symptoms 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 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 taken at older ages especially. This minority is thus demographically and sociologically important and deserves attention.

Some limitations of our study need to be recalled. 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, also grasping what “being in couple” exactly means in different contexts is a difficult, if not impossible, task in quantitative

research. Secondly, the French and Italian surveys do not always offer the same information. For instance, in Italy we have no information on the non-coresident's partner characteristics. This is a usual drawback in comparative-oriented research: we need to stick on what data actually provide us with.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this analysis raises important questions about family change in post-industrial societies. Even if the trend toward “new family forms” comes to a halt, in fact, a return to a traditional family model is unlikely. Thus, focusing on the emergence of new (potential) family typologies, such as LAT relationships, is increasingly important. For young Italians, we found that a LAT relationship appears as a natural arrangement of “doing intimacy”, when they might face difficult in entering into the housing and labor market and, at the same time, are confronted with a (still) low social acceptance of cohabitation. Italian LAT cannot be considered as a new, long lasting family form of living arrangement such as cohabitation. Indeed, as mentioned by Guibert-Lantoine et al. (1994) for the French case, non-cohabiting conjugality differs from cohabitation in at least two aspects: it is less often voluntary and does not appear as “anti-establishment”. As a consequence, in Italy a LAT relationship is linked with a postponement of co-residence between partners, which in turn also contributes to a delay of the first child, and finally to the very low Italian fertility. Despite a similar incidence of LAT in France, their nature contrasts with the Italian one. 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 “doing intimacy”, especially at older ages. Our intent in this paper was essentially exploratory; a study of this kind is a necessary first step for a deeper understanding of the meanings of LAT in modern societies.

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