Non-Marital Cohabitation in Italy

Christin Löffler

Universität Rostock

Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät

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Christin Löffler (geb. Schröder),

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List of Abbreviations

DC	*Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democrats, political party)
FDT	First demographic transition
FSS	*Famiglia e soggetti sociali* (Italian survey)
GDP	Gross domestic product
ILFI	*Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* (Italian panel)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDT	Second demographic transition
TFR	Total fertility rate
ISTAT	*Istituto nazionale di statistica* (National Institute of Statistics)

Part I

Theoretical Considerations

Introduction

Over the past 25 to 30 years, the number of consensual unions grew in most Western and European countries. Especially in northern Europe, informal unions gained in importance. In 2000-01 about 40% of Swedish adults aged 25 to 34 were living in cohabitation. In sharp contrast to that, rates of informal unions were considerably lower in southern European societies. In particular in Portugal and Italy, less than 10% of young adults cohabited in 2000-01 (Kiernan 2004).

According to Carmichael (1995), the transition process toward rising rates of cohabitation is characterized by the increasing acceptance of sexuality, the rapid weakening of social control by institutions, the increased female control over reproduction, the rise in the importance placed on the quality of the couple, the development of more equal intra-union patterns of exchange, and the increase of opportunity costs to women. These developments favored the spread of non-marital unions as a flexible alternative to marriage. However, as figures indicate, cohabitation did not diffuse uniformly across Europe. Prinz (1995) argued that it would be the societal changes that emerged in different societies with different paces and intensities which provoked the different development of cohabitation across countries.

The same is true for the overall demographic changes that have shaped Europe and the Western world since the mid-twentieth century: Changes in family formation pattern, on the one side, demonstrated by a decreasing importance of the marital bond and a diversification of alternative living arrangements (such as singlehood, cohabitation, or 'living apart together,' and dramatic declines in fertility figures, on the other side, affected all European countries – however, again with different paces and intensities. Van de Kaa (1987) and Lesthaeghe (1991) interpret these developments as a second demographic transition (SDT). According to both scholars, this process was triggered by dramatic shifts in norms and attitudes. Altruistic values were displaced by individualistic ones and a strong accentuation of self-fulfillment. Whereas countries belonging to the Scandinavian area were the forerunners of these demographic changes, western Europe followed at some distance. Both Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe assume that southern European countries will follow this path too, although later in time. The extent to which this is true is still controversially discussed among social and demographic scientists.

However, it is without controversy that for a few decades now Italy has shown a very particular pattern of demographic development: Whereas the country has witnessed one feature of the SDT, namely drastically low levels of fertility, we find scarce evidence for the second main characteristic, that is, decreasing importance of marriage and a diversification of alternative lifestyles. Italian family formation and fertility patterns are instead shaped by a striking postponement of leaving the parental home, entering into a (usually marital) union, and having the first child (Billari and Kohler 2005; Billari 2004; Ongaro 2003; Billari et al. 2000). Few young adults, in fact, experience living arrangements alternative to marriage, that is, living alone, sharing an apartment, or living together with a partner. As the foregoing figures have indicated, compared to other countries, non-marital living arrangements are still rare in Italy.

Not only are family formation patterns in Italy unique, but also the phenomenon of cohabitation itself. In 2001, about 3.6% of all Italian couples were living in cohabitation, though we find sharp differences between the North and the South of the country. In the northern regions, especially in Valle D'Aosta and Emilia-Romagna, the proportion was between 5% and 8%. In the southern regions and on the Islands we find figures under 2% (ISTAT 2001a). Interestingly, both parts of the country differ from each other in many respects, not only as far as living together is concerned. The North, for instance, is characterized by an expanding economy, relatively good chances of finding employment, and a high level of secularization. The South, on the other hand, suffers from high unemployment and emigration; furthermore, people living in these regions are more inclined toward traditional moral concepts than people from the North. Given these economic, social, and cultural differences among regions, it is not surprising that we observe rather diverse patterns of family formation across the country. As to cohabitation, we know, for instance, that in the North it is mainly the young, highly educated, and employed adults without children who decide on living together. In the South, by contrast, it is mainly the older, widowed, or divorced who do so; this way, they keep their right to social benefits such as a widow's pension or alimony (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; De Sandre et al. 1997). Hence, the northern style of cohabitation is characterized by innovative behavior, whereas in the southern regions, the choice of a non-marital union appears rather to be influenced by economic considerations.

Scholars have argued that, over the last two decades, the importance of cohabitation has started to grow, as it is strongly connected to uncertainties on the emotional and economic levels. Increasing rates of separations and divorces have provoked a rise of uncertainty at the emotional level. This uncertainty is additionally strengthened by the tight economic situation prevailing in Europe. As a consequence, in most European countries, the attractiveness of cohabitation as compared to marriage has started to increase (Barbagli et al. 2003). However, as we have seen, this is not the case in Italy. In the Mediterranean area, and especially in Italy, the attractiveness of informal unions is strongly damped by prevailing *institutional conditions, economic constraints*, and *cultural ideas*. Previous research has mainly pointed to precarious social policy and close kin ties as major reasons for the hesitant spread of informal unions in the country (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004; Reher 1998).

As the Italian welfare state retreats from supporting young adults and assigns main responsibilities to the family, adult children tend to be strongly dependent on family economic support – all the more when considering young adults' extraordinarily high risk of suffering unemployment. Given this situation, family members – and in particular parents – gain in power over young adults' lives. Their control over financial means has impact on the choices young adults take. It has been argued that this would be true also with respect to cohabitation. Since informal unions are still not accepted in society, parents would be inclined to withdraw from supporting cohabiting children while rewarding the choice of marriage also in financial terms (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). In this situation, young adults face difficulties in defining the actual advantages and drawbacks of living together and tend to withdraw from opting for a venture that implies an economically uncertain future. In addition, parent–child relations in Italy are characterized by a high degree of spatial proximity. Given the tight housing situation as well as prevailing patterns of mutual support (e.g. for childcare or care for the elderly), most adult children live near their parents (Tomassini et al. 2003; Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002). This unusually strong spatial proximity gives parents additional opportunities to exert influence on their offspring. Thus, in Italy, we find a whole variety of circumstances that seem to be relevant for explaining the *so far hesitant spread of informal unions*: scarce state support for young adults, high rates of unemployment, a tight housing market, strong family ties, and the prevalence of Catholic thinking within the society.

The development of cohabitation in Italy can also be seen from the perspective of diffusion theory. According to Rogers (1995), diffusion is "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers 1995: 5). Granovetter (1973) includes explicitly the strength of ties as an important factor when considering diffusion. He found that innovations reach a larger number of people when passed through weak ties rather than strong. Bearing this assumption in mind, we can suggest that in Italy even the diffusion of new living arrangements may be hampered by strong family ties.

It is all the more surprising that recent data hint of an increase of cohabitation among the younger generations. One out of four women born between 1970 and 1974 and living in northern or central Italy started their first union with cohabitation. Though rates seem to rise in the South as well, they still only reach low levels (Gruppo di Coordinamento per la Demografia 2007, based on FSS 2003). Given these recent developments, our study provides insights into both the circumstances hindering the development of cohabitation in Italy as well as the state of affairs at the onset of informal union diffusion in the country.

Insights into union formation patterns among young Italians are important for understanding the ongoing demographic changes, not only in the country itself, but also in Europe as a whole. Focusing on the development of cohabitation in Italy, we intend to contribute deeper insights into the impetus and mechanisms behind recent demographic changes on the Continent and thus on the discussion of Italy experiencing (or not) a second demographic transition.

In particular, our study aims at investigating the *extent of* and *reasons for* the so far hesitant spread of cohabitation in Italy. Thus, on the one side, we are interested in measuring the *occurrence* of cohabitation and the extent to which *factors* such as employment, education, region, or social origin impact the transition to non-marital union formation in the country. On the other side, our study is targeted at gaining insights into the *process of decision-making* in favor of cohabitation. Here, we focus on the question: To what extent do *institutional conditions*, *economic constraints,* and *cultural ideas* influence individual choice for cohabitation? In doing so, we distinguish between the impact of *formal institutions* (e.g. labor market or housing situation) and *informal institutions* (e.g. family, friends, religion). Since earlier studies on Italy found evidence of a strong tendency to convert cohabitation into marriage –

especially when giving birth to a child (Billari and Kohler 2005; Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992) – we also aim at analyzing in more depth the *meaning* of and *transition* to both cohabitation and marriage. Given the high level of regional heterogeneity within the country, we investigate the North as well as the South of Italy.

Earlier research on cohabitation in Italy offers only scarce insights into all of these questions. Existing studies rely merely on quantitative research approaches. However, this method has limitations. First of all, survey data contain few cases of cohabiting individuals. Consequently, insights are rather limited. Secondly, quantitative methods are inadequate for explaining processes of decision-making as they refer only to the macro level of the phenomenon under consideration.

Our study overcomes these limitations by using a *mixed-method design*. We address the first part of our research question, that is, measuring the impact of several individual and background factors on cohabitation, by employing a quantitative research design. Here we restrict the study to data from the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* (ILFI) of 1997 and 1999, analyzing this data by means of event history techniques. The second part of our analysis, that is, the investigation of individual decision-making in favor of cohabitation, is examined by using a qualitative approach. To that end, we conducted *56 semi-structured in-depth interviews* with women in their reproductive ages. These women cohabited at the time of the interview or experienced cohabitation before their current marriage. Some of them were mothers, others were childless. In order to capture regional variations, we interviewed women in the North and in the South of the country. For the North, we decided on *Bologna*, the capital city of Emilia-Romagna – the region witnessing the highest share of informal unions across Italy. As a second locale, we chose *Cagliari*, situated on the southern tip of Sardinia and representing the South of Italy. This city shows much lower levels of informal unions than Bologna. Although Sardinia differs in several aspects from the southern Italian mainland, it shows the highest percentage of cohabitation among all southern regions. Despite being "forerunners" in the South, the city of Cagliari and the island of Sardinia are traditionally shaped by a rather traditional context. This makes the setting an interesting case as it offers the unique opportunity to investigate the meaning of this innovative living arrangement in an area with a relatively closed mentality as compared to Bologna.

Our target is to provide an explanation for the so far low diffusion of non-marital unions in Italy. Since we combine qualitative and quantitative methods, we are able to provide evidence from both the macro and micro perspectives. The consideration of two regions that are each at a different stage of development, as far as family formation is concerned, allows us to gain deeper insights into the evolution of informal cohabitation in Italy.

The study is structured as follows: In Chapter 1, we provide an overview of changing family formation patterns and the evolution of cohabitation across Europe. We also highlight the development of informal unions in Italy. In Chapter 2, we discuss our theoretical background, pointing especially to the contributions of four major approaches to the understanding of the hesitant spread of informal unions in the country: the *welfare state approach*, the *labor market approach*, the *family ties approach*, and the *gender approach*. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the research questions and the mixed-method design of our study. From Chapter 4 onwards, we present our empirical investigations. We start there by explaining our quantitative research design and by highlighting the corresponding findings. As two factors have proved to be most relevant for the transition to cohabitation, we directly address both of them: *women's own educational level* as well as *parental education*. In Chapter 5 ,we present the qualitative design of our study. In order to stress the differences between the two regional settings, we refer to the narrative of one woman from Bologna and another woman from Cagliari. Thereafter, Chapters 6 to 9 are devoted to our qualitative research findings. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the transition to and meaning of cohabitation and marriage in each regional context. In Chapter 8, we analyze the influence of *formal institutions* on the decision for an informal relationship. We concentrate in particular on factors such as the *labor market*, *housing market*, and *legal regulations and their perceptions*. Chapter 9 is dedicated to the investigation of *informal institutions* and their impact on cohabitation. Here, we focus on the influence of *parents*, the *Catholic culture*, *friends,* and *gender relations*. We conclude our study in Chapter 10 by *combining the findings from both research approaches*.

Chapter 1

Cohabitation in an International Perspective

1.1 Introduction

Over recent decades, Europe has undergone fundamental demographic changes. The continent experienced both a dramatic shift in fertility figures as well as a weakening of the institution of marriage. As a consequence of the latter, living arrangements alternative to marriage, such as being single, cohabitation, or living apart together, gained strongly in importance. However, the European picture is far from being uniform. Across countries we find strong variations in union and family formation patterns. In this chapter, we focus first on recent demographic changes in Europe in general. Subsequently, we concentrate on Italy in particular. We start by highlighting family developments in Europe from 1960 onwards (Section 1.2), continue by examining the evolution of cohabitation in a European perspective (1.3), and conclude by discussing marriage and cohabitation patterns in Italy (1.4).

1.2 Family Development in Europe from 1960 onwards

Starting from the mid-1960s, family and fertility patterns in Europe took several new directions. One of the most striking characteristics of this process was the new way of entering into a union: Across all European countries, age at entry into marriage rose to a considerable extent. Figure 1.1 shows the mean age at female first marriage in several European countries. We observe that among societies in northern Europe, women's age at entry into marriage had increased already by the end of the 1960s. By the end of the 1970s, we see similar developments in western Europe as well. Southern Europe, on the other hand, is a latecomer in regard to this change: Only by the beginning of the 1980s, did women in southern Europe start to postpone entry into marriage.

Figure 1.1: Mean age at female first marriage (< 50 completed years) in northern, western and southern Europe
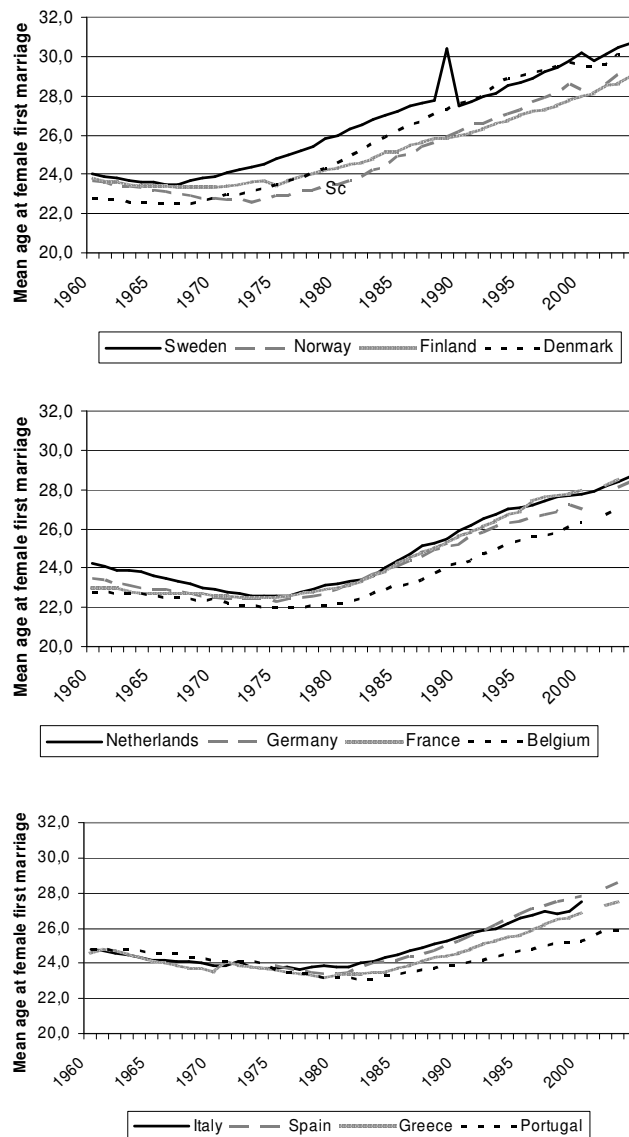
In 2004, women in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark were on average about age 30 when entering into their first marital union. Women in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium were somewhat younger (between age 28 and 29). And despite being "latecomers," women in southern Europe "caught up" rapidly. Though we lack more recent data, we see that some countries had already reached the 29-year benchmark.

In addition to the general postponement of entry into marriage, actual marriage rates dropped as well. In Figure 1.2, we present total female first marriage rates in selected

countries from 1960 up to 2004. The data give evidence that marriage rates decreased in all of these countries. But whereas northern European countries witnessed at least a slight upward trend from 2000 onwards, marriage rates in Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium continued to remain at a low level. Between 1960 and 1980, marriage rates were extraordinarily high in southern Europe. In Italy, the turnaround started in 1975 whereas it began on average five years later in the other southern European countries. Afterwards marriage rates declined continuously – so much so that, by 2004, some northern European countries showed higher total female first marriage rates than in southern Europe. Frejka and Ross (2001) in fact emphasize that the decline in marriage rates would be faster and steeper in southern Europe than elsewhere.

The changes in union formation patterns also had influence on fertility. In the course of a few decades, nearly all European countries experienced a dramatic decrease in fertility figures: Total fertility rates (TFR) dropped from above replacement levels to sub-replacement fertility, that is, a TFR at or below 2.1 children per woman, the replacement standard for low-mortality populations (Frejka and Ross 2001). Although today no western European country has total fertility rates of 2.1 or above, again the European landscape is characterized by a high degree of regional variation. In particular, the Scandinavian countries and France succeeded in stabilizing their TFR above 1.5 children per woman. At the low end, we find countries such as Spain or Italy, thus representative of the southern European countries. With a TFR at or below 1.3, Billari and Kohler (2005) define these countries as those having *lowest-low fertility* (see Figure 1.3, which represents this development in several European countries from 1960 to 2004).

Figure 1.2: Total female first marriage rates in northern, western, and southern Europe
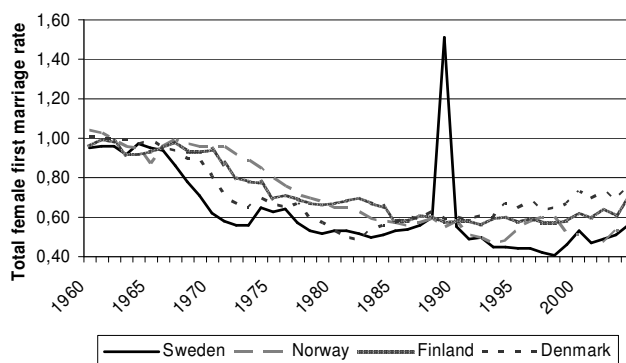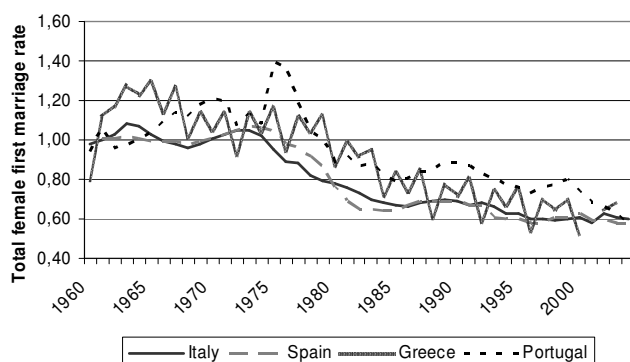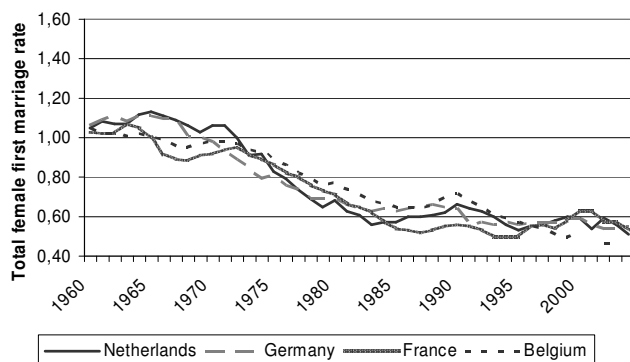
Source: Demographic Yearbook, Council of Europe 2002, 2005.
Note: The 1989 marriage boom in Sweden is again remarkable (see Andersson 1998).

Simultaneously with the decline of fertility rates, female age at first birth rose considerably. Kohler, Billari and Ortega (2002) argue that it would be the interaction of these both factors – the change in the *quantum of births* and the *postponed realization of births* – that contributed to the divergence of fertility patterns across Europe. On the one hand, we find countries that witnessed late childbearing without substantial declines in cohort and period fertility as women in these countries "caught up" at higher ages. On the other hand, we observe countries that experienced large declines in fertility during the postponement transition. The latter case led to the phenomenon of lowest-low fertility, characterized by "a rapid shift to delayed childbearing, a low probability of progression after the first child" (but not particularly low levels of first-birth childbearing), and a "falling behind" in cohort fertility at relatively late ages" (Billari and Kohler 2005: 171).

In addition, in all European countries, the transition to low and lowest-low fertility was accompanied by a change in the parity distribution: Whereas the proportion of women having three or more children – and in some countries even those having two children – declined, the share of childless women and of those having only one child increased (Frejka and Calot 2001).

Figure 1.3: Total fertility rate in northern, western, and southern Europe
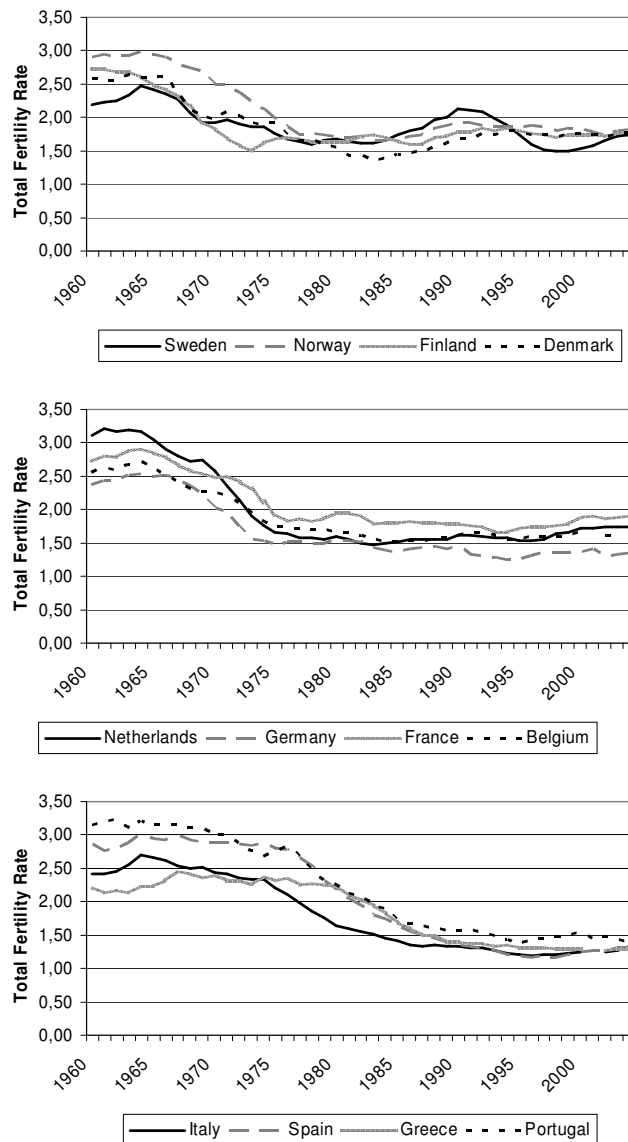
Source: Demographic Yearbook, Council of Europe 2002, 2005.

Frejka and Ross (2001) emphasize that never before in history were there such enormous changes in fertility behavior across so many societies as those observed in the twentieth century. As a major reason for this development, Frejka and Calot (2001) noted that in all low-fertility countries women continue to shoulder most of the childrearing and housework. In doing so, they increasingly face barriers to balance the role as mother with demands in other life spheres such as education, work, career, self-fulfillment, etc.

Interestingly, with the revolution of family formation patterns, also the correlation between total fertility level and total first marriage rate, proportion of extra-marital births and female labor force participation reversed. Whereas, between 1975 and the end of the 1990s, a high

prevalence of marriage and institutionalized long-term cohabitation was associated with higher fertility in cross-country comparisons, the same was not true any longer after 1999. Today, countries showing higher proportions of extra-marital births and female labor market participation are those having higher levels of fertility as well (Billari and Kohler 2005; Kohler, Billari and Ortega 2002).

1.3 The Evolution of Cohabitation in a European Perspective

Whereas, in former decades, marriage was regarded as an adequate measure of union formation or the beginning of exposure to the risk of conception, this interrelationship weakened once cohabitation started to diffuse (Sardon and Robertson 2004). Unfortunately, most countries do not register this kind of union, which complicates making reliable statements about the actual prevalence of cohabitation. Frequently, though, proportions of extra-marital births are used as an indirect source of information about the development of cohabitation in a given country. Sardon and Robertson (2004) argue that "by far most of such births are to couples, and their increase reflects at least to some extent the increase in the number of consensual unions; to some extent only, since the tolerance of various societies toward such births is also a factor" (Sardon and Robertson 2004: 276). We agree with both authors, as the proportion of extra-marital unions seems to be adequate for measuring the diffusion of cohabitation in countries such as Sweden, where cohabitation and births out-of-wedlock are widespread and socially accepted. In southern Europe, by contrast, it is still common for a couple to enter a marital relationship as soon as they expect offspring, or shortly after. In this case, the use of non-marital births as an indirect measure of informal unions needs to be considered carefully and poses a question on the meaning of cohabitation in different contexts.

Nonetheless, Figure 1.4 provides evidence of the development of extra-marital births in several European countries. Again, we find major differences between northern, western, and southern Europe. Whereas Scandinavia recorded a strong increase in non-marital births from 1970 onwards, in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium this process started only after 1980. In the latter group of countries, in 2004, about 30% of births were outside marriage (only France, with about 45%, showed a higher share of extra-marital births). As to southern Europe, we find much lower proportions of non-marital childbirth: By 2004, in Greece and Italy less than 15% of children were born to unmarried mothers.

More recent data on Italy, however, gives reason to assume that a change is taking place (see Section 1.4 for more details).

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, cohabitation started to diffuse across Europe. Especially in northern Europe, informal unions gained in importance as well-established living arrangements. In 2000-01, about 40% of Swedish adults aged 25 to 34 were living in cohabitation (see Figure 1.5). In sharp contrast to that, rates of informal unions were considerably lower in southern European societies. In particular in Portugal and Italy, less than 10% of young adults cohabited in 2000-01 (Kiernan 2004). Scholars assume that remarkable societal changes are one major reason for the spread of living arrangements alternative to marriage. As these changes emerged in different societies with different paces and intensities, also cohabitation diffused differently across countries (Prinz 1995). One of the most significant societal changes was the women's movement that involved several other changes: "the increased economic independence of women, increased education and employment, [a higher] degree of equality in household responsibilities, changes in social norms and values, biological independence of women (birth control methods, revolution of contraceptive techniques, legalization of abortion), feminist movement" (Prinz 1995: 81-82).

Figure 1.4: Extra-marital births in northern, western, and southern Europe
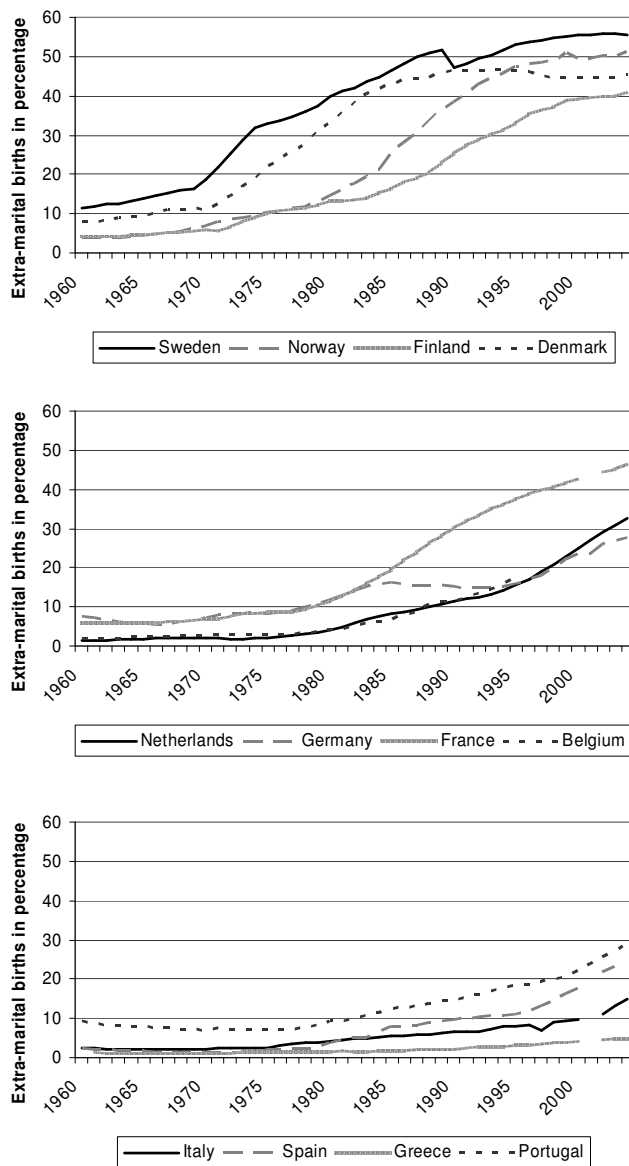
Source: Demographic Yearbook, Council of Europe 2002, 2005.

As a consequence of these fundamental changes, gender roles became less differentiated and more interchangeable, which made the traditional functioning of marriage – with the husband being the breadwinner and the wife taking care of the housework and children – less self-evident (Prinz 1995). In addition to that, other scholars have pointed to the increased uncertainty about the stability of marriage, to the erosion of norms against cohabitation and sexual relations outside marriage, as well as to the weakening of religious and other normative constraints on people's family choices as further reasons for the partially strong increase of cohabitation (Casper and Bianchi 2002).

Figure 1.5: Percentage of informal unions among young adults aged 25-34 in selected European countries, 2000-01
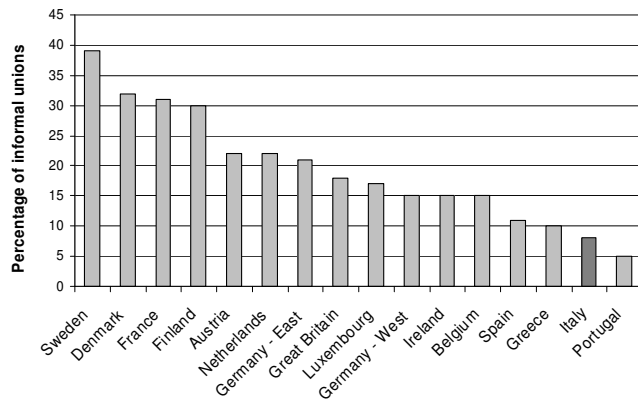
Source: Kiernan 2004 (based on Eurobarometer data 2000-01).

Recurrently, it has been emphasized that cohabitation is a complex phenomenon that involves different meanings. Cohabitation might be seen as pre-marital phase, as trial marriage, as temporary union, as alternative living arrangement – with or without children – and so forth (Prinz 1995; Villeneuve-Gokalp 1991). The meaning of cohabitation may also change over time or might be different for both partners involved (Seltzer 2000; Manting 1996). Several scholars have brought the argument forward that couples in northern Europe would tend to see cohabitation as alternative to marriage, whereas in southern European societies, the perception of cohabitation as prelude to marriage would prevail (Prinz 1995; Kiernan 1999). Another main issue with regard to cohabitation is the question, "To what extent is this kind of living arrangement associated with less commitment among partners and with a rise in individualism? (Lewis 2001). Existing studies are vague in answering this question. Casper and Bianchi (2002) contend that the level of commitment varies according to the meaning attached to cohabitation.

Whereas little research is done on these issues, we know much more by far about cohabiters themselves. Numerous studies reveal that individuals with certain characteristics are more prone to enter into cohabitation than other people. Kiernan (1999, 2000) found, for instance, that in many European countries most men and women cohabit in their early and late twenties and less so in their thirties. Further, there is evidence that the more secular members of a society – those having experienced parental divorce during childhood, and those living in metropolitan areas – are more likely to choose cohabitation (Kiernan 2000, 2003). Adults having a high desire for independence, being more critical toward the quality of their relationship, and having less intention to plan for children were

also found to decide for an informal union more often (Wiersma 1983). The same was proved for people living on their own (Liefbroer 1991) and for those having more liberal gender-role attitudes (Clarkenberg et al. 1995; Casper and Bianchi 2002). In addition to that, evidence suggests that – even if children are involved – cohabiters divide housework more equally than married couples and are more likely to have similar incomes (Brines and Joyner 1999; Nock 1995; South and Spitze 1994).

As for the actual duration of cohabitation, studies have shown that informal unions do not usually last long; either couples decide for marriage or they opt for separation (Bumpass and Sweet 1989). Cross-national analyses by Kiernan (2000) provide evidence that many informal unions convert into marriages. However, there is variation across nations and age groups. Whereas Swedish couples show the lowest rates of conversion, most other European countries witness much higher rates (within five years, one in two unions converts into marriage). At the same time, however, between one-quarter to one-third of couples had dissolved by the fifth anniversary – independent of the country they lived in. Having a child within a cohabiting union, though, accelerates the propensity of entering a marriage. This is true for Italy as well as for other countries. However, besides Austria and Switzerland, Italy is the country where most women experienced a wedding within five years after the birth of their first child in a cohabiting union (Kiernan 2000).

1.4 Marriage and Cohabitation in Italy: Strong Regional Variations

In Italy, union formation is characterized by several peculiarities. The first regards young adults' late departure from the parental home and the high synchronization between home leaving and entry into marriage (Billari et al. 2000; De Rose et al. 2008). In cross-country comparisons, Italian adults are among those leaving home latest – Billari (2004) refers to them as the latest-late. However, once Italians decide to depart from their family of origin, marriage is still the main reason for doing so (Ongaro 2003).

Another peculiarity is related to the fact that Italy's decreasing marriage rates are not in any way compensated by an increase in informal unions. Instead, we find some kind of vacuum: Young adults tend to live in no kind of union rather than living with a partner (Kiernan 1999). De Sandre et al. (1997) found that the proportion of those having no relationship by the age of 34 is in fact rising. As a result of these Italian peculiarities, entry

into both cohabitation and marriage occurs at relatively late ages (Kiernan 1999). Figure 1.6 shows the development of first marriages according to age group between 1980 and 2001. The data give evidence of the general postponement of entry into marriage: The share of women choosing a marital relationship between ages 16–19 and 20–24 decreased strongly. At the same time, however, we observe a rise in the proportion of women entering marriage in the age groups 25–29, 30–34, and 35–39.

Figure 1.6: First marriages according to age group (by age of the woman), 1980–2001
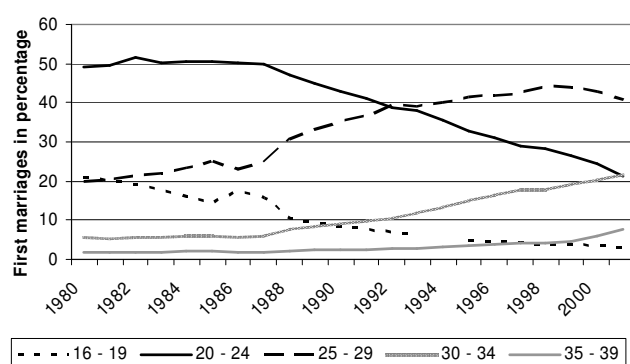
Source: New Cronos 2001.

More interesting, though, is that mean age of female first marriage varies considerably across regions (see Figure 1.7). The highest age at first marriage is found among women living in northern and central Italian regions (between age 27 and 28). Regions of the South show generally lower ages at female first marriage (between 26 and 27).

In fact, regional variations can be found among several indicators of family formation (as we will show later in this section) and in many other fields. These differences are considered a result of unequal economic and societal conditions prevailing in the North and in the South of the country. Whereas the former is characterized by a strong economy, high female labor force participation and low unemployment rates, the South suffers from an economic system affected by mismanagement, unemployment, and the informal economy. As to societal developments, we find differences there too. A trend toward secularization is mainly notable in the northern regions of Italy. The South, by contrast, is still attached to religion and tradition (Brütting 1997). Figure 1.8 provides a more detailed map of the regions of Italy.[1]

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[1] As to the regional classification, we employ the categorization of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), which considers the following regions as quintessentially northern: Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli - Venezia Giulia, Trentino - Alto Adige, Lombardia, Veneto, Valle D'Aosta, Piemonte and Abruzzo. As

Figure 1.7: Mean age at female first marriage, by region, 1997
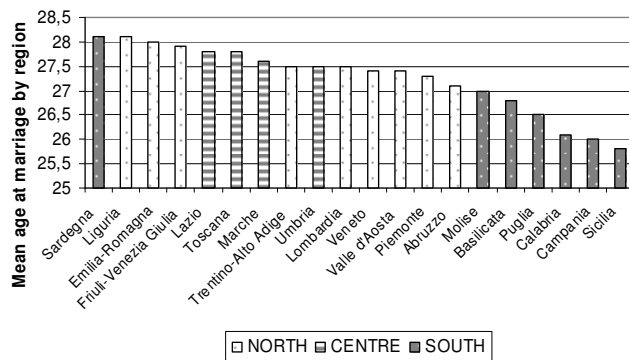
Source: Prati 2002.

Figure 1.8: Italy by region

A remarkable exception to quintessentially northern and southern family formation patterns is the region of Sardinia. Although the region belongs to the southern part of Italy (also with regard to economic and social conditions), women enter their first marriage latest and show union and family formation patterns that today bear a stronger resemblance to the northern model than to the southern one. Nonetheless, about thirty years ago, family formation in Sardinia was more in keeping with the South than with the North. Within only a couple of decades, mean age at first birth of Sardinian women increased so much that by 2006 the island had one of the highest in Italy. In fact, in no other Italian region do

southern regions ISTAT refers to Molise, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Campania, Sicilia and Sardegna. The four regions of Lazio, Toscana, Marche and Umbria belong to the Centre of Italy.

we observe more births to mothers aged 40+ than in Sardinia: 7.5% in 2006 (ISTAT 2008). The same is actually true with regard to fertility: From 1971 to 2001, the region's total fertility rate dropped from 2.92 to 1.04 (ISTAT 2006b). In this respect, the region might be seen as a southern forerunner as far as changes in family and union formation are concerned and is therefore an excellent case for the study of the emerging new family patterns in a traditional context.

As suggested previously, regional heterogeneity is also found when investigating more indicators of family formation, e.g. marriages per 1,000 inhabitants. Figure 1.9 provides evidence that higher rates prevail mainly in southern and central regions of Italy. The North witnesses basically lower rates.

Figure 1.9: Marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, by region, 2006
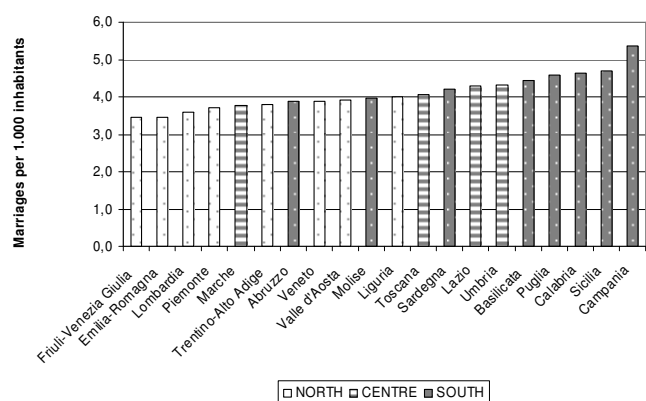
Source: ISTAT 2007.

This trend is also reflected by the share of church and civil marriages across regions.[2] Figure 1.10 presents the percentage of civil weddings according to region in 2006. Considerably more couples opted for a civil wedding in the North (between 38-53%) than in the South (11-20%). Church weddings still prevail in the latter. Again, an exception is the case of Sardinia, where in 2006 more than 30% of couples decided on a wedding at the registry office.

As we have seen, in Italy, entry into marriage is strongly shaped by a high degree of regional variation. This regards the share of people opting for a conjugal union, the age at

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[2] According to an agreement between the Catholic Church and the Italian government, in Italy it is not necessary to verify a church wedding by a wedding at the registry office – as is the case in many other European countries. The Italian government accepts a church wedding as legitimate and equivalent to a civil wedding (Kindler 1993).

(female) first marriage as well as the rite chosen. These regional differences are evident with respect to cohabitation also. Referring to the most current data coming from the census of 2001, about 3.6% of couples were living in an informal union – compared to other European countries, these figures are extraordinarily low. However, in the northern regions, especially in Valle D'Aosta and Emilia-Romagna, the proportion was between 5% and 8%. In the southern region, we found figures below 2% (ISTAT 2001a).

Figure 1.10: Percentage of civil weddings, by region, 2006
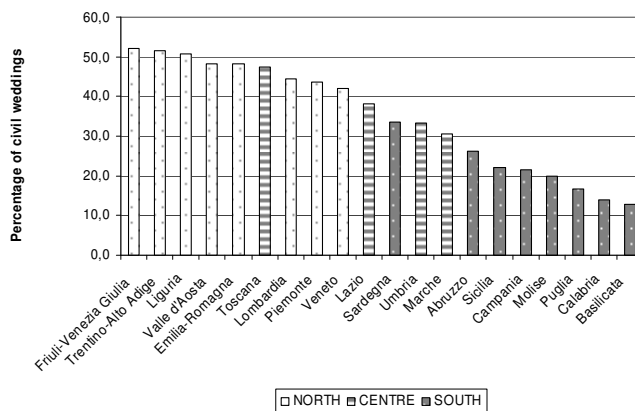
Source: ISTAT 2007.

Nonetheless, considering the development of informal unions between the last two censuses, i.e. between 1991 and 2001, we find strong evidence that a change is taking place (see Figure 1.11). Within a timeframe of ten years, cohabitation figures doubled in most regions and showed the strongest increase in the North. Survey data collected after 2001 give further reason to assume that informal unions are gaining in importance in Italy. Yet more evidence will come from the Census of 2011.

Figure 1.11: Percentage of informal unions, by region, 1991 and 2001
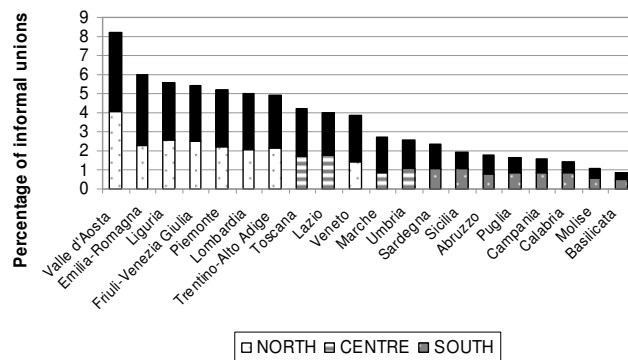
Source: Sabbadini 1997 with reference to 1991 Census data and ISTAT 2001a.
Note: Patterned bars display the percentage of informal unions in 1991. Black bars indicate the further increase up to 2001.

Besides regional variations in the share of informal unions, it has also been found that people choosing cohabitation and living in the North differ to a large extent from those opting for cohabitation in the South. Whereas the "northern kind of cohabitation" shows a rather innovative character, informal unions in the South are often motivated by traditional behavior and economic considerations. Here we find mainly widows and divorced people, people with lower levels of education and with children, who decide consciously against marriage. In doing so, they keep their entitlement to social benefits such as the widow's pension. In addition to that, traditionally, young couples facing economic difficulties in celebrating with a usually expensive wedding party opt for cohabitation too. These couples get away from their home villages and are considered married when they come back – the so-called "fuitine" – (De Sandre et al. 1997). By contrast, the forerunners of the "northern kind of cohabitation" are the more educated, more secularized, and more autonomous adults belonging to less traditional contexts – that is, metropolitan areas in the North – and coming from families with greater cultural resources (Rosina and Fraboni 2004). Cohabitation is also more frequent among young adults who have completed their education and who are employed – thus among those who are relatively independent from an economic point of view (Billari et al. 2000; Grillo e Pinelli 1999). Other scholars have found that Italian individuals are also likely to choose an informal union if they experienced the separation of a previous union (Castiglioni 1999), had sexual experience before age 18, and have no desire for offspring (Angeli et al. 1999).

Castiglioni (1999) argues that cohabitation is still a temporary experience in Italy. Most cohabiters transform their union into marriage – and do so especially when giving birth to a child or when conceiving (Billari et al. 2000). However, recent figures on extra-marital

birth testify to an interesting development. Within a couple of years, percentages of non-marital births increased considerably (see Figure 1.12). By 2006, 18.6% of all Italian children were born outside marriage, whereas in 2000 this group accounted for 10.5% only. Northern Italian regions showed the strongest rise: In 2006, the share of non-marital births reached about 22.8%. In the South, 10.8% of children were born to unmarried mothers. Once again, Sardinia takes the position as a forerunner among the southern regions (ISTAT 2001b, 2007).

Figure 1.12: Percentage of non-marital births, by region, 2000 and 2006
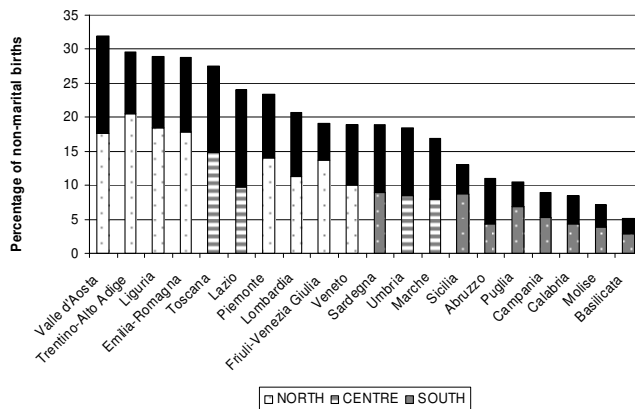
Source: ISTAT 2001b 2007.
Note: Patterned bars display the percentage of non-marital births in 2000. Black bars indicate the further increase up to 2006.

Given the particular pattern of family formation in Italy, several scholars have raised the question, whether the Italian way of union formation is only a delay in development compared to other European countries (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008), or whether it is the result of an Italian specialty (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004). This question is actually widely discussed among both demographers and social scientists (as we will see in Chapter 2). We hope to contribute an answer to this question by considering the development of cohabitation in Italy in much more depth than earlier studies have done.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on recent demographic developments in Europe and Italy. As to the latter, we found evidence for its particular pattern of union and family formation. At the start of the new millennium, Italy's demographic situation is characterized by lowest-low levels of fertility and a dramatic postponement of leaving home, entering a union, and

forming a family. Though marriage as an institution continues to keep a central place in Italian society, from 1975 onwards marriage figures started to decrease strongly. This drop, however, was not compensated by a rise in alternative living arrangements – as tends to be the case in other European countries. Young adults instead chose to stay with their family of origin rather than to live on their own or to form an informal union. Only recently have cohabitation rates started to increase, particularly in the northern regions. In light of the demographic change that is affecting all European countries, the consideration of the particular phenomenon of cohabitation in Italy allows us to draw a more complete picture of this change and to answer the questions: Will the country follow the path of other European countries? Will it cut its own path, or will we observe a trend similar to other countries, which is, however, the result of different causes and consequences?

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The development of cohabitation in Italy can be explained from various perspectives and angles. In this chapter, we highlight those theoretical approaches that are most promising for the understanding of the so far hesitant diffusion of cohabitation in the country. We start by focusing on diffusion theory (2.2.1). Next, we refer to the approach by Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe to the second demographic transition (2.2.2). Then we deal in turn with the welfare state approach (2.2.3), the labor market approach (2.2.4) and the gender perspective (2.2.5). Last but not least, we turn to the role of family ties and religion (2.2.6). We try to disentangle the theoretical impact of these different factors on the decision for or against cohabitation. In doing so, we describe the structural conditions under which, in Italy, informal union formation takes place.

2.2 Theoretical Considerations on Transition to Cohabitation in Italy

2.2.1 Diffusion Theory

The development and spread of a new lifestyle such as cohabitation can be looked at from the perspective of diffusion theory. Rogers (1995) defines diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (1995: 5). According to the author, diffusion is a special type of communication as it is concerned with the spread of new ideas. Given this newness, a certain level of uncertainty is always involved. And uncertainty "implies a lack of predictability, of structure, of information" (1995: 6). The consequence of diffusion is social change: Ideas that are new are invented, diffused, adopted, or rejected.

Proceeding from this definition of diffusion, Rogers focuses on four main elements in the diffusion process:

(1) The *innovation* itself, which might be an idea or practice that is perceived as new by individuals. But it might also be a technological innovation. In both cases, people

would seek information in order to evaluate the innovation. As a consequence, uncertainty might be reduced.

(2) *Communication channels,* which are the means that allow messages to spread from one individual to another. According to Rogers, mass-media channels "are more effective in creating knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and changing attitudes toward a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea" (1995: 35).

(3) *Time,* which is involved with diffusion in three different ways. First, time is involved in the innovation-decision process. This is the mental process of knowledge accumulation about an innovation, of forming an attitude toward it, of taking the decision whether to adopt or reject an innovation, of implementing it and of confirming that decision. Second, time is involved when considering the innovativeness of diffusion. Innovativeness indicates the degree to which a person is early or late in adopting an innovation – always with reference to the members of the social system the person belongs to. And lastly, time is important when considering the rate of adoption, which is the relative speed of innovation adaptation by members of a social system.

(4) A *social system,* which Rogers defines as "a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal" (1995: 37). The system has a structure which ensures stability. In order to maintain stability and regularity, norms are important. Norms are defined as "established behavior patterns for the members of a social system" (1995: 37).

Several scholars have dealt with the diffusion of innovations, be it in the sense of new ideas and practices or in the sense of technological innovations. Studies have focused on various aspects of the diffusion process. Granovetter (1973) includes, for instance, the strength of ties as a key factor of diffusion: Arguing that weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than strong ties, he found out that "whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance, when passed through weak ties rather than strong" (1973: 1364). Other researchers analyze the relative

importance of previous cohorts versus peer groups in adopting a certain behavior (see Nazio and Blossfeld 2003).

2.2.2 Europe's Second Demographic Transition

When, in 1987, Van de Kaa raised the issue whether Europe was passing through a second demographic transition (SDT), he saw the principal demographic feature of this transition in the decline of fertility levels from somewhat above replacement to a level below replacement. The driving forces behind this process were assumed to be dramatic shifts in norms and attitudes: the change from altruistic to individualistic and self-fulfilling orientations of people, which in the long run was supposed to end in a continued secularization and individuation. Van de Kaa argued, further, that this process was possible due to the development of the welfare state.

Though the SDT was mainly seen as a transition to low fertility, it involved four related shifts:

(1) the shift from the golden age of marriage to the dawn of cohabitation;

(2) the shift from the era of the king-child with parents to that of the king-pair with a child;

(3) the shift from preventive contraception to self-fulfilling conception; and

(4) the shift from uniform to pluralistic families and households (Van de Kaa 1987: 11).

Interestingly, Van de Kaa himself found that there was heterogeneity in these shifts and processes among all 30 European countries. Nonetheless, he engaged in the endeavor to classify these countries into four groups. Into the first group he put the ideal types of the SDT: Denmark and Sweden, where, according to Van de Kaa, the process toward below-replacement fertility was well advanced. Further, he included countries that seemed to follow this trend: Finland, Norway, but also countries like Austria, Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy. In the second group, he put countries such as Greece, Malta, Portugal, and Spain, where the fertility decline has been less marked. The six Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic) were clustered in a third group. And countries like Iceland, Ireland, Albania, and Turkey were put in a fourth group, since for different cultural and

historical reasons they were very late in completing the first demographic transition (FDT) (Van de Kaa 1987).

However, this approach attracted many critics from various sides. Coleman (2004), for instance, questions the basis of the approach. He argues that below-replacement fertility is not a new phenomenon and that it actually might be considered as a continuation of the first demographic transition. Further, Coleman points out that according to the underlying assumption, the countries with the highest score of post-materialist values should have the lowest fertility. In fact, such is not the case: These populations have, by contrast, the highest birth rates. In addition, it would remain unclear how the approach accounts for the rise in fertility levels in a number of Western countries (Coleman 2004).

Billari and Liefbroer (2004) question the implicit assumption of the SDT approach that attitudes always translate into action. Recent research has proved that this is not necessarily the case. Mynarska and Bernardi (2007) show, for instance, that cohabitation is far from spreading in Poland – even though its approval is relatively high.

Bernhardt (2004) criticizes that values do not operate in a social and political vacuum, as pretended by the SDT approach, but depend on current political, economic, and demographic contexts.

In a recent paper, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (2008) address some of these issues. The authors argue that the SDT differs significantly from the FDT as demographic predictions and underlying motivations would be different. Thus, they do not agree that the SDT is merely a continuation of the FDT, but rather departs from the latter (and thus from a stationary population and the predominance of the stable conjugal family). As far as their point of view is concerned, the SDT would predict sub-replacement fertility and emphasize the increasing importance of migration. In addition, new living arrangements would be less stable than traditional arrangements – a situation that would complicate procreation. According to Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, these developments are so substantial that they do not justify considering them as a continuation of the FDT.

As we agree with Bernhardt (2004) and others, who underline the importance of economic, societal, and cultural dimensions for the development of demographic events, in the

following, we shall focus on potential explanatory approaches and weigh their importance for the so far hesitant development of cohabitation in Italy.

2.2.3 The Welfare State Approach

2.2.3.1 The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism

In his famous book "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism," Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) distinguishes between three types of welfare states: the liberal, the conservative, and the social democratic welfare state. Whereas Anglo-Saxon countries are assumed to belong to the liberal welfare states, and Scandinavian countries to the category of social democratic ones, Esping-Andersen puts countries such as Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Italy into the group of countries that belong to the conservative welfare state.

In order to define welfare states in a more detailed way, Esping-Andersen introduces the concepts of de-commodification and de-familialization. *De-commodification* describes the extent to which "a person can maintain a livelihood without the reliance on the market" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 21). While the Scandinavian welfare states are the most de-commodified and the Anglo-Saxon tend to be the least, conservative welfare states are somewhere between. Italians, for instance, can obtain the social right to maintain a livelihood, provided that they spend at least a certain time in the labor market.

Esping-Andersen (1999) refers to the term *de-familialization* to explain the degree to which families' welfare responsibilities are caught by the welfare state or the market. While a familialistic regime assumes that family or household members have the duty to care for the needy, a de-familializing system provides financial and caring assistance in order to take the load off the family. Conservative welfare states are described as the most familialistic regimes, characterized by a very low degree of social policy that renders women autonomous to set up independent households.

Table 2.1: Unemployed youth living with parents in selected Western countries (1991-3)

	Unemployed youth living with parents as a (%) share of total (1991-3)
Liberal regimes:	
Canada	27
UK	35
USA	28
Social democratic regimes:	
Denmark	8
Norway	-
Sweden	-
Continental Europe:	
France	42
Germany	11
Netherlands	28
Southern Europe:	
Italy	81
Spain	63

Source: Esping-Andersen 1999.

Esping-Andersen proposes that "the intensity of familial welfare responsibilities can be measured by … the degree to which families absorb social burdens, such as … supporting adult children who, for reasons of unemployment, are unable to form independent households" (Esping-Andersen 1999: 62). Referring to Table 2.1, we observe that Italy is the country where most unemployed youth still live with their parents – about 81%. This percentage is higher than in all other countries considered by Esping-Andersen and provides evidence for the low degree of social support by the state. He describes Italy as a representative of the conservative welfare state, characterized by a state edifice that is ready to supplant the market as provider of welfare, and "shaped by the Church and hence strongly committed to the preservation of traditional familyhood" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27). The welfare system discourages female labor force participation and encourages motherhood. In conservative welfare states, the sector of family services and childcare (especially for children aged 0-3) is underdeveloped. And the principle of subsidiarity regulates that it is first the family who cares for needy individuals, followed by the state.

2.2.3.2 Institutional Fragmentation and Clientelism

Other scholars introduce a fourth type of welfare state in which they subsume the Mediterranean countries. Leibfried (1993), for instance, puts Spain, Portugal, Greece, southern Italy, and France together and marks them as countries of the "Latin Rim." These "rudimentary developed" welfare states would be characterized by the presence of the Catholic Church in the structures of the welfare state, by a low labor market participation of women, by a high importance of the agrarian sector, and by the lack of legal, institutional, and social realization of welfare promises.

Ferrera (1996) offers a more specific framework for the consideration of the Mediterranean welfare state. In his approach he concentrates on Italy, arguing that it would be characterized by four typical features: an institutional fragmentation, some universalistic elements, a low degree of welfare development, and a particular kind of clientelism. Institutional fragmentation refers to the high number of different social protection systems, depending on the condition in which employees are working (public versus private sector, kind of profession, self-employed, and so forth). Simultaneously, the Italian welfare state is marked by a precarious dualism. On the one hand, we would find hyper-protected welfare receivers, but on the other we would discover a high number of people who are only inadequately protected against social risks (the so-called *insider and outsider*). This is actually in line with Esping-Andersen's observations.

In addition, Ferrera considers the precariously developed welfare system of the Apennine peninsula. Although the Italian gross domestic product (GDP) corresponds to the European average, the composition of the various social allowances differs considerably. Considerably more than the European average of social payments is granted for old age and invalidity pensions – in 1998, they accounted for 61.6% of all social welfare benefits (Ferrera 1996, 1997; OECD) – while family benefits are neglected. In 1998, only 2.3% of all means were spent for family allowances and 1.2% for family services (OECD). Thus, old men who were employed during their working years receive most social welfare benefits. Within the Italian welfare system, women and young families are the underprivileged (Ferrera 1996). Actually, it was the clientelism described by Ferrera which contributed to this development. For many years, the former Christian Democrat party (*Democrazia Cristiana*) bought votes in the South of Italy by assuring that people would

receive pension allowances (*voto di scambio*). The Christian Democrats, who governed the country for decades, concentrated their political programs mainly on old working or retired men (Ferrera 1996).[3] Still today the Italian government accommodates more toward families with adult children than toward young adults. In November 2005, the Italian senate discussed, for instance, the possibility of supporting families with children who study in a city other than their hometown.[4] Instead of investing the financial means directly in students – a possibility that was not taken into account at all – politicians discussed whether to give these additional means to the parents. However, in this case, parents would have the power to decide whether their adult children would profit from this economic support or not. Since the demands of older people are still regarded more highly than the needs of young adults, the Italian welfare state can still be considered as clientelistic.

2.2.4 Labor Market Approach

Scholars see a direct link between demographic events in young adulthood and a country's labor market situation (see, for instance, Kohler et al. 2002). For Italy, studies have found evidence that successful entry into the labor market tends to accelerate household and union formation (Billari et al. 2000).

However, the Italian labor market is in an awkward disposition. Over the last two decades, several developments have increased insecurity among most Italians: a stagnant economy, the delocalization of medium-sized and small firms, and the increasing diffusion of precarious employment relations (Pisati and Schizzerotto 2003). One can identify two groups of employees that stand in direct contrast to each other: on the one hand, the older cohorts who still profit from the strong employment protection guarantees of the 1960s and 1970s, and on the other hand, the younger cohorts who are more prone to

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[3] In political sciences, the concept of "clientelism" has strongly gained in importance since the 1980s. Though patron–client relations were first considered only among countries of Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Third World countries, starting from the 1980s, political scientists have discovered the concept to fill important gaps in the earlier models of the politics of modern industrialized countries of Europe as well (Lande 1983). According to Roniger (2004), clientelism "involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange, a nonuniversalistic quid pro quo between individuals or groups of unequal standing. It implies mediated and selective access to resources and markets from which others are normally excluded. This access is conditioned on subordination, compliance or dependence on the goodwill of others. Those in control – patrons, subpatrons, and brokers – provide selective access to goods and opportunities and place themselves or their supporters in positions from which they can divert resources and services in their favor. Their partners – clients – are expected to return their benefactors' help, politically and otherwise, by working for them at election times or boosting their patrons' prestige and reputation" (Roniger 2004: 353-354).

[4] According to "Finanziaria maxiemendamento al Senato," *Corriere della Sera*, 12 November 2005.

unemployment and unstable job situations (Bernardi and Nazio 2005) – a development that has been described as the "gerontologization" of work (Sgritta 2002). Dietrich (2002) emphasizes that in nearly all European countries the probability of entering a job creation program would increase with duration of unemployment, but this seems not to be the case in Italy. On the contrary, Italy is characterized by a weak connection between the educational system and the labor market, which leads to a long and problematic school-to-work transition (Bernardi and Nazio 2005). In 2005, 36.8% of Italian people aged 15–19 were looking for a job; 21.1% of adults aged 20–24 and 13.1% of the 25–29 age group were similarly situated (ISTAT 2006a). Taking a closer look at the distribution of unemployment by age group and gender, we discover that the disadvantaged are mainly women and young adults in general (see Figure 2.1). In addition, the Italian welfare state protects only employed individuals and ignores those who are not yet successful in entering the labor market (Ferrera 1996).

Figure 2.1: Percentage of unemployment, by age group and gender, 2005
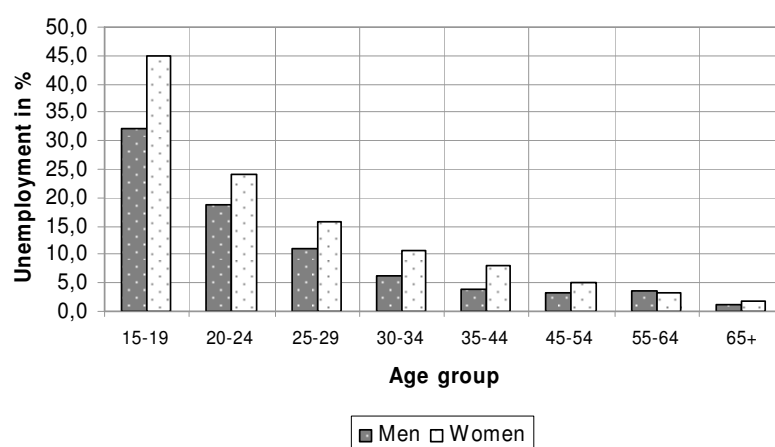
Source: ISTAT 2006a.

In their study on young Spaniards who, compared to young adults in Italy, live in a similar economic situation, Simó Noguera et al. (2005) analyze the effect of globalization on the transition to adulthood. They come to the conclusion that the risks and uncertainties associated with globalization, in particular those regarding occupation, "are not equally spread across all workers but have channeled toward those age groups which are precisely at the life cycle stage of family formation" (Simó Noguera et al. 2005: 380). Bernardi and Nazio (2005) argued as well that "when compared with their peers in other nations – possibly with the exception of Spain – Italian youngsters seem to be particularly exposed to

the new forms of insecurity brought about by the globalization process" (Bernardi and Nazio 2005: 351). Furthermore, Dolado et al. (2000) observe a process of crowding-out in which higher educated youth replaced less educated people in their traditional positions. In the absence of alternatives, young adults opt increasingly to stay longer in education. It has become rather common to "accumulate" one university degree after the other. However, unemployment and job insecurity among university graduates is high as well (ISTAT 2006a). Meanwhile, new types of employment contracts are increasingly prevalent: the so-called coordinated continuous collaborations (or "co.co.co"), contracts for a project ("co.pro") or freelance activities where people work as consultant or collaborator without any protection or security regarding the continuity of their work. Even if they are formally independent, these people occupy de facto subordinate positions (Bernardi and Nazio 2005; Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini 2007).

2.2.5 The Gender Perspective

A fifth approach contributing to the understanding of the hesitant diffusion of informal unions in Italy is the gender perspective: Scholars have argued that within the Western world, it is the welfare state that creates the living conditions for the family and for single individuals. This way, the welfare state prescribes the financial, legal, and cultural basis for the (gender-specific) division of work within and outside of the household (Saraceno 1994; Meyers et. al. 1999; Orloff 1996). As a result, the welfare system influences role-specific behavior of both men and women in many situations in life.

Bussemarker and van Kersbergen (1999) criticize, for instance, the fact that several welfare states are oriented toward the male-breadwinner model: In these countries, social benefits would be traditionally transferred through the head of the family, since they were intended to protect the whole family against the disruptive impact of the market and to replace the earnings of the male breadwinner. However, while this way family benefits grew over time, individual entitlements continue to be lacking. Thus, whereas the male breadwinner benefited – and still benefits – from these transfers, the principle of subsidiarity imposes the care for needy individuals to the whole family. Consequently, especially in the case of childcare and care for the elderly, women would be disadvantaged. Bussemarker and van Kersbergen (1999) show to what extent the whole system of social benefits is oriented toward a male-breadwinner model by considering tax schemes; they found that still today

the traditional family model is favored over dual-earner families. This unequal distribution of social benefits would penalize all women, and would become clearly discernible when they intend to live an autonomous life, for instance, in the event of divorce (Bussemarker and van Kersbergen (1999).

In a similar vein, Sainsbury (1999) analyzed the current gender system of Esping-Andersen's conservative welfare state. She found too, that the traditional assumptions about sexual division of work are still displayed today: The social insurance model, for instance, is based on work performance and the distributional principle of equivalence, which means that benefits and contributions should correspond to each other. However, as long as (unpaid) social responsibilities are mainly assigned to female family members, women are not able to pay earnings-related social contributions to an extent that allows them to benefit adequately.

Orloff (1993) investigated gender relations within welfare states in more detail. In doing so, she refers to the three dimensions that were first used by Esping-Andersen (1990) and Korpi (1989) to characterize the relationship between individuals and the different types of welfare regimes:

- the market-state relations dimension;
- the stratification dimension, and
- the social citizenship rights/ de-commodification dimension.

Orloff (1993) criticizes the fact that the role of gender is not taken into account in any of these dimensions – a deficit she wants to overcome by integrating the gender issue ex post: As regards the market–state relations dimension, Orloff (1993) claims that the concept of welfare provision should not only include services offered by the state or market, but also those provided by women. She is critical that, due to the lack of care services in conservative regimes, women are not able to choose between "staying at home" or "combining work and family." Women are simply constrained toward a "compulsory altruism" (Orloff 1993), as they are the main instrument of government intervention (Balbo 1984). Further, Orloff (1993) points to the power-imbalance of genders in policy, which still prevails in conservative welfare states. This imbalance allows men to control the distribution of resources and social services in the whole society. This fact has been underlined by other scholars as well: O'Connor (1993) criticizes the low incorporation of

women into political organizations. She argues that, whereas men have an organizational buffer between themselves and the authorities, such as trade unions, women have no lobby that articulates their interests.

As to the second dimension, the stratification dimension, Orloff (1993) finds fault that the situation of women not taken into account at all: In her view, women are disproportionally disadvantaged when benefits reflect work-related inequalities. This works through the higher privilege of full-time workers over part-time and homeworkers and through the reinforcement of the sexual division of work within the family. Moreover, employees in diverse sectors have different social rights and are protected in a different way – this applies especially to women working in small companies or shops (Saraceno 1994).

The social citizenship rights/de-commodification dimension refers to the degree to which individuals are freed from dependence on the market, especially in typical life situations. Orloff (1993) criticizes the de-commodification concept by Esping-Andersen and claims for extensions: In her view, the extent to which the state guarantees women access to paid work and care services, which enable them to combine family and work, should be integrated. Since the patterns of participation in paid and unpaid work differ by genders, benefits that de-commodify labor have a different effect on men and women.

In addition to these three dimensions, Orloff (1993) introduces two new ones: first, the access to paid work and second, the capacity to form and to maintain an autonomous household. She argues that, since conservative welfare states are characterized by a high number of women who depend economically on their husbands (especially when having children), it is an important option for mothers to have access to fully paid labor. From Orloffs (1993) point of view, especially lone mothers exemplify the economic vulnerabilities of all women: In contrast to men, these women have lower earning capacities and more responsibilities for their children. In Italy, lone mothers are not an official category in social policy. Single mothers are highly dependent on the market and have, in contrast to married mothers, much higher labor force participation rates (Bussemarker and van Kersbergen 1999).

Beside the importance of childcare services, Anttonen and Sipilä (1996) point to the role of women as providers of care for the elderly. In their study on several European countries,

they found that Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Italy are characterized by a common family care model. This model is actually marked by a very limited supply of social care services (with the exception of care for children aged 3–5 in Italy); by a substantial importance of the informal and grey market, by a high degree of regional variation in care provision and by a low number of employed women (only a minority of whom work part-time). Given the rise in life expectancy and the sharp reduction of children born, women will be constrained to take care of their parents for longer times than any previous generation. At the same time, these women will be asked to support their own daughters with childcare as well. Laslett et al. (1993) refer to these women, who will be in charge of both the older and the younger generation, as the "sandwich generation."

These intergenerational responsibilities are even more pronounced in societies where family plays a major role. In fact, recent research has increasingly pointed to the importance of the strength of family ties on union and family formation.

2.2.6 The Role of Family Ties and Religion

Italy's family system is characterized by strong regional and sub-regional heterogeneity. Considering the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, three different household formation systems have been identified: (1) high age at marriage, patrilocality, and complex family households in the northern regions of Italy; (2) early marriage for women, neolocality, and nuclear family households in the southern regions; and (3) late marriage for both sexes together with neolocality in Sardinia. The Sardinian pattern is somewhat surprising, since the island is part of a quintessentially Mediterranean region (Viazzo 2003), and the pattern is probably due to the social obligation to be living on a self-sufficient basis at the time of marriage – this applied to both Sardinian men and women (Oppo 1992).

Despite these differences, it has been argued that all Mediterranean countries would have one common characteristic: the prevalence of strong family ties. Reher (1998) distinguishes between areas of weak and of strong family ties. Whereas weak ties would be dominant in the northern part of Europe, strong ties would be a particular characteristic of southern Europe, more precisely of the Mediterranean region. Reher argues that "the way in which the relationship between the family group and its members manifest itself has implications

for the way society itself functions" (Reher 2004: 45). Using the examples of home leaving and support for the elderly, he describes the way this mechanism works. In the Mediterranean regions, young adults would not be accustomed to solving economic difficulties on their own; they would rather leave it to the entire family group to deal with these problems.

Within the debate on modernization, another important aspect emerges: the impact of religion on the change of family formation patterns. Reher states that the Reformation had an important influence on the development of individualism in the northern countries of Europe, while Catholicism, "based on paternal authority and family loyalties" (Reher 2004: 59), contributed to the continuation of hierarchical structures. Apart from Italy, other Catholic countries witness rather traditional union and family formation patterns too. Mynarska and Bernardi (2007) showed that, for instance, for Poland. Höllinger and Haller (1990) argued that it is not the Roman Catholic family morality per se which determines the traditional view of family. It is rather the connection between the Roman Catholic Church and the socio-cultural pattern of close kin ties in southern Europe which explains the low dynamism of the Mediterranean region. Dalla Zuanna (2001) discovers a relationship between Roman Catholic belief and prevailing family patterns as well: he suspected that Catholic values are filtered by the familistic way of life, and thus Catholicism has reinforced familism, and vice versa.

2.3 Understanding the Development of Cohabitation in Italy

2.3.1 Italy in the Context of Europe's Second Demographic Transition

The extent to which Italy follows the path toward the second demographic transition has been discussed widely in social and population research. The country indeed witnessed a sharp decline in fertility rates – an important feature of the transition. Other characteristics, however, are hardly observable or even not at all. As we have seen in Chapter 1, marriage is still the dominant form of union formation, and cohabitation as well as other kinds of alternative living arrangements (such as living alone, single parenthood, or patch-work families) gain little or even very little importance. The same is true for divorce.

Nonetheless, Van de Kaa (1987, 2001, 2004) and Lesthaeghe (1991) continue to see Italy and the Mediterranean countries in general as following the path of the second demographic transition. Van de Kaa feels confident that, as societies develop and peoples cultural representations change, "a second demographic transition will inevitably follow" (Van de Kaa 2001: 325). Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (2004) admit that on the one hand, Southern Europe follows the overall postponement trends in nuptiality and fertility, but nevertheless misses a part of the SDT package: i.e. early home leaving combined with independent single living or pre-marital cohabitation as well as pre-marital child birth. Still, both authors are convinced that there will be "also a take-off of non-traditional household forms in Italy" (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2004: 12). In a recent paper, the authors argue that Italy is well on the way toward the transition, since we would observe a rise in the country's proportion of extra-marital births (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008). Though it is true that levels of out-of-wedlock births are increasing in Italy, we doubt that this justifies describing the country as experiencing the transition. First of all, we do not know how many of these children are born to cohabiting couples and how many of them to lone mothers. Secondly, it is not clear whether cohabiting couples who become parents decide for marriage shortly after the birth of a child. Given the fact that in Italy childbirth and marriage are strongly interrelated life-course events, this assumption cannot be excluded. In this case, non-marital childbirth is likely to have a different meaning than in other European countries. Gabrielli and Hoem (2008) argue that a take-off toward the second demographic transition includes people facing a higher risk for cohabitation than for marriage as their first union. In their recent study, the authors show that this is not the case in Italy.

Barbagli et al. (2003) suppose that two factors are related to the so far hesitant spread of cohabitation in Italy. First of all, they argue that it is the Italian welfare state that hampers the diffusion of pre-marital cohabitation: The lack of state support for young adults who are at an economically difficult stage in their life (be it through university attendance or unemployment) would be an obvious obstacle for the development of informal unions. Another reason for the low diffusion of cohabitation would be the strong impact of social opinions toward this kind of union, which would have been negative for a long time and which would be obstructive even today.

Both factors were much less relevant or even nonexistent, when cohabitation started to diffuse in other European countries. In our view, these unequal conditions contribute

toward diversity of cohabitation patterns among European countries. Moreover, in their study on cohort dynamics in the transition to adulthood in contemporary western Europe, Billari and Wilson (2001) show that instead of an inter-country convergence, more evidence is found toward the persistence of national differences or toward greater diversity. They suggest that policy, culture, and path dependence of institutions are responsible for the unequal demographic development of countries.

Though many scholars expect cohabitation to further increase in Italy, they argue for the development of specific characteristics of this kind of union in the country. Rosina (2004), for instance, assumes that the spread of pre-marital cohabitation does not lead to the overall European pattern. Rather a special kind of Mediterranean cohabitation would develop, where the importance of marriage persists. Dalla Zuanna and Micheli (2004) even doubt that Italy will witness a second demographic transition à la western Europe. They believe that although the same processes have affected all European countries, they have different effects in Italy:

"Over the last 30–40 years, the same social processes have affected the whole of the West: reinforcement of extra-domestic roles of the women, increase in prosperity and consumption, emphasis on post-materialist values. These processes have weakened the social significance of the conjugal bond everywhere. However, in the lands of the strong family, these processes have come up against the familist social structure, which has managed – at least in part – to slow them down and modify their effect in terms of demographic behavior. For example, in weak-family regions, the loss of meaning of the institution of marriage has translated into an increase in cohabitation, while in Italy and on the Iberian Peninsula, on the other hand, children remain in their parents' family even beyond the third decade of life" (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004: 18).

Thus, according to Dalla Zuanna and Micheli (2004), the second demographic transition approach is not very convincing for the Italian case. Our study aims, in fact, at contributing to the ongoing discussion on the value of that approach for the study of recent demographic developments in the country.

However, as we believe that both institutional and cultural factors are the main forces behind the hesitant diffusion of cohabitation in Italy, in the following sections of this thesis, we will maintain the importance of these approaches for the consideration of the development of informal unions in the country.

2.3.2 The Impact of Formal and Informal Institutions

In the past, studies relied mainly on economic and institutional determinants as explanatory factors for demographic behavior. Only recently have scholars increasingly made demands on integrating new aspects, such as culture, history, gender, and power (Greenhalgh 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997). Greenhalgh (1990) actually coined the phrase "political economy" to characterize an institutional perspective, which "directs attention to the embeddedness of community institutions in structures and processes, especially political and economic ones, operating at regional, national, and global levels, and to the historical roots of those macro-micro linkages" (Greenhalgh 1990: 87). Her approach aims at a more comprehensive explanation of demographic change that integrates not only social and economic, but also political and cultural aspects. It is within the aim of our analysis to follow this path: to analyze, on the one hand, economic constraints that confront young adults and their impact on informal union formation, and to investigate, on the other hand, the influence cultural factors have on the decision for cohabitation. The distinction we employ here is the one of *formal* and *informal institutions*. Whereas formal institutions are generally created and arranged by agents (law, political systems, economy), informal institutions do not rely on an external authority's monitoring (social norms, conventions) (Voss 2001).

2.3.2.1 Formal Institutions

Both, Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) and Ferrera (1996) describe the Italian welfare state as familialistic since the family is regarded as main provider of social security. It is not so clear, however, whether people are "compelled to strengthen their family ties in order to adapt themselves to a welfare system they are certainly not capable of changing, or [whether] the welfare system has adjusted to a society based on strong family ties?" (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004: 11).

The result, though, is the same: In the absence of adequate social welfare benefits, the members of a family depend on each other throughout their life. This is especially true for young adults. The lack of welfare state protection, e.g. in the case of unemployment, results in a high level of economic dependence on the family. Thus, in contrast to young people

living in northern or western Europe, young Italians lack a substantial basis for financial independence.

Bearing in mind that the Italian labor market is strongly shaped by insecure, low-paid and precarious employment as well as high rates of youth unemployment, the situation for young adults is even worse: Actually, in a society where work becomes more and more insecure and contracts are given only for short periods, the importance of the family as a safety net increases significantly. It is not surprising, then, that these adults tend to depend on their parents, even at the age threshold that once was considered as the entry into independent adult life. The consequences of these processes are dramatic: Italian adults tend to leave home at a higher age than any others in Europe, so high in fact that Billari (2004) refers to this group as the "latest-late." As we have seen in Chapter 1, the postponement of leaving home results in a delayed entry into union and transition to parenthood, with severe effects on fertility rates.

In addition, young adults are confronted with a tense housing market: Housing property as well as extraordinary high renting costs – especially in the metropolitan centers of the North – are typical characteristics of the country. Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda (2002) argued that in southern Europe the diffusion of alternative living arrangements is also hampered by the prevalence of these housing market characteristics. According to their reasoning, in the Netherlands 92% of single and 81% of cohabiting entrants rent a flat. The rigid structure of the Mediterranean housing market, however, hinders a similar pattern. In Spain they identify "young people from more privileged backgrounds with greater accumulation of human capital" (Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002: 15), who can afford *not to buy* and thus have greater flexibility to decide for cohabitation.

On the basis of these insights, we assume that young adults face significant barriers when intending to form a non-marital union. The lack of social security, the dominance of insecure, low-paid, and precarious employment as well as extraordinarily high renting costs and limited numbers of rentable units hinders young adults from making the transition out of the parental home and into their own independent living. For that reason, we shall focus on the Italian labor and housing market as those formal institutions that are supposed to very strongly restrict entry into cohabitation.

2.3.2.2 Informal Institutions

A number of scholars have criticized the structure of Italy's familialistic welfare state as it delegates major responsibilities to women and much less so to men. Women face, for instance, huge difficulties combining work and family life as they are penalized by the lack of public childcare services (Saraceno 1994; Meyers et al. 1999).

Figure 2.2 displays the rate of female labor force participation in selected European countries. In Italy, we observe a relatively low rate (37.1% in 2003 as compared to 60.0% in Norway or 59.5% in Denmark). In addition to the lack childcare opportunities, the lack of part-time jobs and flexible work schedules makes it difficult for women to combine both parts of life (Pisati and Schizzerotto 2003; Moreno Mìngues 2003; Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004).

Figure 2.2: Female labor force participation in selected European countries, 2003
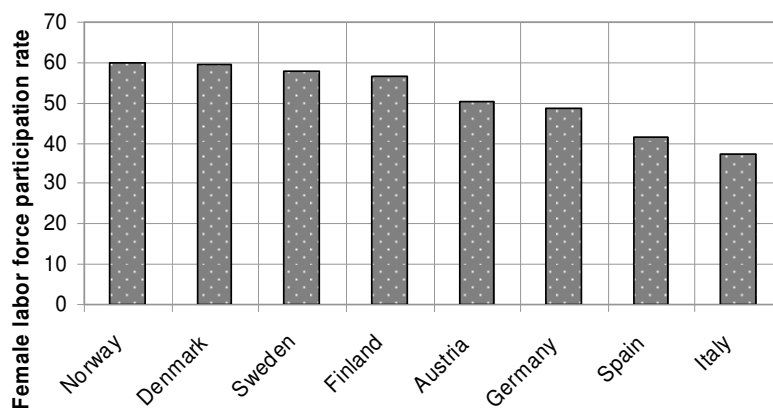
Source: OECD Statistics 2006.

Rather than appreciating the care performed by women, the Italian welfare state offers only flat rate benefits that are related to childcare. This way "women provide care to others but are less likely to be eligible for benefits to pay for their own care" (Sainsbury 1999: 255). As a consequence, women with care responsibilities not only lose current earnings but are also excluded from social insurance schemes and thus have also higher risks of poverty in their older ages. King (2002) considers the Italian welfare state as patriarchal, as it concentrates its income and social support on older married men, while disregarding family services for women. Trifiletti (1999) argues in a similar way: Through the insufficient protection of

working women and the support of the male-breadwinner model, the state achieves control over the paid and unpaid work of women.

As a consequence of the scarce number of services that allow for a reconciliation of work and family, women are often constrained to leave the labor market when giving birth to a child or when taking care of the elderly. In doing so, they lose a wide range of social rights that are strongly oriented toward labor market participation. This way, women become economically dependent on the family's breadwinner. This situation has an effect on cohabitation too: Women who abandon their employment position in order to raise a child tend to be better protected within marriage than within cohabitation. For that reason, we assume mothers to prefer marriage over cohabitation.

A second factor supposed to be responsible for the so far hesitant diffusion of cohabitation in the country is the prevalence of strong family ties. It has been argued that these strong ties would cause a marked material and emotional involvement of parents in the lives of their adult children. Parents would consider the success of their children as a consequence of their far-sighted family strategy and would see their children as extensions of themselves. Consequently, adult children would have to rely on prevailing traditions, norms, and values when making choices (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). Rosina (2004) argues, for instance, that adults may only decide for a new living arrangement, if their family accepts this choice. Since parents would consider the failures of their children as their own ones, they would try do discourage their offspring doing socially not accepted things. Cohabiting adults might be "punished" with less generous help (Di Giulio and Rosina 2004; Holdsworth and Iraoqui Solda 2002).

In his comparative review of intergenerational transfers, Kohli (2004) finds that most transfers are inter vivos transfers that flow from the older to the younger generations. Variations between different institutional regimes may occur through different legal and normative obligations, different needs for family transfers and different opportunities and restrictions. In Italy, for instance, normative obligations to support the family are rather strong. The principle of subsidiarity, on the other hand, increases the need for family support. Since parents transact such high investments on their children, they want to have "successful" and "socially accepted" offspring.

The strong influence of parents is also due to the Italian housing situation and the resulting proximity among family members. Because of the "predominance of closed, densely built-up types of settlements in small towns and rural areas" (Höllinger and Haller 1990: 114) a high percentage of young and even older adults live near their parental home. This applies to more than 70% of adults in rural areas (Höllinger and Haller 1990). Given these circumstances, parents have better opportunities to influence the way of life of their children than parents in other European countries. Tomassini et al. (2003) assume that it is a conscious decision of young adults to live near their parents' home, since parents may serve as a low-cost and high-quality source of childcare and offer help even before children are born.

Clearly, in Italy we observe a strong exchange of goods and services among families. Adult offspring receive transfers not only in their youth, but also after marriage and even when having children. The economic help of parents contributes to an important extent to the family's income (Barbagli 1997; Tuorto 2002). Consequently, adults may tend to avoid disputes with their parents in order to secure financial means that are probably necessary for them.

The role of strong ties, however, seems to be also important for the process of diffusion per se. According to Granovetter (1973), innovations diffuse less efficiently in areas with strong ties rather than weak. Bearing this assumption in mind, we can suggest that, in the Mediterranean countries, even the diffusion of new living arrangements may be hampered by strong family ties.

Furthermore, the country is strongly shaped by catholic values and moral concepts: Italy has been governed by the *Democrazia Cristiana* for half a century. And even today the Vatican continues to comment about Italy's political and cultural developments. Given this situation as well as the high number of Catholics in the country, it is not surprising that public opinions on cohabitation tend to be negative. This too has an effect on the spread of these unions.

2.4 Conclusion

The approaches we have described provide an extensive foundation for the consideration of non-marital unions in Italy. Table 2.2 presents the corresponding summary.

Table 2.2: Summary of approaches

Formal Institutions	
Welfare state approach	Through the familialistic structure of the welfare state and the low degree of welfare development, the family is obliged to support its members. The precarious dualism of the welfare state protects young adults only inadequately against social risks and disregards their interests.
Labor market approach	Insecure, low-paid, and precarious employment affects mainly the youth, leading to high rates of youth unemployment and high levels of economic insecurity.
Housing market	Given the prevalence of housing property and extraordinary high renting costs, young adults face significant barriers in finding adequate and affordable housing.
Informal Institutions	
Gender approach	The familialistic structure of the Italian welfare regime has an unequal effect on gender relations: Whereas men are considered as breadwinners, women are assumed to be responsible for child rearing, housework, and care for needy individuals. Consequently, women are not supported by the state in fulfilling these responsibilities; that is, the state offers only limited opportunities for reconciling work and family life. Thus, especially mothers are constrained to leave the labor market and to depend de facto on their husbands.

Role of family ties and religion	Given the strong interdependencies within the Italian family, young adults feel compelled to accommodate their parents' wishes when taking important decisions, such as entering into cohabitation. Due to economic dependencies young adults can only decide to cohabit if parents agree with that choice.
	However, given the strong importance of Catholic values and moral concepts, public opinion toward cohabitation is rather negative.

From these theoretical considerations, we see that the failure of both the market and the state assign major responsibilities to the family. As economic means tend to be pooled among the family – and especially concentrated in the parents – the family gains power and has effective means to bring pressure to bear upon young adults. Figure 2.3 illustrates the interplay of all these factors on young adults' choices for cohabitation.

Figure 2.3: Interplay of formal and informal institutions and their impact on cohabitation in Italy (based on theoretical considerations)
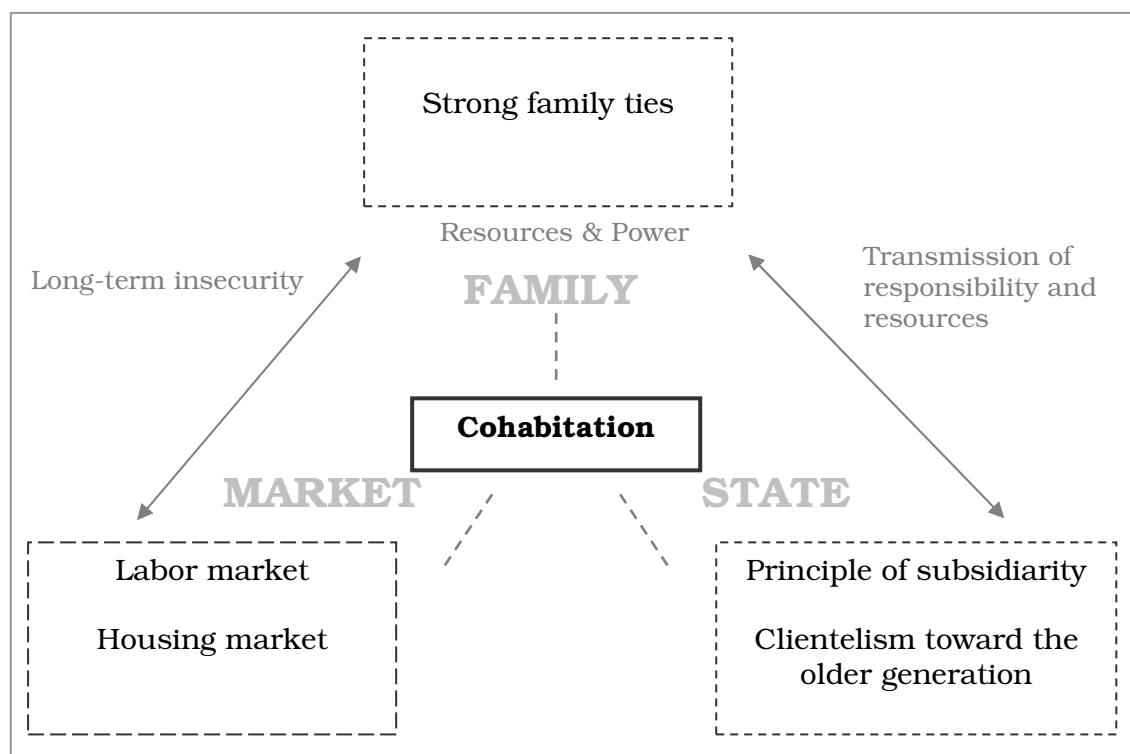
With regard to our categorization, both the state and the market might be perceived as formal institutions, whereas the family might be seen as an informal institution. Given the

fact that the formal institutions (market and state) fail to provide the economic structure for independent living of young adults, the importance of informal institutions increases considerably.

The question that inevitably emerges is: Which are the people who decide for cohabitation despite all the problems and obstacles involved, and why do they do so? According to the approaches discussed here, we assume that especially adults coming from families with a stronger economic background and with more tolerant values (e.g. better educated parents) are prone to enter a non-marital union. These adults might tend to be higher educated as well. They probably have more broadminded attitudes toward modern living arrangements and toward gender roles in general.

However, some people might also face significant difficulties realizing a non-marital union: couples who suffer more economic problems and couples who have to defend their decision for cohabitation in a more persistent way. Apart from the fact that less educated women are starting to enter non-marital unions, there seems to be some evidence that the meaning of cohabitation is also starting to change. Especially in the urban centers of northern Italy, higher educated women decide for cohabitation as an alternative to any other living arrangement (Rossi 2003). With the slow but steady diffusion of cohabitation, not only higher educated and more economic independent adults decide for such a union, but even people from other social groups. Since cohabitation tends to expand – at least partly – the society may accept informal unions more often than in past times. The more this process develops, the more parents might consider supporting their cohabiting children. An increase of autonomy and individuality would be the result. As to the diffusion of life-course choices in southern Europe, Kohler et al. (2002) stressed an interesting point. With reference to the postponement of first child birth, they argued, "the behavioral change of the innovators has an indirect effect on the incentives and normative context of fertility decisions in the population in general, and this indirect effect makes it more likely that others will adopt the new behavior as well" (Kohler et al. 2002: 658). Moreover, the authors of this study stress that once the transition has started, the population will experience a rapid and persistent delay in the timing of childbearing. This might actually be the case for cohabitation as well: Once a certain threshold is reached, a high number of young adults may follow the path toward cohabitation. Figures of unmarried couples would rise in a more rapid way than in other countries.

However, as a consequence of prevailing traditional attitudes, young Italian couples who enter cohabitation are likely to modify their living arrangement in a way that fits better with prevalent patterns of family formation in Italy. In order to accommodate their parents' wishes, couples may, for instance, enter cohabitation simultaneously with an engagement. That might be true especially for southern regions of Italy and the Islands. This way, cohabitation tends to be in itself a promise toward marriage, rather than a trial. This could explain why a large proportion of non-marital unions convert into marriages. Further, when analyzing these relationships it will be interesting to examine, whether gender role attitudes among these couples are as liberal as among couples, who perceive their informal union as a real trial. We suppose that gender roles among those couples who already know that they will marry within some months, are less equal than those of couples who still prove their relationship. All these peculiarities might contribute to the development of a specific Mediterranean type of cohabitation in Italy.

Part II

Empirical Investigations

Chapter 3
Research Questions and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

On the basis of the theoretical elaborations we presented in Chapter 2, we shall define in this chapter the research questions and describe the methodological approach of the study. Section 3.2 deals with the systematic presentation of the questions to be addressed in the analysis. Again, we refer to the impact of formal and informal institutions on non-marital union formation. In Section 3.3, we present the research design and justify the approach we use for the study.

3.2 Research Questions

The main focal point of our research is to understand the so far hesitant diffusion of informal unions in Italy. Previous studies have pointed to different explanations for that development. As described in Chapter 2, several studies have found, for instance, that unfavorable structural conditions are responsible for a postponement of events related to the transition to adulthood (Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002, Aassve et al. 2000; Rossi 1997). Other studies show that parents play a decisive role when young adults decide between a traditional living arrangement, such as marriage, and a modern one, such as cohabitation (Reher 1998; Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). In the previous chapter, we subsumed these possible hampering factors under the concept of formal and informal institutions.

Bearing in mind that for a long time informal unions were rare in Italy and that this kind of living arrangement started to spread only recently, we are interested in investigating the reasons for that particular pace of acceptance. Are the *prevailing formal and informal institutions* the main cause of that development? Or might a *different meaning attached to cohabitation and marriage* be responsible for this pace too? Our findings will also contribute to the ongoing discussion on Italy as a latecomer to the second demographic transition. If prevailing formal and informal institutions were responsible for the hesitant diffusion of cohabitation,

a change in these institutions (e.g. a relaxation of the labor market or the development of a positive evaluation of cohabitation in society) might lead to an increase of non-marital unions. In this case, Italy would truly follow the path toward a second demographic transition. However, if different meanings attached to cohabitation and marriage were responsible for the slow development of non-marital unions, marriage would keep its central place even though conditions to form an informal union improved. In this case, predictions of the second demographic transition approach would not hold.

Actually, little is known about the way these factors – that is, formal and informal institutions as well as perceptions and meaning attached to union formation – influence young adults when they are about to decide on cohabitation. As most studies rely on a quantitative research design only, they are not able to shed light on the motivations of young adults when entering cohabitation or marriage. Furthermore, existing studies fail to highlight the whole spectrum of factors that might influence the choice of an informal union.

In order to overcome these limitations and to shed light on the phenomenon of cohabitation in Italy to the greatest possible extent, our research objective is twofold:

First, we want to measure the occurrence of cohabitation and the extent to which factors such as employment, education, region, and social origin influence the transition to cohabitation as compared to direct marriage in Italy. To do so we use the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* (ILFI) of 1997 and 1999. As we are interested in the impact of factors that may change over time – among others, education and occupation – we employ event history techniques.

Secondly, we aim at investigating the *process of decision-making* about cohabitation in more detail. To that end, we employ qualitative research methods and conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews. As the regions of Italy show differing paces in the diffusion of informal unions, we are particularly interested in the reason for these unequal developments. Thus, based on theoretical assumptions and previous studies, we pay particular attention to the question: *To what extent do institutional conditions, economic constraints, and cultural ideas influence individual decision-making for cohabitation in the North and South of Italy?*

Institutional conditions and economic constraints refer to factors such as the welfare state structure of the country, the high rates of youth unemployment, and tight housing – thus on *formal institutions*. Previous studies have shown that all these factors cause a remarkable delay in the transition to adulthood (Billari 2004; Aassve et al. 2000; Rossi 1997).

With respect to cultural ideas, we are interested in motivations, norms, and values impacting the entry into cohabitation – thus in *informal institutions*. Among other things, we focus especially on the influence of the family of origin on young adults' choices for cohabitation. Researchers so far have assumed that traditionally strong family ties between parents and their adult children have been responsible for the slow spread of extra-marital unions (Reher 1998; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007; Rosina and Fraboni 2004). We hypothesize that both the weakness of the Italian welfare state and the unfavorable conditions of the labor market reinforce the power parents have on decisions of their adult children. Thus, we aim at investigating whether and how parents influence young adults' choices for cohabitation.

Furthermore, as regards the influence of cultural ideas,[5] we want to clarify whether and to what extent additional factors impact the choice for cohabitation, among them Catholic beliefs, friends' opinions toward cohabitation, and gender inequalities between the couple. Earlier research found, for instance, that cohabiters tend to have higher degrees of autonomy and that they share domestic duties more equally than married couples (Sabbadini 1997; Zanatta 2003). Consequently, the role behavior of cohabiting couples appears to be quite different from that of formal unions. Nonetheless, there seem to be traditional behavioral patterns and norms that are more or less binding for individuals in both kinds of unions. The rite of a Catholic wedding seems to be of importance not only for couples who proceed directly to marriage, but also for cohabiters.

Accordingly, as a further point, we are interested in the transition from cohabitation to marriage. The actual transition might be a sequential decision or a decision that was taken even before entering cohabitation. As in Italy, couples tend to pass to marriage especially when giving birth to a child (Billari and Kohler 2005; Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992; Golini

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[5] Within sociological and anthropological studies different concepts of culture coexist. In his paper on "A Theory of Culture for Demography" Hammel (1990) makes a distinction between *culture as content, culture as identifier, culture as pattern, culture as expression* and *culture as a negotiated set of understandings*. Whereas some concepts emphasize the active role of individuals within society, other approaches take passive behaviour as a basis.

1999), we shall pay particular attention to the motivations behind the choice to enter into marriage after having experienced cohabitation. So we aim to gain further insights into the interrelationship between cohabitation, childbirth, and marriage. Moreover, we concentrate on the commonalities and/or differences that might persist in the meaning, perception, and expectations of cohabitation and marriage. Again, our aim is to contrast the situations in the North and the South.

3.3 The Mixed-Method Design of the Study

As explained earlier, our research strategy is based on both *survey data analysis* as well as *qualitative in-depth interviews*. We thus employ a mixed-method design to investigate the phenomenon of cohabitation in Italy from different angles, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

However, this approach is far from nonproblematic: Since the beginning of the twentieth century, social and behavioral sciences have witnessed an ongoing "paradigm war" (Kelle 2001: 1) between proponents of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Whereas the latter profess "the superiority of 'deep, rich' observational data," the former emphasize "the virtues of 'hard, generalizable' survey data" (Sieber 1973: 1335). The strengths of quantitative methods are seen in their ability to produce "factual, reliable outcome data that are usually generalizable to some larger populations," whereas qualitative methods are strong in generating "rich, detailed, valid process data that usually leave the study participants' perspectives intact" (Steckler et al. 1992: 2). For many decades, scholars held the view that the two paradigms are incompatible with each other (Howe 1988). It has been argued that the two approaches are based on different views of reality: the quantitative paradigm being that only one truth exists independently of human perception, and the qualitative paradigm assuming multiple realities are based on individuals' constructions of reality (Sale et al. 2002).

Only recently, social and behavioral researchers have started to argue in favor of combining both approaches (e.g. Mayring 2001; Fielding and Schreier 2001; Jick 1979). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), for instance, bring forward the argument that there are more similarities between both perspectives than there are differences. Researchers of both approaches incorporate safeguards in order to minimize bias; they attempt to triangulate their data, use

analytical techniques designed to maximize meaning from data, attempt to provide explanations of findings utilize techniques to verify data, and try to explain complex relationships that exist in the social science field. Mayring (2001) underlines that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, qualitative and quantitative approaches are no longer opposed to each other. The combination of both perspectives instead allows for using and relying on the strengths of the two paradigms. Mayring (2001) argues that both approaches may in fact profit from each other: Quantitative research might gain in openness toward the object of research and might take a step toward challenging concepts as well as hypotheses to a stronger extent. Qualitative research, in contrast, might obtain a higher level of transparency, which would allow for a stronger intersubjective traceability.

The extent to which both approaches complement one another becomes evident when considering the role of theory in qualitative and quantitative research. Whereas qualitative studies aim at *theory building*, quantitative research is targeted on *theory testing* and *theory modification*. Hence "neither tradition is independent of the other, nor can either school encompass the whole research process. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative research techniques are needed to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena" (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005: 380). Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) propose a re-conceptualization of both perspectives. Both authors suggest subdividing research into *exploratory* and *confirmatory* methods in order to unite qualitative and quantitative research under the same framework.

The advantages of *mixed-method designs* are recurrently emphasized in recent literature. Two basic arguments prevail: The first argument refers to the achievement of cross-validation or triangulation, that is mixed-method studies are assumed to complete our understanding of a phenomenon. The second argument regards the achievement of complementary results by using the strengths of one approach to enhance the other (Sale et al. 2002). A third – and less emphasized – argument is found in the fact that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for investigating a phenomenon from two perspectives, namely from the micro and the macro perspectives (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005).

Steckler et al. (1992) refer to four different ways that permit the integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods into one common research design: (1) Qualitative methods are used to help develop quantitative measures and instruments; (2) qualitative

methods are used to help explain quantitative findings; (3) quantitative methods are used to embellish a primarily qualitative study; and (4) qualitative and quantitative methods are used equally and in parallel.

Independent of the concrete research design, Greene et al. (1989, cited in Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) emphasize five broad purposes of mixed methodological studies: *triangulation* (seeking convergence of results from different methods), *complementarity* (seeking clarification of results coming from one method with the findings from the other method), *development* (using the findings from one method to help inform the other method), *initiation* (discovering contradictions that lead to a re-framing of the research question), and *expansion* (seeking to expand the breadth and range of inquiry).

In sociological and demographic studies, the importance of mixed methodological research approaches is in fact rising. Bernardi and Hutter (2007), for instance, point to the increasing role of anthropological theory and methods in the field of demography, paying particular attention to family and fertility research. An example of this kind of study is the work of Bledsoe et al. (2007). The authors combined municipal register data with exploratory fieldwork to study high-fertility Gambians in low-fertility Spain. Another example is the research by Rossier (2007). On the basis of ethnographic literature and qualitative studies, she used representative surveys to investigate attitudes toward abortion and contraception in Burkina Faso.

In our study, we aim to take advantage of the combination of both methodological paradigms. We believe in the capacity of integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods for gaining deeper insights into the phenomenon of cohabitation development in Italy. Accordingly, we employ two different methods to investigate one phenomenon. In doing so, we make use of both methods equally. However, as the two approaches refer to different kinds of research questions (as described above, the qualitative approach aiming at exploring data, and the quantitative approach targeting the confirmation of theories), we use each approach to investigate a different problem: Whereas survey data analysis aims at measuring the effect of several *individual and background characteristics* on informal union formation, in-depth interviews form the basis for analyzing the underlying *motivations, perceptions, and attitudes* that are relevant to entering cohabitation. In our study, we use each method separately, which means that the separate quantitative and qualitative analysis will

be followed by a combination of findings combing from both investigations. We hope that the findings from one approach will help us understand the results from the other approach. This way, we expect to gain a deeper understanding of cohabitation diffusion in Italy than one method alone would permit.

3.4 Conclusion

As explained in this chapter, the research objective of our study is twofold. We first aim at investigating the factors that impact the transition to cohabitation in Italy by relying on survey data from the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* (ILFI) of 1997 and 1999. Secondly, we use qualitative, in-depth interviews to detect the underlying motivations, norms, and values relevant to decision-making in favor of cohabitation. We decided on this mixed methodological approach in order to enhance our understanding of cohabitation development in Italy to the greatest extent possible.

Our analysis will be structured as follows: In Chapter 4, we describe the way the survey data were used and analyzed, and present our quantitative research findings. Chapter 5 deals with the qualitative research design, while Chapters 6 to 9 are devoted to the results coming from that analysis. In Chapter 10, we combine the quantitative and qualitative findings and discuss each in relation to the other.

Chapter 4

Measuring the Impact of Education on Entry into Cohabitation in Italy[6]

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we turn to our first research objective, that is, measuring the effect of a number of individual characteristics (such as the level of education and educational enrollment) and family background factors (such as the effect of the father's and the mother's education) on women's propensity to enter a non-marital union. Previous research found that it is especially the level of education that has a strong effect on the transition to cohabitation. Rosina and Fraboni (2004), for example, argue that women coming from families with more highly educated fathers tend to be forerunners in the development of informal unions in northern Italy. Using the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* of 1997 and 1999, we aim to test this assumption. We therefore calculate multiplicative intensity models for (i) entry into cohabitation as a first relationship and (ii) direct marriage, of women born between 1940 and 1974.

In Section 4.2 we discuss our hypotheses. Section 4.3 is devoted to the quantitative research design as well as the data and model used for the analysis. Thereafter, we present the results from our investigation and focus in particular on the effect of individual and parental education. We conclude this chapter with a summary of findings, in Section 4.5.

4.2 Hypotheses

Data show that cohabitation figures have increased slightly in Italy. The phenomenon has gained in importance among the relatively educated, relatively secularized, and relatively autonomous youth living in less traditional contexts, such as large cities in northern Italy (Rosina 2004; Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Rossi 2003; De Sandre et al. 1997). Furthermore, women with a religious affiliation seem to have an attitude toward marriage that is more positive since the morality of Roman Catholic families does not allow for pre-marital

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[6] A slightly different version of the chapter has been published as a research article:
Schröder, Christin (2006). Cohabitation in Italy – Do parents matter? In: *Genus* 62 (3-4): 53-85.

cohabitation (Manting 1996, with reference to Halman 1991; Castiglioni 1999). In addition, there is evidence that informal unions in Italy and Spain usually involve people who are economically relatively independent (Billari et al. 2000; Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002; Grillo and Pinelli 1999). As far as age at entry into cohabitation is concerned, Kiernan (1999) stresses that among western European countries, women as well as men tend to enter informal unions in their early and late twenties, and the proportion of cohabiting unions is lower in the thirties. As regards Italy, we find that an unusually high percentage of women tend to avoid entry into any kind of union, at least in their twenties (Kiernan 1999). In line with this observation, Barbagli et al. (2003) argue that the pre-conditions for marriage (having a stable job, owning a house, and having a stable relationship) apply to entry into cohabitation, too. As a consequence, cohabitation in Italy is a living arrangement more typical of older young adults than of younger ones. In accordance with these suggestions, De Sandre et al. (1997) found an increase in the median age at entry into any type of union among younger generations in Italy.

We are mainly interested in the effect of education on the entry into cohabitation, however. First, we consider the impact of the educational level and educational attendance of women. Second, we focus on the educational degree of both parents. In doing so, we want to explore whether it is only individual education that has an impact on the development of cohabitation in Italy or whether family background factors matter, too.

With regard to our main interest, previous studies reveal that women with a higher level of education decide more often to enter informal union than do women with a lower educational level (Rossi 2003; Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Angeli el al. 1999).[7] Whereas there is little direct association between the educational level and the probability to marry, we do find that this connection applies to cohabitation (Kiernan 1999). For the Italian case, the level of education might be seen as a proxy for the relative openness toward modern behavior, such as non-marital union formation. Moreover, Kiernan (2000) argues that the link between being in full-time education and entering cohabitation is not so clear-cut and varies across nations. Recent research finds that in Italy the completion of studies has a positive impact on entry into cohabitation (De Sandre et al. 1997; Billari et al. 2000;

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[7] For Italy, there is one minor exception to this: Some decades ago, poor couples in the South and on the islands of the Apennine peninsula who could not afford to marry left heir home villages in order to set up home together with their partners (the so-called "fuitine"). Trost (1978) describes the same phenomenon, referring to poor people in Sweden who move from rural to urban areas: This is called the phenomenon of "Stockholm marriages."

Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002). Even though educational enrollment reduces the probability of forming any kind of union, when a student enters a union, it is more likely to be a cohabitation than a marriage (Baizán et al. 2001). With reference to the high level of economic dependence on the family, we assume that women decide increasingly to enter cohabitation when they are relatively independent of their family, i.e. when they have completed school or university. In line with these assumptions, our first hypothesis is:

H1: Women who have reached a high level of education have a higher risk of entering informal union than do women with a lower educational level. Furthermore, being enrolled in education has a negative impact on the propensity to experience transition to cohabitation.

As far as family background factors are concerned, previous research has found a connection between the diffusion of non-marital unions among women and the educational level of their fathers. Rosina and Fraboni (2004) argue that the low diffusion of cohabitation in Italy is not so much caused by the low level of secularization and the strong role of the Catholic Church, but mainly by the strong family ties between parents and children. Since families with greater cultural resources would be the forerunners of informal unions, the father's education would have a great impact on the diffusion of cohabitation – not only in terms of economic power, but also because the "higher educated tend to be more open-minded toward the possibility of their children making non-traditional choices" (Rosina and Fraboni 2004: 154). Thus, these families would have better cultural and material resources at their disposal to make less traditional choices. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that among women who have completed university, cohabitation would be more common among those coming from a family with a father who is relatively highly educated. Apparently, acceptance by the parent generation, especially by the father, seems to have a great impact on the diffusion of cohabitation. We expect to find this effect in our data as well; thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Fathers with higher cultural resources, i.e. those with a higher level of education, tend to accept their adult daughter's decision to cohabit more readily than do fathers with a lower level of education. Therefore, women with relatively highly educated fathers have a higher risk of entering informal union than women with fathers who are less highly educated.

To the next section, we turn to the quantitative design of the study, focusing in particular on the techniques and data used.

4.3 Quantitative Research Design and Data

4.3.1 Event History Data and Analysis

For our quantitative investigation, we use event history techniques of analysis. In the following paragraphs we highlight both the advantages and problems related to this procedure.

Especially in population studies, though not exclusively, scholars increasingly point out the importance of measuring variables of interest on a continuous basis. This is realized by an event-oriented research design, where, ideally, individuals are followed throughout their life, and the occurrences of the events under study are recorded. An event is considered as a "qualitative change that occurs at a specific point in time," and this "change must consist of a relatively sharp disjunction between what precedes and what follows" (Allison 1984: 9). Event history data may display, for instance, events in the process of family formation, such as union formation and childbirth, or changes in other life trajectories, such as education or employment.

One important aim of this research strategy is to study causes of events. Thus, the dataset should not only include full histories of the event under study, but also complete information about possible explanatory variables. Some of these variables, such as region of birth or in some cases religion, may be constant over time; others, such as educational attainment or employment, may vary (Allison 1984). Blossfeld et al. (2007) emphasize that "the major advantage of event history data is that they provide *the most complete data possible on changes in qualitative variables that may occur at any point in time*" (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 19). In contrast, other research designs, such as cross-sectional samples or panel designs, seldom offer information about the exact time of occurrence, not only of the event under study, but also as regards explanatory variables (Blossfeld et al. 1989). Thus, especially explanations based upon cross-sectional data are inappropriate whenever there are changes in causal variables – as is true for most cases (Tuma and Hannan 1984).

According to Blossfeld et al. (1989), the event history research design offers several advantages. It explicitly takes change and the dynamics of empirical phenomena into account; it gives information about prior history that might help to improve the explanatory and prognostic capacity of statistical models; it permits the reconstruction of a continuous process; and it allows for investigating complex and/or parallel processes.

There are various ways to record event-oriented information. Data might be collected retroactively or through a long-term panel study, which is, of course, much more cost-intensive. However, event history datasets recorded retrospectively suffer from several limitations. It has been argued, for instance, that respondents face difficulties in recalling the timing of changes accurately; that retrospective designs are inappropriate to record information on attitudes; or that such designs are based on survivors and ignore those individuals who have died or migrated (Blossfeld et al. 2007). Further, retrospective studies might suffer from misrepresentations of specific populations. In a study on educational homogamy, Blossfeld and Timm (2003) showed, for instance, that persons who were single at the time of the interview were generally excluded.

Nonetheless, the analysis of event history data offers the possibility for a causal understanding of social processes. According to Aalen (1987) causality in dynamic modelling has to be understood as follows: "The cause has to precede the effect in time. A factor is only called a cause if variation in this factor produces changes in consecutive parts of the process" (Aalen 1987: 185). Or as put by Blossfeld et al. (2007): "Event history models … relate change in future outcomes to conditions in the past and try to predict future changes on the basis of past observations" (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 21).

4.3.2 Data and Model Description

For the event history analysis of this study, we use the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* of 1997 and 1999 (Longitudinal Survey of Italian Households, ILFI).[8] The ILFI is one of the few existing panel surveys in Italy. It was first conducted in 1997 and carried out by the universities of Milan (Bicocca), Trento, Bologna, ISTAT, and others. The survey was

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[8] Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca, Università degli Studi di Trento, Università degli Studi di Bologna, Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane, 1997 – 1999. File dati su supporto magnetico. Responsabile scientifico: A. Schizzerotto.

continued every two years up to 2003. In the first wave, 9,770 members of 4,404 Italian families were interviewed (for further information, see Schizzerotto 2002).

Using retrospective data from the first two waves, we calculate *multiplicative intensity models* in order to analyze women's risk of entering cohabitation and direct marriage as a first partnership in Italy. We concentrate on women born between 1940 and 1974. We decided to exclude women born before 1940, firstly because entry into marriage was not only the prevailing but nearly the exclusive practice of entering a couple relationship, and secondly because of the very low number of cohabiting women in these cohorts as a result of this behavior. Women born between 1900 and 1939 or after 1974, as well as foreigners and women who lived abroad during their childhood, were not considered. The original dataset consists of information on 5,313 men and 5,819 women. After having cleaned and restricted the data, information on 3,233[9] women was used – 81 of them entered cohabitation as a first relationship and 2,436 entered marriage directly.

To estimate first cohabitation and direct marriage intensities of women in Italy, we use multiplicative intensity models. The observation starts at age 15. The corresponding baseline hazard is modeled as a piecewise function that will be divided into 0-60, 60-120, 120-180, 180-240, and 240-300 months (from exact age 15-20, 20-25, 25-30, 30-35 and 35-40, respectively). Censoring will occur at entry into direct marriage (or at entry into cohabitation as a first relationship for the model considering direct marriage), upon reaching the age of 40, or at the month of the interview, whichever occurs first. We control for a number of time-constant and time-dependent covariates. The following formula describes the main effects model:

$$\mu(t)_{jklmnopqr} = a_{j(t)} \times b_k \times c_l \times d_m \times e_n \times f_{o(t)} \times g_{p(t)} \times h_{q(t)} \times i_{r(t)}$$

Factor *a* represents the effect of time, i.e. time from the exact age of 15 until entry into cohabitation or censoring, whereas *j(t)* denotes the time segments, which are assumed to be piecewise constant. Factors *b* to *e* indicate the time-constant covariates and factors *f* to *i* represent the time-varying covariates. Cohort, region of residence at age 15, education of both parents, and religion are used as time-constant covariates. Cohorts are subdivided into women born in the periods 1940-49, 1950-59, 1960-69, and 1970-74. For region of

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[9] In the ILFI, 1,541 women were born before 1940 and 618 after 1974. These women were excluded from the analysis.

residence at age 15, we distinguish between Northwest, Northeast, Center, South and Islands regions. We are aware of the fact that the islands of Sicily and Sardinia are quite different from each other in many aspects and especially as far as family formation is concerned, but the low number of cohabiting women in these areas did not allow for a more detailed categorization. The ILFI offers full migration histories – to identify the region of residence during socialization, we calculated the region of residence at age 15. The education of the father and the mother was classified into low (illiterate person, no degree, or primary degree), medium (lower secondary) and high (higher secondary, university) level of education. In addition, we used a missing category. In the final model, we matched the education of both parents together, using the following classification: Both parents have a low level of education, both have a medium or both have a high level of education, the mother's education is higher than the father's, and the father's education is higher than the mother's. The missing category was then deleted. For religion, we argue that religious affiliation is relatively stable over the life-course, so we use it as a time-constant covariate. Moreover, the ILFI provides information on religion only for women interviewed in 1997. Women who entered the survey in 1999 were not asked to provide information on their religious affiliation. The categories of religion are Catholic and not Catholic (no religion, Christian without church affiliation, other, or missing – including those interviewed only in 1999). (See Appendix A, Table A.1 for more detailed information.)

As time-varying covariates, we use educational level, educational attendance, having a first conception, and employment status. For educational level, we distinguish no degree/primary, lower secondary, higher secondary, and university. Educational attendance was calculated according to time spent in education, independently of whether a woman acquired a degree or not. Time periods with less than five months between one exit from education and the next entry into education were ignored since summer vacations or the time between A-level school examinations and entry into university are normally not perceived as being out of education. Since birth occurs nearly always within marriage and contributes to entry into union, we decided to use first conception instead of first birth. Having a first conception was calculated by subtracting eight months from the month of birth, as most women are not aware that they are pregnant during the first few weeks of pregnancy (Baizán et al. 2001). For employment status, we distinguish between being in the labor market (active) and being out of the labor market (inactive). Although we are aware

that a more detailed distinction, such as working part-time or full-time, would be more appropriate, we decided to use a simple categorization (active–inactive). This decision was mostly driven by the low number of cases we had when we tried to use thinner levels of employment.

In our analysis we include all current factors, which means that in all sections of the analysis we control for the impact of the factors specified in this sub-section.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Impact of Individual Characteristics

4.4.1.1 Spread of Informal Unions

Table 4.1 presents the relative risks of entering cohabitation as a first relationship for women in Italy. In terms of cohort, we observe that the risk of entering cohabitation increases significantly by cohort. Women born between 1960 and 1969 have the highest risk of experiencing this transition. With the youngest cohort, the risk decreases – possibly because the women in this cohort were very young at the time of interview. Since women tend to postpone their exit from the parental home and therefore also entry into cohabitation, we presume that some of these women will enter informal union at a later point in time.

Women who lived in the northern and central regions of Italy during childhood (at age 15) have a higher risk of entering non-marital union as a first relationship than women who lived in southern regions or on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Model 8, which includes all covariates, reveals that women who lived in central and northeastern Italy have the highest risk, followed by the northwest. The results for the northeastern and central regions are significantly different from those of the southern regions. Table 4.1 indicates that Italian women from the islands of Sicily and Sardinia have the lowest risk of entering informal union – this figure is not significantly different from that of the southern regions, however. We assume that the high risk of entering cohabitation for women from central Italy is largely driven by women from Rome and not so much from other areas of the central region. As for the impact of religion on the transition to cohabitation, the models show that non-Catholic women have double the risk of starting a non-marital union

compared to that of Catholic women. To sum up: Italian women who are relatively secularized, i.e. women from more recent birth cohorts, women who have grown up in relatively modern contexts such as those found in northern and central Italy, and women without Catholic church affiliation tend to enter informal unions more often than do other women.

Table 4.1: Sequence of nested models presenting the relative risks of the transition to non-marital cohabitation as a first relationship for women in Italy

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Cohort								
1940-49	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1950-59	3.53***	3.47***	3.34**	2.98**	3.07**	3.37**	3.36**	3.37**
1960-69	5.55***	5.12***	5.04***	4.58***	4.82***	5.58***	5.61***	5.69***
1970-74	3.23**	2.75**	2.81*	2.45*	2.7*	3.17**	3.19**	3.23**
Parents' education								
Both low		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mother's education higher than father's		2.16**	1.92*	1.86*	1.99*	2.29**	2.31**	2.36**
Father's education higher than mother's		0.55	0.55	0.55	0.6	0.69	0.69	0.69
Both medium		1.28	1.18	1.15	1.24	1.42	1.42	1.45
Both high		2.26***	2.28***	1.92**	2.21***	2.56***	2.58***	2.61***
Region of residence at age 15								
Northwest			1.74*	1.48	1.45	1.49	1.46	1.44
Northeast			2.13**	2.01**	1.92*	1.93*	1.89*	1.84*
Center			2.24**	1.8*	1.82*	1.93*	1.9*	1.85*
South			1	1	1	1	1	1
Islands			0.64	0.68	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.7
Religion								
Catholic				1	1	1	1	1
Non-Catholic				2.49***	2.55***	2.58***	2.59***	2.6***
Educational attendance								
Out of education					2.01*	1.87*	1.8	1.79
In education					1	1	1	1
Education								
No school completion / primary						1	1	1
Lower secondary						0.8	0.79	0.82
Higher secondary						0.53	0.52	0.54
University						0.64	0.63	0.68
Employment contract								
Active							1.09	1.11
Inactive							1	1

First conception

No first conception								1
First conception								2.08*

Age

| | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
		(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
15-20	1 (0.01)***							
20-25	3.44***	3.38***	3.34***	3.31***	2.78***	3.44***	3.4***	3.31***
25-30	8.42***	8.02***	7.97***	7.79***	6.01***	7.62***	7.46***	7.11***
30-35	14.17***	13.38***	13.68***	12.8***	9.43***	12.00***	11.7***	10.85***
35-40	15.67***	14.84***	15.56***	13.93***	10.06***	12.79***	12.55***	11.27***
Log likelihood	-728,01	-720,19	-714,2	-707,25	-705,09	-703,66	-703,6	-702,44
Probability level		0,004	0,018	< 0,001	0,038	0,412	0,74	0,127

p<0.01*** 0.01< p<0.05** 0.05<p<0.1*
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

4.4.1.2 Influence of the Employment Situation

As to the impact of employment on entry into cohabitation, previous research has found that women with greater economic security, e.g. women who have a job have a higher risk of cohabitation. These women are not necessarily dependent on their family's help, so they have a higher level of decision-making autonomy than do women who have to rely on their family. Table 4.1 shows the corresponding relative risks and reveals that employed women have a somewhat higher risk of entering cohabitation than unemployed women; however, the integration of this factor does not improve the model.

4.4.1.3 Late Entry into Cohabitation

In order to investigate the age at entry into cohabitation as a first relationship among younger generations in more detail, we estimate three models based only on (i) women born between 1940 and 1949 (ii) women born between 1950 and 1959 and (iii) women born between 1960 and 1969. In Figure 4.1, we compare the absolute risks of the baseline intensities from the three models. Women born between 1940 and 1949 and those born between 1960 and 1969 have the highest risk of forming non-marital union at ages 30 to 35. Women born in the 1950s have the highest risk between the ages of 35 and 40.

In comparison to other European countries, we see large differences between the ages at entry into cohabitation as a first relationship. Kiernan (1999) emphasizes that in most European countries, cohabitation tends to be a living arrangement that applies more to the younger-young than to the older-young. Italian women, by contrast, have the highest risk of experiencing this transition after age 30.

Figure 4.1: Baseline intensities as absolute risks for the transition to cohabitation for women in Italy (controlled for region of residence at age 15, parent's education, religion, education, educational attendance, first conception, employment, and age)
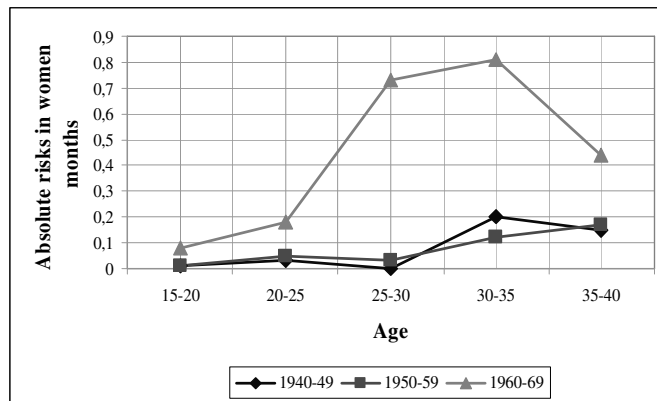
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculations.

4.4.1.4 Impact of a Woman's Own Level of Education and Educational Attendance

In relation to our first hypothesis, Table 4.1 indicates that women who have reached a higher level of education have a lower risk of entering an informal union. We assume that this effect is partly due to the high degree of interrelation between the parents' and the daughter's education. Previous research on the impact of social origin, e.g. the parents' education on the child's educational career, found that in Italy social origin highly influences men's and women's educational attainment. This applies to the past as well as present (Cobalti 1990; Pisati 2002). Therefore, we estimated a model in which we do not control for the impact of the parents' level of education (see Table 4.2). In this model, we find that the effect of education on entry into cohabitation largely disappears; but women who have obtained the highest levels of education now have the highest risk of forming an informal relationship.

Table 4.2: Relative risks for the transition to non-marital cohabitation of women in Italy (not controlled for parents' education)

Cohort	
1940-49	1
1950-59	3.34**
1960-69	6.52***
1970-74	3.98**
Region of residence at age 15	
Northwest	1.78*
Northeast	1.98*
Center	2.13**
South	1
Islands	0.89
Religion	
Catholic	1
Non-Catholic	2.39***
Educational attendance	
Out of education	1.5
In education	1
Education	
No school completion / primary	1
Lower secondary	0.96
Higher secondary	0.72
University	1.21
Employment	
Active	1.16
Inactive	1
First conception	
No first conception	1
First conception	1.98
Age	
	1
15-20	(0.01)***
20-25	3.62***
25-30	6.72***
30-35	10.13***
35-40	10.23***
Log likelihood	-743.78

p<0.01*** 0.01< p<0.05** 0.05<p<0.1*
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

For the influence of educational attendance on the entry into cohabitation, we calculated two separate models in which we used a combination factor of graduation and educational attendance. In the first model, we included the parents' education, and in the second one excluded it (Table 4.3). We observe that, in both models, women who have completed their education have a higher risk of forming a non-marital union than do women who are still attending school or university. Controlling for the impact of the parents' education, Table

4.3 indicates that (Model 1) women with a primary education or without any degree have the highest risk of forming such a union, whereas in Model 2, where we did not control for the parents' education, women with a university degree have the highest risk of forming an informal union. We conclude that the impact of education is not so clear-cut; it interacts to a large extent with the educational attainment of the parents. As for the influence of attending school, we confirm that women who are still attending school or university have lower risks of entering a cohabiting union. Here we may also find a particular characteristic of Italy: Since a lot of students enroll in the local university – with the possible exception of those coming from southern Italy – they continue to stay at their parental home when studying and thus have a lower probability of entering new living arrangements than do students in other Western countries, who often leave home when entering university.

Table 4.3: Relative risks for the transition to informal cohabitation of women in Italy, with an interaction between level of education and educational attendance. (Model 1 is controlled for cohort, parents' education, region of residence at age 15, religion, employment, first conception and age. In Model 2 we control for the same covariates except for the parents' education)

Education and educational attendance	Model 1	Model 2
No school completion / primary & out of education	2.63*	1.88
Lower secondary & out of education	2.8**	2.08*
Higher secondary & out of education	1.43	1.26
University & out of education	1.95	2.24*
Any degree & in education	1	1

$p < 0.01$*** $0.01 < p < 0.05$** $0.05 < p < 0.1$*

Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

4.4.2 Impact of Family Background Factors

4.4.2.1 Impact of Parents' Education

With regard to family background factors – that is, parents' education – we have experimented with different models. In the first model, we integrate the father's education and exclude the education of the mother. Model 1 of Table A.2 in Appendix A indicates that the risk of entering an informal union is higher among women with highly educated fathers. However, these figures are not significant. In a second step, we integrate the mother's education and omit the educational level of the father. The results, presented in Model 2 of Table A.2, show that women with highly educated mothers have the highest

risk of experiencing transition to an informal union. Their risk is three times that of women with mothers who are not highly educated. Furthermore, the value for more highly educated mothers is clearly significant, and the effects are stronger than the effect of the father's education.

Calculating a third model, which includes the level of education of both parents, we discovered that the positive impact of the father's education not only disappears – it actually changes its direction of influence. Model 3 of Table A.2 reveals that women with more highly educated fathers have a lower risk of forming a non-marital union. However, these figures are not significant. As for the impact of the mother's education, we find the same results as in the models with the mother's education only; the effect of a high level of education on the part of the mother is strongly positive.

To disentangle the impact of the parents' education in more detail, we calculated a model with an interaction between the father's and the mother's level of education. Figure 4.2 presents the corresponding relative risks and reveals that the women with a more highly educated mother experience the highest risk of entering cohabitation, regardless of the educational level of the father. When the mother has a relatively low level of education, there is still a positive effect if the father's educational level is even lower. The reverse influence can be noticed when the education of the father is higher than that of the mother. In this case, the risk of forming an informal union decreases.

Since both factors are highly interrelated, we used a combined factor of the mother's and father's level of education in the final model (Table 4.1). For this factor, the following categories are used: (i) both parents have a low level of education, (ii) the mother has a higher level of education than the father, (iii) the father has a higher level of education than the mother, (iv) both parents have a medium or (v) a high educational level.

Figure 4.2: Relative risk of entering an informal union as a first relationship for women in Italy (Interaction between mother's and father's education)
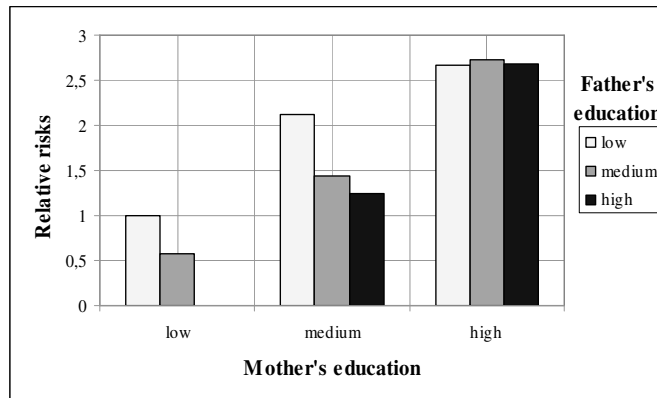
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculations.

Table 4.1 indicates that women with two highly educated parents have the highest risk of experiencing transition to cohabitation; moreover, this figure is significantly different from the category "two parents with little education." However, the results show that women with mothers who are more highly educated than the fathers have a high risk as well. Low risks are found for women who have parents, both of whom have a low or medium level of education. Italian women with fathers who have a higher level of education than their mothers have the lowest risk of entering cohabitation.

With reference to our second hypothesis, we confirm that the education of the father has a large impact on the transition to informal union. However, we discover that the educational level of the mother is much more important than that of the father – and it works in the expected direction. Whenever both parents have the same level of education, the risks increase with the relative level of education. Whenever the father is more highly educated than the mother, the daughter's risk of forming a non-marital relationship is lower. The opposite holds when the mother is more highly educated than the father. From these findings we assume that the educational career of the mother plays a key role in the decision-making process on entering or not entering cohabitation. In a broader sense, the mother's level of education (also in comparison to the father's education) could be understood as a measure of "emancipation" of female family members from the more traditional idea of family. Thus, more highly educated mothers (as well as more highly educated daughters) might have more open-minded attitudes about modern living arrangements. One may assume that in cases where fathers have negative attitudes toward cohabitation, mothers with higher educational resources or with the same resources as their

husbands exert a certain influence on their husbands to "permit" their daughters to cohabit. If women, in comparison to their husbands, have no higher educational resources at their disposal, they may have less power to support their daughters' entering cohabitation. From this perspective, the lower educated father could be seen as an obstacle in the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy, whereas the mother seems to be important in terms of accepting the daughter's decision to cohabit.

Since our results indicate that there is a high interrelationship between the education of the daughter and the educational level attained by the parents, we calculated an interaction between the two factors. Figure 4.3 presents the corresponding results: Women have a high risk of entering a cohabiting union if both of their parents are highly educated, regardless of their own educational levels; whereas women have the lowest risk of entering cohabitation if the father is more highly educated than the mother – independently of the educational level of the woman herself. The highest risk is identified if the mother has a higher educational level than the father and the daughter is highly educated as well. Finally, if both parents have a low or medium level of education, the effect of the daughter's education is clearly negative.

Figure 4.3: Relative risk of entering an informal union as a first relationship for women in Italy (Interaction between women's level of education and parents' education)
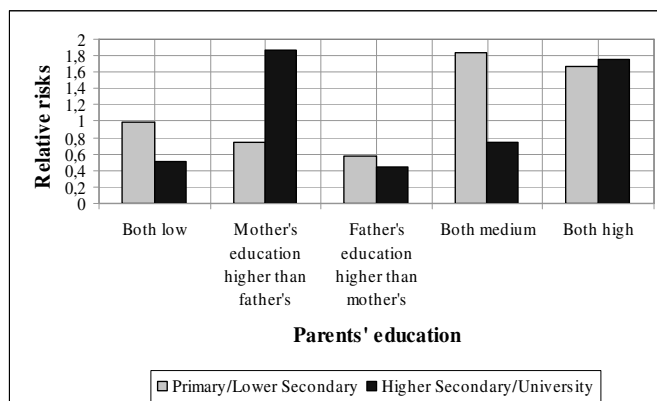
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculations.

The results presented here reveal that the impact of the educational level of the woman herself is not so clear-cut. We must take into account that the interrelation between the educational level of the parents and the educational level of the woman influences the transition to cohabitation in Italy.

4.4.2.2 The Opposite Side of the Coin: Impact of Parents' Education on Direct Marriage

In a further step, we estimate multiplicative intensity models for the entry into direct marriage for women in Italy (results shown in Table A.3 in Appendix A). With regard to the impact of the parents' education Table 4.4 reveals that women with two highly educated parents and women with a mother who has a higher level of education than the father have significantly lower risks of deciding on a direct marriage.

Table 4.4: Relative risks for the transition to informal cohabitation and direct marriage of women in Italy (controlled for cohort, region of residence at age 15, religion, educational attendance, educational degree, employment, first conception and age (baseline)

Parent's education	Cohabitation	Direct marriage
Both low	1	1
Both medium	1.45	1.00
Both high	2.61***	0.72***
Mothers' education higher than fathers	2.36**	0.86**
Fathers' education higher than mothers	0.69	0.88

p<0.01*** 0.01< p<0.05** 0.05<p<0.1*

Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

The impact of the parents' education is interesting: Whereas a high level of education of both parents and a higher educational level of the mother favors entry into cohabitation, the same characteristics hamper entry into direct marriage. It seems that the same mechanisms are at work when women decide what kind of union to choose. The question that arises is this: Why do we find this kind of interrelationship between parental education and daughter's living arrangement? It might be the case that higher educated parents are more inclined to be nondenominational rather than Catholic. Consequently, they might attach less importance to marriage than Catholic parents usually do. Another possible explanation might be the relatively strong ambition of highly educated parents to encourage their daughters to postpone a serious commitment such as marriage and to invest rather into their educational and professional careers.

Estimating, then, the interaction between parents' education and a daughter's own education, we find that women with two highly educated parents have lower risks of marrying directly, regardless of their own educational level. The highest risks of entering a

marriage directlyare found among women with primary or lower secondary education who have two parents with either a low or a medium level of education (results not shown).

4.5 Conclusion

The analysis confirms that a slight but constant diffusion of informal union is taking place in Italy. Women from younger birth cohorts who grew up in the northern or central regions of Italy and who declare themselves not to be Catholic have the highest risk of entering cohabitation. Women who have spent their childhood in the northeastern or central parts of the country enter non-marital relationships more often than do women coming from any other part of Italy.

Regarding the diffusion of cohabitation among the individual cohorts, the results show that Italian women tend to enter cohabitation up to their thirties. This is in keeping with the so-called "postponement syndrome," which is typical for the family and fertility developments of recent cohorts in southern European societies. We have shown that Italian cohorts, apart from exhibiting an increase in the mean age at home leaving, at first marriage and first birth, also experience late entry into cohabitation.

In contrast to our initial expectation, we found that the impact of employment status is not so strong. The model for direct marriage shows that unemployed women have a significantly higher risk of forming a direct marriage than employed women. We suggest that women who have decided to cohabit need to rely on their employment earnings to a greater extent than do women who entered marriage directly. Married couples may receive stronger economic support from their families than those in non-marital unions. This applies especially in terms of housing. Since renting a flat is very expensive in Italy, many couples seek to buy a flat or a house. Parents often support their married children in doing so, while cohabiting couples cannot always account on their parents' financial support.

Looking at the impact of the level of education and educational attendance, we find that the educational level of women interrelates to a large extent with the educational level of the parents. Controlling for the educational level of the parents, we find that the impact of education is negative, whereas it is positive when we exclude this factor. In the latter case we observe a slightly U-shaped effect: Women without any school completion or a primary

level of education and women with a university degree have a higher risk of experiencing transition to cohabitation than women with lower or higher secondary levels of education. Women who have not completed any education are least likely to enter informal union. But if we compare direct marriage and cohabitation, our data support the hypothesis that women who attend school have lower risks of entering the former than they have of entering the latter. In terms of individual characteristics, our analysis confirms that these have a big impact on the transition to cohabitation and marriage in Italy. It is especially education and educational enrollment that seem to exert a strong influence on the decision for one or the other of the two living arrangements.

Analyzing the impact of family background factors, we find that the educational level of the parents also largely matters when deciding for marital or non-marital unions. Our findings revealed that – in contrast to previous results – the education of the mother has a higher impact on the transition to cohabitation than the education of the father. This outcome contradicts our initial hypothesis and earlier findings. Previous studies discovered the opposite effect: The education of the father had a larger impact than the mother's graduation (see Rosina and Fraboni 2004). By contrast, we find that women with two highly educated parents have the highest risk of forming a consensual union. The risk is also high if the mother has a higher level of education than the father. Women with a father who is more highly educated than their mother have the lowest risk of deciding on cohabitation. In addition, we find evidence that the risk of entering marriage directly is significantly lower for women with two highly educated parents or a mother with a higher level of education than the father. From these findings we assume that the education of the mother becomes highly important when a daughter decides on a living arrangement. We suggest that, within the family, more highly educated mothers have more power to support their daughters when opting for informal union. Furthermore, in families with a more highly educated mother, female family members may grow up in a relatively "emancipated" context. Their mothers probably had more decision-making autonomy than women in unions with relatively highly educated husbands. Since the daughters of these women were socialized in a more liberal context, they decide more often on cohabitation and less frequently on a direct marriage. Axinn and Thornton (1993) found evidence that young women with mothers who have a favorable attitude toward cohabitation have significantly higher rates of entering an informal union than women with mothers who oppose cohabitation. McDonald (1980) provides support for the "social power theory of parental

identification," which states that young adults are likely to identify with the parent they perceive to be more influential. We may assume that in relationships where the woman is more highly educated than her husband, the wife presents herself as being more powerful than women living in unions with lower or equal educational degrees relative to their partner. Furthermore, Wright and Young (1998) discovered that children from father-headed families have more traditional gender-related attitudes than mother-headed families. They also found that children from families where the mother is active in the labor market have more egalitarian attitudes. Our findings confirm the strong impact of mothers on the decision-making process of daughters.

Nonetheless, it is notable that, traditionally, women in Italy (and elsewhere) have tended to have high rates of "upward" marriages, whereas it has been highly uncommon to marry "downward" (Bernardi 2003). From this perspective, our group of women with mothers who have a higher educational degree than the fathers can be seen as selective – especially because these parents are coming from older cohorts. It is only in recent years that women have been opting less and less for upwards marriages. Esteva and Cortina (2006) found evidence of this for Spain. As far as Italy is concerned, Bernardi (2003) has provided proof that the levels of educational homogamy among the more educated women have been high in the past, just as they are now. Focusing on recent birth cohorts, i.e. adults born between 1955 and 1969, Fraboni (2000) finds evidence of a slightly growing likelihood of Italian males to marry women who have a higher educational degree; she assumes that "when women study longer, they face greater difficulties in marrying a men with the same level of education and they more often marry a man with a lower level of education" (Fraboni 2000: 231).

With reference to our results, these trends (the decrease of typical upward marriage of women, the strong homogamy among higher educated couples and the slight increase in the propensity of higher educated women to marry downward) may lead to a further increase in cohabiting couples. Since the education of the woman's and mother's generation seems to have a major influence on the transition to informal unions, we assume that the continuously rising expansion of education among both generations will increase the importance of cohabitation in Italy. We further assume that increasing numbers of daughters will be supported by their mothers when entering non-marital union. It is possible that non-marital relationships will develop more rapidly than in the past, as

Italian society witnesses entire generations of highly educated mothers. At the same time, the educational level of young women themselves will increase as well. As cohabitation becomes socially accepted, it will probably stimulate further increases. Our suggestions are in line with statements made by other scholars. Rosina (2002), for example, states that in cities such as Milan, social changes are in progress. And Angeli et al. (1999) come to the conclusion that even if marriage continues to be of high importance, people increasingly see cohabitation as one option among others. Gabrielli and Hoem (2008) find in fact that – compared to past times – cohabiting couples increasingly tend to postpone entry into marriage.

The analysis presented here raises the question as to how different individual and family background factors, such as the mother's education, influence the decision of a woman to cohabit. However, based on this investigation, we can only guess how these factors impact the transition to informal union formation. Our analysis provides no insights into the mechanisms through which these factors act. Only qualitative research methods allow for a deeper understanding of the observed phenomenon and offer the opportunity to investigate in more detail, for example, the role of mothers in the decision for or against cohabitation.

Chapter 5

Qualitative Research Design: Cohabitation in Two Different Regional Settings

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we addressed the measurement of particular factors in the transition to cohabitation and direct marriage. In this chapter, the focus is on defining our qualitative research design. We start with a general introduction to grounded theory and continue with the description of the design and the data. We describe both regional settings in more depth and highlight a typical case for each context.

5.2 Qualitative Research Design and Data

5.2.1 The Qualitative Approach

In their landmark book, Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe qualitative research as "the most 'adequate' and 'efficient' way to obtain the type of information required and to contend with the difficulties of an empirical situation" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 18). According to the authors, the strength of qualitative research is rooted in its ability to generate – or as Glaser and Strauss put it, to *discover* – theory, rather than to verify existing theoretical assumptions. This way, qualitative methods provide "relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 1).

In contrast, research designs based on quantitative methods make statements about correlations between events of interest and related factors. However, it is difficult to move from correlations to causal statements. Further, statistical methods may be inappropriate to explain certain phenomena, as they exclude the observation of behavior in everyday life (Silverman 2001).

According to Maxwell (1996), there are five particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially suited: to understand the individual *meaning* of events, situations, and actions with which people are involved; to understand the particular *context*

within which people act and the influence this context has on their actions; to identify unanticipated *phenomena* and *influences*; to understand the *process* by which events and actions take place; and to *develop causal explanations*. Further, as emphasized by Flick (2002), qualitative research offers a unique opportunity to analyze the variety of perspectives, interactions between people, individual knowledge, and ways of behavior. Thus, qualitative methods permit an extensive consideration of the phenomenon we are interested in – namely "cohabitation" – in everyday situations and, as indicated, allow us to identify the meanings of cohabitation and marriage, the underlying norms and expectations of and motivations behind individual behavior. This way, qualitative research methods provide us with a deeper insight into the mechanisms that guide the process of decision-making toward cohabitation and thereby facilitate an understanding of the development of cohabitation in the specific contexts of northern and southern Italy.

To our best knowledge, there are no qualitative studies that explicitly address informal union formation in Italy. However, there are numerous studies that deal with that issue in other countries. Smock and Manning (2008), for instance, use two waves of in-depth interviews to investigate the decision-making processes that lead young adults living in the United States to marry, remain cohabiting, or dissolve their unions. Further, Mynarska and Bernardi (2007) study the low diffusion of non-marital unions in Poland – a country that, like Italy, is strongly shaped by Catholic values and moral concepts.

Remarkably, previous studies on informal unions in Italy have focused mainly on the diffusion aspect and less on the mechanisms behind the hesitant spread of cohabitation. Using quantitative research methods, existing studies fail to capture the motivations behind informal union formation in Italy as well as the preconditions that are perceived as necessary to make the daring decision for cohabitation. In addition, quantitative studies are problematic, as representative studies on Italy have only low numbers of cohabiting unions.

In contrast, the aim of our study is to go beyond what these studies have examined and to disentangle the influence of different forces that come into play when young adults in Italy decide on this new kind of living arrangement.

In order to generate hypotheses and theory about the impact of factors on informal union formation, qualitative data need to be obtained systematically. A number of ways are

available to collect qualitative data: (a) by means of ethnographic fieldwork such as observations, through group discussions, or with the help of interviews – ethnographic observations are particularly suited to analyze how something actually occurs; (b) group discussions, which allow for the investigation of how attitudes are formed, articulated, and exchanged in everyday life; and (c) qualitative interviews, which offer the opportunity to explore people's intimate thoughts and motivations for behavior (Flick 2002).

It is the latter type of qualitative data that excites our interest in this research. For qualitative interviews allow us to analyze people's *individual considerations* when deciding on cohabitation (and subsequent marriage). However, there are several kinds of qualitative interviews, each having specific characteristics and ranging from rather closed to rather open interview questions. The ethnographic interview, for instance, is distinguished by very open questions and therefore suited to examine relatively unknown research areas (Spradley 1979). As previous research and theories offer some hypotheses about the reasons for the hesitant diffusion of informal unions in Italy, we employ *semi-structured in-depth interviews*. These interviews are based on an interview guideline that specifies all areas that are supposed to be covered during the interview. However, the guideline also gives interviewees enough space to add their thoughts about the topic under consideration (Schensul et al. 1999). We will come back to this point in more detail in a later part (Section 5.2.3) of this chapter.

An important feature of qualitative research is that collection of data proceeds on theoretical grounds: Assumptions about certain interrelationships between behavior and individual characteristics are the starting point for qualitative sampling. Once data collection has started, further collection of data and the respective analysis are interrelated processes. The analysis of qualitative material generates categories. It is within the work of the researcher to interrelate these categories with each other and to produce concepts as a basic unit of analysis. As soon as new aspects emerge, the process of data collection needs to be modified – up to the point where "theoretic saturation" is reached. Due to the alternation between data collection and data analysis, qualitative research is often described as a *circular process* in which additional data might modify existing theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Flick 2002; Witt 2001). The generation of hypotheses and theories is strongly related to the data. This is also why Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to their procedure as "grounded theory."

Another important aspect of theory generation is the use of constant comparison, whether it be between cases or between categories and concepts. Corbin and Strauss (1990) emphasize that comparisons "assist the researcher in guarding against bias" and that they "help to achieve greater precision and consistency" (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 9).

In social sciences, discussions about the generalizability of theories that are based on qualitative methods are recurrent. Unfortunately, the relatively low number of cases that are usually analyzed in qualitative research does not allow for representativeness and is often the bone of contention between qualitative and quantitative social scientists. It is, however, not within the aim of qualitative research to work on representative samples, but to discover new theory from theoretical sampled cases. Corbin and Strauss (1990) counter this argument by stating that "a grounded theory is generalizable insofar as it specifies conditions that are linked through action/interaction with definite consequences. The more systematic and widespread the theoretical sampling, the more completely the conditions and variations will be discovered, permitting greater generalizability, precision, and predictive capacity" (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 15).

In subsequent sections, we describe our process of data collection and analysis in more depth, starting with the reasons that drove our choice to select Bologna and Cagliari as regional settings for the research.

5.2.2 The Settings: Bologna and Cagliari

In our study we concentrate on two different geographical foci. This decision is based upon the fact that within Italy, informal unions have been spreading and still do so at very different paces. As described earlier in this study, cohabiting unions tend to be more widespread in northern Italy than in the south and on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia (see Section 1.4). We believe that the focus on two regional settings that are at a different stage of development, each with respect to informal union formation, offers the best possibility to analyze why, within some areas, couples more often decide on cohabitation compared to couples in other regions. Thus, our research design allows for a profound understanding of the evolution of this new kind of living arrangement within the country. For that reason, we select one geographical context where informal unions tend to be more diffused and

another where cohabitation seldom occurs. Actually, the two settings we decided on have been studied with respect to fertility too: In the international project "Explaining Low Fertility in Italy," four Italian cities (Padova, Bologna, Cagliari, and Naples) were chosen for collecting ethnographic data on fertility choices.

As to our study, we decided first of all on *Bologna*. Bologna is the capital city of the northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna and has about 380,000 inhabitants. This region is very interesting demographically since the share of informal unions rose from 2.3% of all couples in 1991 to 7.6% in 2001 (Sabbadini 1997; ISTAT 2001a). Emilia-Romagna occupies a particular position with respect to cohabitation: The area witnesses a stronger increase in informal unions than is evident in other northern Italian regions – this applies not only to the cities, but also to the countryside (own calculations based on Sabbadini 1997, referring to Censimento 1991 and ISTAT 2001a). Bologna itself recorded 7.6% informal unions in 2001 and is the main forerunner as regards cohabitation. Consistent with this, Emilia-Romagna registered only 3.5 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants in 2005, and thus is situated at the lower end of the Italian range (ISTAT 2006a). These figures are not surprising as the city has been traditionally governed by liberal left-wing parties and even known as *"la città rossa"* (the red city). By contrast, the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*) governed most Italian regions and cities between 1946 and the collapse of the political regime in 1992. Left-wing parties propagated non-traditional living arrangements. Christian Democrats, on the other hand, were renowned for their strong orientation toward the Christian maxim (Brütting 1997; Drüke 2000).

With the oldest university in the whole of Europe and the second largest in Italy, Bologna attracts tens of thousands of students from all over the country. In addition, the region enjoys relatively low unemployment rates and a fairly prosperous economy. Consequently, not only students move to the city, but also people from disadvantaged areas in search of employment (Bubbico 2005). We assume that all these factors contribute to a rather open-minded attitude in the city toward new living arrangements such as cohabitation. However, extraordinarily high expenses for housing make living difficult in Bologna. In recent years, both home ownership expenses as well as rental costs have increased considerably. Table 5.1 gives an overview of recent developments in prices for housing property in Bologna. Despite notable increases, the local authorities have had little success in promoting social housing schemes. In contrast to other European countries, Bologna is characterized by

very few flats belonging to such schemes – only 6.4% of all flats in 2002. While, compared to other regions of Italy, the city shows rather high rates of social housing, merely 17.7% of these dwellings are rented to adults aged 19-34 years – that is, the most important age group with regard to latest developments in family formation. The overwhelming majority of these flats are occupied by senior citizens (Piancastelli 2004).

Table 5.1: Mean prices of housing property (euro per square meter) in the area of Bologna, 2000-2002

	2000	2001	2002
City center	3,100	3,400	3,500
Mid-central	2,400	2,700	3,100
Periphery	1,600	2,100	2,400

Source: Piancastelli 2004: 175.

In view of the difficult housing situation, in 2003, the Italian government passed a law to support young families in purchasing their first dwelling.[10] However, concerning Bologna, Piancastelli (2004) comes to the conclusion that the financial means provided for that end are hardly satisfactory to successfully promote young families' housing plans.

As a second regional context, we refer to *Cagliari*, the capital city of the island of Sardinia. The city has about 168,000 inhabitants. In 2005, Sardinia registered 4.1 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants and occupied a middle position in the Italian spectrum (ISTAT 2006a). Between 1991 and 2001, the share of informal unions in the region doubled from 1.1% of all couples to 2.4% – however, still showing relatively low levels of cohabitation (Sabbadini 1997; ISTAT 2001a). Sardinia also has a unique position: Among the southern Italian regions, it displays the highest percentage of informal unions. In this respect, the region might be seen as a forerunner among the southern regions.

In general, cohabitation in southern Italy is characteristic for older persons who choose not to marry in order to keep their widow's pension. Only in Sardinia do we find a higher incidence of the "innovative" kind of cohabitation in which we are interested (Sabbadini 1997). Cagliari itself showed a figure of 2.5% informal unions in 2001 (ISTAT 2001a). Still today, family formation and household structures are strongly shaped by the island's past as

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[10] GU n. 171, 25 July 2003 (Piancastelli 2004).

a peasant-style, livestock farming society. The development of this special kind of society was favored by the particular Sardinian landscape. Large areas of land, barely accessible, meant that the farmers had to be away from home while taking care of their livestock. However, with the absence of the male head of the family, the decision-making autonomy of wives increased considerably; their influence increased not only on day-to-day decisions, but also on the organization of the family's financial issues (Oppo 1992). The particular family culture that developed in Sardinia over many centuries influenced – and most probably still influences – the transition to marriage as well. Children were brought up to follow the rule of living as economically autonomous individual once they entered into marriage. As a consequence, both men and women were constrained to save money before deciding to be married. Whereas the groom was assumed to acquire a small dwelling, the bride was expected to care for the family's furniture, such as a bed, chairs, a table, linen goods, and so forth (Oppo 1991, 2004). Bernardi and Oppo (2008) analyze the transition to "being a couple" in Sardinia; they underline that the introduction of the partner to the parents, the participation in the partner's family events, and the sharing of housing costs are crucial events in that transition.

Like Bologna, Cagliari is a college town that attracts students, but in this case they come from Sardinia itself rather than from the Italian mainland. Both the city and the region are strongly shaped by unemployment, mismanagement, and the informal economy. Although from the 1960s onwards the Italian government instigated several programs for the stimulation of the island's economy, those initiatives were seldom successful; all too often, companies from the northern part of Italy profited from major government orders in building industrial parks, but which afterward had short existences (Brütting 1997). Consequently, young adults today are confronted with extraordinarily high unemployment. Figure 5.1 displays the percentage of youth unemployment (age 15-24) among the Italian regions. Sardinia is among those regions with the highest percentages of joblessness for this age group: In 2001, about 53.8% of young people in Sardinia were looking for employment (ISTAT 2001a). As a result, the island suffers high rates of emigration. Data show that both the Islands and the South of Italy have negative net migration rates, whereas northern and central Italian areas show positive rates (Gruppo di Coordinamento per la Demografia 2007). High numbers of (young) adults actually move from the rural hinterland to the city of Cagliari or to the relatively prosperous regions in the north of Italy.

Figure 5.1: Percentage of youth unemployment (age 15 - 24), by region, 2001[11]
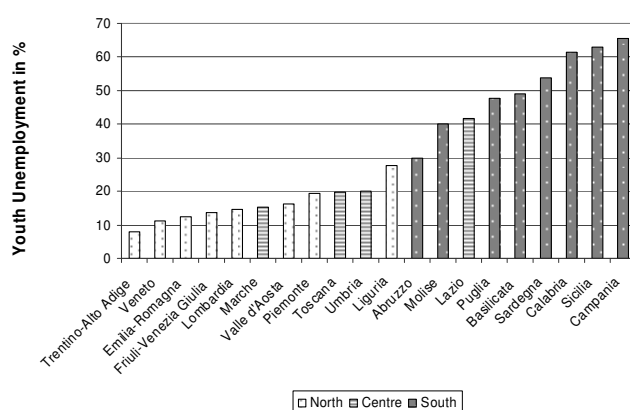
Source: ISTAT 2001a.

As indicated earlier in this study, reliable data on informal unions on the regional and municipal level are only available through the latest census of 2001. It will not be until the next census in 2011 that we will have more recent data. However, several studies give reason to assume that changes are underway and that cohabitation is gaining more importance in the whole of Italy, while retaining the sharp differences between the North and the South (Di Giulio and Rosina 2007; Gabrielli and Hoem 2008).

5.2.3 Data Collection

In both geographical contexts, we employ semi-structured, in-depth interviews to investigate our research questions. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by an interview guideline that consists of preformulated questions. The answers to these questions, however, are open-ended and allow both the interviewer and interviewee to expand the topics under consideration according to their discretion. Furthermore, the interviewer may enhance the interviewee's motivation to respond in more depth by using probes (Schensul et al. 1999). This way, semi-structured interviews "combine the flexibility of an unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data" (Schensul et al. 1999: 149) and "offer us the most systematic opportunity for the collection of qualitative data" (Schensul et al. 1999: 164).

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[11] Especially the data for southern Italy might be biased by the fact that individuals who are working in the informal economy are probably inclined to report "unemployment" instead of illegal work.

A similar procedure is used by Witzel (2000), which he refers to as problem-centered interviewing. Following Witzel, we use the following instruments: a *short questionnaire* in order to gather the most important social characteristics, an *interview guideline* with open-ended questions, the *tape recordings* of the interviews transcribed ex post*, and *postscripts* that contain comments on the situative and nonverbal aspects of the interview as well as an outline of the topics discussed (Witzel 2000).

The short questionnaire, completed right after the interview, includes information on the interviewee's year of birth, educational level, employment, civil status, children, as well as data on the partner's level of education and employment situation, and finally, information about both families of origin, such as regional origin, civil status, educational degrees, employment, and siblings. The interview guideline is built around several thematic topics assumed to be of importance for the process under consideration, namely, the decision for cohabitation. These thematic topics were derived from previous studies and theoretical approaches used in the literature discussed in Chapter 2. We focus, for instance, on the influence of family members or more precisely of parents on the choice for cohabitation. Thus, a whole section of the interview guideline refers to that topic. During the process of data collection and data analysis, we expanded the guideline including aspects that came up during the interviews. We start the interview with the broad opening question: *You are currently living with your partner. How did you arrive at that choice and why have you chosen to live together?* Depending on the subject of the respondent's answer, we then guide the interviewee to the following thematic sections:

A. **The woman's characteristics:** family and youth, friends, education and employment history, economic (in)dependence, home leaving, previous relationships, children ….

B. **The current relationship**: beginning of the relationship, perception of the relationship, rituals, most important periods within the partnership, partner's opinion, problems or conflicts within the relationship ….

C. **Cohabitation**: advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation, perceived differences between cohabitation and marriage, gender roles, meaning of cohabitation and change of significance during partnership, future expectations and plans …

D. **Parents' reactions**: mothers' and fathers' opinions; discussions with parents; changes in family relations after entry into cohabitation, economic and non-economic interdependencies …

E. **Friends' reactions**: discussions with friends, experiences of friends, reactions of colleagues …

F. **Religion**: importance of religion, importance for family of origin, impact on decision for cohabitation or marriage, conflict between cohabitation and religion, opinion of family …

G. **Children**: childbirth intentions, opinion on birth out of wedlock …

Women who entered a marriage after having experienced a previous cohabitation were requested to answer questions concerning the reasons and motivations for that choice as well. In addition, we focused on the wedding ceremony and reactions of family members and friends to the marriage. The last question of the interview was on the concept interviewees held about the family in general. On the one hand, this closing question served to find inconsistencies within the interview; on the other hand, it helped the respondent to reach emotional closure on the topics discussed previously. (See Appendix B for the complete Italian interview guideline.)

As to our sampling strategy, we intended to interview women aged between 25 and 40 who were cohabiting at the time of the interview or who married after a previous cohabitation. We also planned to talk both to mothers and childless women. The final dataset was intended to contain information on 25 to 30 women from each of the regional settings. In Bologna, interviewees were found through register data; they were contacted first by phone and then by mail. Furthermore, we used the *snowball method* (Goodman 1961) to complete our sample. For Cagliari, we used the snowball method only and started with contact persons at social and information services. We decided on this (additional) sampling procedure as cohabiters are relatively rare in Italy and not directly listed at the registry offices.[12] Although the snowball method allowed us to collect information from a relatively hidden group of people, we are aware that this approach has some limitations. As Erickson (1979) emphasized, the snowball method produces biases in several ways. The initial sample and additional individuals are not found randomly; participants usually include

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[12] Although several municipalities (Turin being a forerunner) started to allow couples to register informal unions, up to 2005 in Bologna only five couples did so. In both Bologna and Cagliari, we had no access to that category of data.

those individuals willing to cooperate and exclude those who instead withdraw from participation; further biases arise from the fact that interviewees might tend to "protect" friends by not referring to them and by the fact that respondents with a large network of friends will be oversampled, while more isolated persons will be excluded. We expect that our Cagliari sample is biased by the fact that we started our search for interviewees at social and information services, as some of these services engaged especially in women's issues and referred to potential respondents who had dealt already with certain problems such as the status of women in society; as a consequence, these women were much more informed and sensitive to certain issues (for example, gender relations within the couple) than seemed to be the case in Bologna.

Data collection took place between May 2005 and May 2006 and resulted in 56 semi-structured, in-depth-interviews – 28 interviews in each of the two cities. Most of these interviews were from 50 to 60 minutes.

The interviews were conducted in Italian. The interviewer was of German nationality, a characteristic which possibly had some effect on the respondents' answers. Some interviewees might have trusted a "stranger" less than someone of their own nationality and thus might have shown some reservations in sharing all their thoughts on the questions asked. On the other hand, interviewees might have had more trust in the interviewer exactly because of this fact; some people tend to be more talkative when discussing things with a completely unknown person compared to people who live in the same city or region. In addition, we noticed that the interviews greatly benefited from asking the women to provide a deeper description, as the interviewer knew less about the sociocultural context than they did. Maxwell (1996) emphasizes that it is impossible to eliminate the influence of the researcher, and that it is not within the aim of qualitative research to eliminate this influence but to understand it and to use it productively.

Since we interviewed only women who experienced cohabitation, we have no data on women who entered marriage directly, nor on those who never lived in a union. Given our sampling strategy, we furthermore lack information on women who desired or intended to cohabit, but nevertheless did not enter informal union. We thus cannot investigate why women made a decision against this choice or which factors drove such decision. Indeed, we cannot provide evidence on women who did not take into consideration the possibility

of entering a cohabiting union – possibly because it never seemed to be an option for them. However, as we interviewed also women who decided on marriage after cohabitation, we are able to analyze the reasons and motivations that drove the choice to enter a conjugal union after having experienced an informal union.

5.2.4 Sample Description

As mentioned, we conducted 56 interviews – 28 in each of the two settings. Most of the interviewees were between the ages of 25 and 40; some of them were younger and others a little older. However, the median reveals that women in the Cagliari sample were somewhat older than interviewees in Bologna: 37.5 years as compared to 35.0 years. This rather old age of our respondents is a consequence of the evident tendency of Italians to strongly postpone home leaving and family formation (Billari et al. 2000; Billari 2004).

The final dataset for Bologna has information on 16 cohabiting women (two of them mothers) and on 12 married women (three of them childless). From these, 15 were born and raised in Bologna, 6 in the region of Emilia-Romagna, while 3 came from other northern regions to the city and 4 came from the South. They mainly moved to Bologna because of their studies and, at the time of the interview, had been living there already for many years. As to Cagliari, the final dataset consists of information on 16 cohabiting women (5 of them mothers) and on 11 married women (6 of them childless). Additionally, we interviewed one single woman who intended to enter cohabitation within the next six months. From these, 15 were born and raised in Cagliari, 9 in Sardinia; 2 came from northern Italian regions to the city, and one came from the South. The main reason for moving was the intention to study in Cagliari. Particularly those who came from the Italian mainland, moved to Cagliari because of their partner.

Though we did not sample for education, most of the interviewees in Bologna and Cagliari had completed university education. This was not surprising, since several studies have found evidence that in Italy higher educated adults are especially prone to enter cohabitation (Sabbadini 1997; Rosina and Fraboni 2004). As to employment, there were many white-collar workers in both samples, including several working in the public sector. In Bologna, two interviewees were still students. And both city samples included women who came from the medical, teaching, or photography professions.

As to religion, more women among the Bologna sample declared themselves to be Catholic than among the Cagliari sample: in Bologna this applied to eleven women, whereas in Cagliari merely six interviewees stated they were Catholic. Though, at first glance, civil status of the interviewees' parents seems to be rather equal among both samples, that is not the case. At the time of the interview, merely three women in Bologna and two in Cagliari reported a current separation or divorce of their parents. However, many more parents among the Bologna sample had experienced cohabitation, lone parenthood, separation, or divorce in the past than was the case in Cagliari. Interviewees in Bologna also tended to have rather few siblings compared to women in Cagliari. See Table 5.2 for a detailed description of the dataset.

Table 5.2: Description of the Bologna and Cagliari Samples

		Bologna	Cagliari	Total
Marital status	Cohabiting and childless	14	11 (+ 1 single)	*26*
	Cohabiting and mother	2	5	*7*
	Married and childless	3	6	*9*
	Married and mother	9	5	*14*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
Age	20-27 years	3	2	*5*
	28-35 years	12	8	*20*
	36-42 years	11	14	*25*
	43 years and older	2	4	*6*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
	Median	*35.0 years*	*37.5 years*	
Region of birth	Same city	15	15	*30*
	Same region	6	10	*16*
	North/ Centre	3	2	*5*
	South	4	1	*5*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*

Educational level	Lower secondary	2	1	*3*
	Higher secondary	4	5	*9*
	University degree	22	22	*44*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
Religious	Yes	11	6	*17*
	No	17	22	*39*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
Parents' civil status at the interview	Married	25	26	*51*
	Separated or divorced	3	2	*5*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
Number of siblings	No siblings	5	1	*6*
	One sibling	16	10	*26*
	Two siblings	3	10	*13*
	Three or more siblings	4	7	*11*
	Total	*28*	*28*	*56*
	Median	*1 sibling*	*2 siblings*	

We need to take into account that the Cagliari sample represents a selective group of cohabiters compared to Bologna. Whereas informal unions are relatively widespread in Bologna, this is by no means the case in Cagliari. Our Cagliari interviewees represent the early innovators of this modern kind of living arrangement in that area.

5.2.5 Data Analysis

After conducting and recording the interviews, all audio tapes were transcribed. This enabled us to go back to the data several times. In a further step we coded the material. The coding and categorizing of the interviews was inspired by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded theory employs three steps of coding and categorizing to analyze qualitative data: *open coding, axial coding,* and *selective coding.* Open coding refers to labeling of data, sentence-by-sentence or paragraph-by-paragraph. Next, labels are combined into

categories, and axes between them are identified. During axial coding, the number of codes is reduced and the different axes between the phenomenon and its context, intervening factors, and consequences are constructed (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 1990). Finally, selective coding aims at "elaborate[ing] the core category around which the other developed categories can be grouped and by which they are integrated" (Flick 2002: 182). The end result of qualitative research is the generation of theory. For our analysis, we used Nvivo computer software, a program designed for the purpose of coding and analyzing qualitative data. After coding our interviews, we had a total of about 440 labels. As in grounded theory, we categorized these codes and elaborated axes between emerging categories. Furthermore, we used memos as an intermediate step between coding and analyzing (Charmaz 2000).

To illustrate the analytical steps we quote two examples. After providing the interviews with open codes, we pooled those codes that belonged together into categories. In Example 1, we refer to the category "type of cohabitation." In this category, we subsumed all possible types of informal unions, among them cohabitation as pre-marital passage, as trial, as alternative, and so forth. (See Example 1 for a selection of different codes of this category, corresponding code descriptions, and exemplary passages from the interviews.)

Example 1: Category "Type of cohabitation"

Code	Code description	Passages
'Premarital passage'	Cohabitation is primarily perceived as a pre-marital step.	"But I was already thinking about building something more serious, more lasting, something that might lead to marriage."[13]

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[13] "Ma c'era già in me l'idea di far nascere qualcosa di più serio, più duraturo, qualcosa che portasse al matrimonio."

Code	Code description	Passages
'Trial'	The union is, in the first place, seen as a trial that might lead to marriage, but does not need to.	"I mean … we are happy together, but it's not as if our living together is specifically aimed at marriage. The intention is there, but it is not obligatory, shall we say."[14]
'One experience (among others)'	Cohabitation is perceived as one experience among others. The wedding is not (yet) taken into account.	"Maybe (it's) an experiment that might work out or which might fail … to see what living together all the time is like, shall we say."[15]
'Alternative living arrangement'	The informal union is experienced as an alternative living arrangement. The couple decided consciously against a wedding.	"It's a choice that's linked to the fact … for me and also for Giulio, my boyfriend, it's the same as marriage. We are not practicing Catholics so we don't believe we need to formalize our relationship by having to go to Church and celebrate a ceremony."[16]
…		

In Example 2, we focus on the category "advantages of cohabitation." Interviewees quoted, for instance, economic advantages, a higher degree of security, more freedom, or no wedding costs as benefits of an informal union. Example 2 presents a selection of codes for this category.

Example 2: Category "Advantages of cohabitation"

Code	Code description	Passages
'Economically advantageous'	The informal union is perceived as economically advantageous e.g. due to the fact that the couple shares costs for housing, electricity, gas and water.	"Well … firstly for financial reasons in the sense that … because I had a single room anyway, he always came to my place and so to give us both more freedom and also to share the rent costs as best as possible, etcetera, etcetera, we decided to share a room in a flat

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[14] "Cioè … stiamo bene però non è che questa convivenza sia finalizzata al matrimonio, le intenzioni ci sono ma non è una cosa tassativa diciamo."

[15] "Magari (è) un esperimento che può funzionar bene oppure può fallire anche … per vedere come si vive insieme tutto il tempo diciamo."

[16] "È una scelta che è legata al fatto di …per me e anche per Giulio, il mio ragazzo equivale al matrimonio, non siamo cattolici praticanti quindi non pensiamo che sia per noi necessario per ufficializzare il nostro rapporto dover andare in Chiesa e dover celebrare una cerimonia."

[17] "Dunque … innanzi tutto per ragioni economiche nel senso che … perché comunque io avevo una stanza singola, lui veniva sempre da me e sia per avere maggiore libertà noi due che per condividere al meglio le

Code	Code description	Passages
		where other people live."[17]
'Never alone'	Cohabitation is seen as beneficial as both persons involved in the union are never alone.	"Well, in my opinion, the advantage is that I never feel alone. I like it, apart from the fact that I love him, so I like being with him, and I also like sharing things with people. (…) So this is one of the biggest advantages."[18]
'More security'	The union is assumed to give a higher degree of security as far as the seriousness of the relationship is concerned.	"Another of the advantages is … in any case it gives you more security. At the start of our relationship (…) I was always afraid that it would finish and after an argument I thought "oh, I've made a big mistake this time and he won't be back', whereas if you live together he has to come back anyway because where is he going to sleep at night? He can spend one night in a hotel but it's not as if he can … can he? Sooner or later he'll be back, so in any case you have a chance to put things right."[19]
'You can always go'	One advantage of a non-marital union is seen in the possibility to separate at any time. When married, in contrast, it is assumed to be much more difficult to put that choice into action.	"But in my opinion the advantage is purely psychological, at least as far as I'm concerned. I mean when you live together you can always say "ok, friends as before' when things aren't working out. Not with marriage. You have responsibilities, besides financial ones, but well, basically there is something else."[20]

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[17] spese d'affitto eccetra eccetra abbiamo deciso di condividere una stanza all'interno di un appartamento in cui abitano altre persone."

[18] "Mah, il vantaggio secondo me è che non mi sento mai sola. Mi piace, a parte che sono innamorata di lui quindi mi fa piacere stare con lui, però mi piace anche condividere le cose con le persone. (…) Quindi questo è uno dei più grossi vantaggi."

[19] "Un altro dei vantaggi è … ti dà comunque più sicurezza. Io all'inizio della nostra relazione (…) avevo sempre paura che finisse e pensavo dopo una litigata "ah, sta volta l'ho fatta grossa e non torna più', mentre invece se abiti insieme comunque deve tornare perché dove va a dormire la sera? In albergo può andare una sera, ma non è che … no? Prima o poi torna, quindi comunque un'occasione per rimettere a posto le cose c'è."

[20] "Ma secondo me il vantaggio è che è un fatto prettamente mentale, almeno per quanto mi riguarda. Cioè è che nella convivenza poi si può sempre dire "ok, amici come prima' quando non vanno bene le cose. Nel matrimonio no, ci sono delle responsabilità, al di là di quelle economiche però insomma c'è qualcosa in più ecco."

Code	Code description	Passages
'No wedding costs'	Another benefit of cohabitation is seen in the fact that no cost-intensive wedding party needs to be arranged.	"Well, the first advantage: You avoid the whole rigmarole of having to organize the wedding and wedding costs for the party, which is for the others …"[21]
'More freedom'	The informal union is perceived to give more freedom to the individuals involved in the relationship.	"For me living together only has advantages, because you are together just the same, you wake up together just the same every morning, you share problems just the same so for me there is no difference, but you are free … it's a free choice to be together, so it's only an advantage for me."[22]
'Having a trial'	Another advantage of an informal union is the fact that the couple has a trial before they decide to stay together for a longer period or before marriage.	"The advantages are that you can put your relationship to the test, so to speak."[23]
…		

However, in some cases, we had to deal with ambivalences of interviewees' statements. For instance, one woman declared at one point that she perceived cohabitation as a step that leads to marriage. Yet, the same woman emphasized at another point the "trial" character of an informal union. In cases like that, we coded the first passage as "pre-marital step" and the second passage as "trial.' When analyzing the actual case, however, we took this ambivalence into account.

In a further step – after coding – all categories were assigned to different axes. One important axis, for instance, is the "family axis." Here we subsumed several categories and single codes that relate to the family of origin. The axis is composed as follows:

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[21] "Allora, il primo vantaggio: Uno si evita tutta la storia di dover organizzare il matrimonio, spese per il matrimonio per fare una festa che è per gli altri …"
[22] "Per me c'è solo vantaggi nella convivenza perché si sta insieme lo stesso, ci si sveglia insieme lo stesso tutte le mattine, si condividono i problemi lo stesso perché per me non c'è differenza, però si è liberi … è una libera scelta di stare insieme, quindi per me è solo un vantaggio."
[23] "Vantaggi appunto sono quelli che si mette alla prova un rapporto per così dire."

- FAMILY
  - o RELATION TO PARENTS
    - § Communication with parents
    - § Family contact
    - § Partner–Parents relationship
    - § …
  - o REACTIONS TO COHABITATION
    - § Mother's reaction
      - Positive reaction
      - Negative reaction
    - § Father's reaction
    - § Reaction of sister(s)
    - § Reaction of brother(s)
    - § …
  - o SUPPORT
    - § Economic support
    - § Non-economic support
    - § Support for the wedding
    - § …
  - o PERCEIVED ATTITUDES
  - o EXPRESSED ATTITUDES
  - o …

Once all data were coded and all categories and axes constructed, we analyzed the material by using maps to illustrate the relationship between single codes, categories, and axes. In the following section, we describe the analytical strategy that influenced the way our data were analyzed and the way the corresponding results are now presented.

5.3 Presentation of Typical Cases for Bologna and Cagliari

As we have seen in Section 5.2.2, both regional settings are characterized by remarkable differences in economic conditions, housing situations, family cultures, and so forth. Our interviews give evidence of that. To illustrate the differences in family formation patterns –

especially with regard to cohabitation – we highlight two typical cases, one for each of the settings explored. Both experiences presented here concern women in their thirties, who are cohabiting and childless. Despite the fact that the situation of both women might appear to be quite similar, each of them lived through completely different decision-making processes.

5.3.1 Bologna: Eleonora, age 34, cohabiting and childless

For Eleonora and her partner Federico, the decision for cohabitation was a carefully considered choice that was not taken by accident. In fact, the couple opted for an informal union as *alternative to marriage*. At the time of the interview, Eleonora had lived with her partner for about seven years – so she entered cohabitation at the age of 27 – however, they had considered themselves a couple for another four years before that. Another two years earlier, at the age of 25, Eleonora had earned her degree at the local university and started working as company employee soon after. Federico worked in a similar position. Given Eleonora's *economic independence*, at the age of 26, her parents proposed that she leave home and move into another family-owned flat.

Actually, in contrast to other parents of our interviewees, Eleonora's parents had rather *modern attitudes toward union and family formation*; they entered their union by cohabitation themselves – at a time where informal unions were even less diffused than today. But whereas Eleonora's parents supported the couple's choice for cohabitation, Federico's family would have preferred to see their son married. Both families of origin had quite different experiences of life: Eleonora's family came from Bologna, her parents experienced non-traditional living arrangements themselves and had high levels of education. In contrast, Federico's family lived in a southern region of Italy, was surrounded by traditional living arrangements, and had low educational levels. However, Eleonora and her partner did not attach much importance to the wishes of Federico's parents.

It is noteworthy that, although Eleonora took advantage of the opportunity to move alone into a flat, she initially preferred to stay on her own. Only later did her partner move in. Eleonora in fact underlined how important it was to *experience living on one's own* before entering a union. Her desire for independence also had an impact on the relation she had with her parents. Although her family offered them the possibility of living in their flat free

of cost, the couple insisted on paying a rent. It was indeed the couple's economic independence that allowed them to do so. No more than a few years before the interview, they stopped this practice, and Eleonora's family signed the flat over to their daughter.

Just a few months before the interview, the couple decided to have a child. Nonetheless, they did not intend to enter marriage. In this respect, it is very interesting how Eleonora perceived her informal union. In her mind, cohabitation is not just an alternative to marriage. She actually claimed the "willingness to stay together throughout life" as a precondition for cohabitation. From this point of view, *cohabitation* is indeed *equal to marriage*.

Though Eleonora defined herself as Christian, she did not perceive any conflict between her unconventional living arrangement and the Church. However, she was aware that people might not approve. Eleonora herself emphasized that she was not Catholic. She did feel close to the Protestant belief, but never attended any Protestant churches.

Within the partnership, Eleonora and Federico had an *equal distribution of duties*, both *economically* and *non-economically*. With regard to housework, Eleonora used to clean up, whereas Federico took care of the couple's dinner when they arrived home after work. As to financial arrangements, Eleonora used to be very active. She was in charge of family expenditures and took care of the couple's bank accounts. Eleonora and Federico had three accounts: a common bank account for joint expenses such as electricity, gas, water etc., and two separate accounts for personal spending. Initially, the couple tried to divide common costs on a regular basis. Yet, for reasons of convenience, they decided to open a joint account. Eleonora set a high value on her personal bank account, which allowed her – in her opinion – more freedom.

5.3.2 Cagliari: Patrizia, age 38, cohabiting and childless

After 14 years in a relationship, Patrizia entered cohabitation at the age of 35. Beforehand, she lived with her family of origin in Cagliari. Her partner, Stefano, in contrast, left parental home one year earlier – however, not purposely. When his parents inherited some amount of money, they intended to give a part of these means to their son. As it made no sense for them to keep this money in the bank, *they decided* to invest the funds into a flat. So, Stefano's

mother started looking for an adequate flat for her son. When the family found a flat, they used the inheritance to pay the deposit for the purchase. Yet, as this flat would serve as the couple's future home, Patrizia felt much excluded from the whole process of choosing and buying – a process couples usually experience on their own, or at least together.

Since Patrizia's family expected marriage to come soon, they agreed to furnish the flat. Later on, Patrizia used to oscillate between her parental home and her partner's flat. She felt sure about her parents having *negative attitudes toward cohabitation*. Thus, she never considered the possibility of moving out before marriage. Only when her parents proposed that she leave home in order to stay with Stefano, did she decide to take that step.

At the time of the interview, Patrizia and Stefano had been cohabiting for about three years. Patrizia earned a university degree at the local university at age 29. Her partner held the same educational level. After her studies, Patrizia had several short-term contracts. Though she had worked already for a longer period of time for the same employer, she had *limited contracts* only. Stefano had some good jobs, but just for limited periods, too. One year prior to the interview, he lost his job and was still looking for a new position. Patrizia assumed, actually, that Stefano's *precarious economic situation* was the main reason for his refusal of marriage. She speculated that he did not consider marriage as there were no economic means for the wedding and no way that he could afford it – though the couple never talked about that topic. Patrizia, on the other hand, would have liked to have a nice *church wedding*.

As to childbirth, the couple found themselves in another difficult situation: Patrizia expressed her wish for a child but was aware of all the problems connected with that choice which would, in her view, prevent them from having offspring. In the main, these problems comprised the couple's *tight economic situation* and their *age*. Later, Patrizia reported on yet another problem: Both Patrizia and Stefano were carriers of an illness that would very probably affect the health of their child.

Interestingly, though Patrizia's parents proposed cohabitation, they would have by far preferred their daughter to marry. Her family of origin came from Cagliari, and both of her parents had low levels of education degrees. Her mother had always been a housewife. When Patrizia's father actually noticed that the wedding was a long time coming, he said to

his daughter: "If I'd known that you were not going to marry, I wouldn't have paid for all the furniture."

As for the division of *economic and non-economic duties* and responsibilities, the couple had rather *unequal arrangements*. Patrizia was in charge of almost all housework, having experienced a gendered division of domestic tasks in her family of origin. She was content with this arrangement and never had any conflict with her partner about it. With respect to financial arrangements, the couple changed its behavior when Stefano lost his employment position. Beforehand, Stefano used to pay for the costs connected to the purchase of the flat. When he was not able to continue this practice, his parents started to support their son economically. At the same time, Patrizia stepped in and started to contribute to the bank loan. Toward her partner, she justified her contribution as some kind of rent. Yet, the couple had one common bank account for joint expenditures and two separate personal accounts. As Stefano had no income at the time of the interview, Patrizia was putting most of the money into the joint account.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented our qualitative research design. We highlighted the qualitative research method, our data sampling strategy, and described our data and the way it was analyzed. Furthermore, we provided a detailed description of the two regional settings used in the study and demonstrated the differences between the contexts by referring to typical cases.

The experience of *Eleonora from Bologna* was characterized by a relatively early transition to economic independence (when compared to the overall Italian situation), by extensive support of her parents – both in material and emotional terms – and by a strong orientation toward independence and gender equity within the relationship. *Patrizia from Cagliari*, by contrast, experienced a difficult and precarious transition to economic independence. Though her parents supported her by furnishing the couple's future flat and even proposed that they enter cohabitation, they left no doubt about favoring marriage over cohabitation. Patrizia herself, actually desired a wedding as well.

The further analyses of our interview data consider these regional peculiarities by investigating both regional contexts separately, one after the other. We shall present our qualitative results as follows: Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to the *transition to and meaning of cohabitation and marriage* in both geographical contexts. In Chapter 8, we present the influence of *formal institutions* on non-marital union formation, focusing on economic uncertainty, housing market shortages, and the perception of legal regulations. Chapter 9 addresses the influence of *informal institutions*, such as the family, the Catholic culture, friends, and gender roles within the couple. In Chapter 10, we then draw conclusions on the influence of each of these aspects on informal union formation by investigating the *interplay of all factors*.

Chapter 6

The Transition to and Meaning of Cohabitation

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the transition to and meaning of cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari. Several earlier studies give reason to assume that the transition to cohabitation is different in Italy compared to other European countries. Earlier research had underlined that Italian adults tend to leave home at a very late stage in life (Rossi 1997; Menniti et al. 2000; Billari 2004). This behavior has consequences for cohabitation, too: Kiernan (1999), for instance, points to the fact that in almost all European countries cohabitation tends to be a living arrangement mostly prevailing among young adults in their twenties. In Italy, by contrast, this age group seems to avoid entry into any kind of union and to delay this transition into their thirties (Kiernan 1999). Other studies emphasize the fact that, in Italy, young adults generally opt for leaving the parental home only when intending to form the first – usually marital – union (Ongaro 2003; Rosina and Fraboni 2004). Since more detailed knowledge about the transition to cohabitation is missing for the Italian case, we are particularly interested to see how young adults decide and reason about their move into this living arrangement. A further aim is to analyze which stages in life our interviewees lived through before entering cohabitation, at which point in time they made the decision for living together, and which preconditions were important for them in order to make that choice.

Furthermore, scholars have stressed that cohabitation might be perceived differently among people involved in informal relationships. Cohabitation might be seen and experienced as prelude to marriage, as trial, or as alternative to the conjugal bond. Additionally, the way cohabitation is perceived seems to be related to the relative diffusion of this living arrangement in a given context: The more widespread cohabitation is, the more it seems to be accepted as alternative to marriage (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1991; Prinz 1995). In this respect, the low diffusion of informal unions in Italy gives reason to assume that the great majority of cohabiting couples perceive their union as prelude to marriage. However, as the diffusion of cohabitation varies among both regional settings we examine, we aim at analyzing the way couples in Bologna – where higher rates of informal unions

prevail – and Cagliari – where we find much lower cohabitation rates – perceive their union. We argue that the way cohabitation is seen by couples has considerable impact on the future development of family in their respective contexts.

6.2 The Transition to Cohabitation

6.2.1 Bologna: Gaining Experiences of Life Separately

In Bologna, the transition to cohabitation is mostly characterized by experiencing alternative living arrangements before entering an informal union. Instead of staying with their parents, the clear majority of women in the Bologna sample lived in student flats or on their own prior to cohabitation. This is not surprising with reference to women who came to Bologna for their studies. However, it is interesting that women who grew up in Bologna also tended to live on their own. Only in a few cases did women leave their parental home in order to enter directly into an informal union. If women did so, they either came from religious families or had only moderate levels of education. Since the majority of women in the Bologna sample had a high education, they (as well as their partners) had the opportunity to study or to work several months or even years in another country. For that reason, several relationships were characterized by discontinuities – before as well as during cohabitation. Both the women's tendency to attend higher education as well as gaining experience in foreign countries contribute further to the assumption that in Bologna cohabitation still occurs mainly among a selective group of people.

Most women in the Bologna sample had already experienced intimate relationships before they decided on an informal union: In about half of the cases, women had one or several relationships beforehand. But only four interviewees had been in a previous cohabitation.

Often women mentioned the importance of being mature, experienced, and economically independent before entering cohabitation. Once these preconditions were attained, women felt ready to enter an informal union. Thus, cohabitation is rarely perceived as a possibility of "growing together," but rather as a step to be taken after having experienced other relationships, university, or in some cases even a period of independent living:

"Well…if you want to make a relationship last, I mean if you already intend to build something more important and more serious I think you should try other experiences before living together, you should concentrate on your studies, you should go on holidays, you should cultivate friendships because, rightly or wrongly, living together does nonetheless restrict you a little, so you must be ready to live together. This is why if I said yes before, we had both had some wonderful experiences, some exciting…personal experiences when we were single so, well, we were ready to take this step and commit ourselves…basically…we were ready to take this step that would lead to different things."[24]

On average, women in the Bologna sample met their current partner at approximately age 26.5 and entered cohabitation at age 28.6. The maximum time difference between dating the partner and moving in together was four years. Furthermore, the data give no evidence that women who were somewhat older when deciding on cohabitation entered this union faster than younger women with less experience of life. Most interviewees described the transition to cohabitation as a "permanent coming and going," as a slow and gradual process, sometimes spontaneous and very often as a natural step:

"Since I was always at his home or he at mine, we decided to start cohabiting."[25]

"It was a slow process, knowing each other better step-by-step as we spent more time together and lived together (…) therefore we did not experience a particular day when we decided to start cohabiting, I almost do not remember, because it was quite gradual and somehow spontaneous."[26]

Frequently women moved to their partner's flat or vice versa. However, it is striking that in seven out of eight cases where men moved to the women's place, it was the women themselves or their families who owned the flat. Especially younger couples tended to live in a student flat with other people instead of on their own. In addition, these couples often shared a double-bedded room. In all such cases, this kind of housing was due to economic reasons. Only in two cases did the couple first live with the family of origin before looking for their own flat and a few other couples looked for a flat of their own in which to live together. Thus, it seems that couples in Bologna accommodated to the Italian housing market. When entering cohabitation, they generally tended to move into a partner's place, rather than searching for a new flat to move into together.

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[24] "Mah…se si vuole fare durare un rapporto, cioè se si ha già un po' l'intenzione di portare avanti qualcosa di più importante e più seria penso che prima della convivenza uno debba provare altre esperienze, quindi debba dedicarsi agli studi, debba fare vacanze, debba dedicarsi alle amicizie perché comunque la convivenza bene o male un po' lega quindi uno deve sentirsi pronto per la convivenza. Per questo se prima ho detto si, avevamo tutti e due avevamo vissuto delle belle esperienze, esperienze piene di vita…personale, da single insomma e quindi eravamo pronti per fare un passo che ci legasse…insomma…che portasse a cose diverse."

[25] "Visto che o io ero sempre a casa sua o lui era sempre a casa mia insomma abbiamo deciso di unire la convivenza."

[26] "E' stato un processo lento, cioè mano a mano che ci siamo conosciuti passavamo più tempo insieme e quindi abitavamo (…) quindi non abbiamo sentito proprio il giorno in cui proprio abbiamo deciso di andare a convivere, quasi non lo ricordo perché è stato tutto molto graduale, spontaneo proprio."

6.2.2 Cagliari: Gaining Experiences of Life Together

Despite some commonalities, in Cagliari the transition to cohabitation is characterized by a different pattern. Although – as in Bologna – women, who came to the city in order to study, experienced living in a student flat, very few of the Cagliari interviewees did so. If they decided to live on their own or to share a flat, the choice was often driven by external factors: In one case, the male partner lived on his own for about six years since his parents bought a second flat in another part of the city. In another example, a woman moved out to give her room to her grandmother, who needed support at that time:

"Let's say we got this house because of a series of circumstances, and in any case at the time my grandmother was staying at my parents' house. She wasn't very well and she needed a room all to herself, so I moved to this house and stayed here. It wasn't because I wanted to leave home or because I didn't get on with my parents."[27]

Thus, among the Cagliari sample, living outside the parental home was not only a result of the desire for personal freedom, but more often an effect of external circumstances. Again, some women experienced living abroad during their studies – some also lived on the Italian mainland. We also found women who reported that cohabitation was a convenient way to leave home – convenient, that is, as they wanted to leave home anyway and sharing a flat was economically favorable.

In general, couple relationships in Cagliari were characterized by very long engagements. Instead of having several short-term relationships, the interviewed women tended to have few, but very long-lasting ones. Often they were engaged, too. As a result, couples often passed together through numerous stages of life: They finished school together, started studying and finished their studies – sometimes going abroad together – and finally, they started working, often followed by the start of cohabitation. We observe a type of relationship that is strongly marked by gaining experiences of life together. As a result, few women reported previous relationships and even fewer mentioned previous cohabitations. If they did so, they often reported long-lasting engagements.

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[27] "Diciamo che sono state una serie di circostanze per cui avevamo questa casa e comunque in quel periodo a casa dei miei c'era mia nonna che non stava bene e quindi aveva bisogno di una stanza tutta per lei e quindi io mi sono spostata in questa casa e sono rimasta. Non era perché me ne volessi andare da casa o perché non andassi d'accordo con i miei genitori."

On average, women in the Cagliari sample met their current partner at the age of 26.5 years. However, they entered cohabitation on average at age 31.3. In eight cases, couples decided on an informal union only after 9 to 16 years in a relationship.

The demand for at least one secure income as a precondition for cohabitation might explain the strong delay in entering cohabitation. Some of the couples who had to overcome such difficulties reported that they initially intended to marry when moving into their common flat. Since housing and furniture was highly expensive, they decided to postpone marriage in order to save money for the wedding party.

When entering cohabitation, the majority of couples searched for a new flat to rent or to buy. In some cases, one of the partners moved into the rented or owned flat of the other partner, so it happened more often that the female partner moved into the owned flat of the male partner. Since many couples searched for a new flat before they entered cohabitation, they had to overcome the housing market difficulties.

In several cases, entry into cohabitation occurred gradually – especially in cases where one or both partners lived in a student flat. First, the couples experienced some kind of "convivenza notturna" (nighttime cohabitation) where they regularly spent nights together. Most women reported that they experienced some kind of pre-cohabitation, e.g. cohabitation lasting several weeks or months – often during summer vacations but also at the end of their studies. Thus, frequently these young adults stayed with their partner a long time before entering the informal union.

To sum up, interviewees in Cagliari often justified the way they lived by referring to external circumstances rather than individual desires – for instance, living with the grandma since she needs help; living on one's own since the flat would be empty otherwise; postponing cohabitation for several years since the flat was not ready in time (and renting was associated with "throwing money down the drain"). There were few couples who decided on cohabitation after a relatively short time of two or three years; generally, couples moved in together only after ten years or even longer.

6.2.3 Comparing the Transition to Cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari

Comparing the patterns identified in Bologna and Cagliari, we find several differences in the respective transitions to cohabitation. First of all, in Bologna women to a higher extent tended to live in alternative living arrangements, such as sharing a flat with other students or staying on their own. Whereas in both contexts, women who did not originate from the city, had already left their parental home, in Bologna this accounted also for women who grew up in the city and had their family nearby. In Cagliari, this was much less the case: Women who originated from the city usually stayed with their families and left home only on entry into cohabitation. Whereas the Cagliari pattern corresponds to the overall assumption that Italian adults leave home primarily for union formation (Ongaro 2003; Rosina and Fraboni 2004), the pattern we observe in Bologna is quite different. There, the women we interviewed left home mainly for other reasons, such as experiencing residential autonomy. This observation supports the assumption that orientations toward individuality are well advanced in Bologna.

Second, women in Bologna emphasized that it was important for them to be mature, experienced, and economically independent when deciding on an informal union. Before venturing such a step, they wanted to have many experiences and enjoy life. Interviewees in Cagliari, on the other hand, tended to gain experiences together with their partner; the couple usually underwent several stages in life together (such as studies, transition to employment, etc.) and decided finally to cohabit. Having a more or less stable employment position was an important factor for couples in Cagliari, too. However, as the economy in Sardinia is very unstable, young adults faced many more difficulties finding a job in Cagliari than in Bologna.

Among both city samples, interviewees met their current partners at approximately age 26.5. But whereas women in Bologna tended to enter cohabitation on average at age 28.6, women in Cagliari did so only at age 31.3. Additionally among the Cagliari sample were eight couples who moved in together only after 9 to 16 years in the relationship, whereas the maximum time difference in Bologna was 4 years. Although the sample is not representative, these figures indicate the different patterns of entry into cohabitation. The relatively high age at entry into cohabitation in both settings is consistent with findings from previous studies that point to the strong postponement of home leaving and

consequently of family formation choice in Italy (Rossi 1997; Menniti et al. 2000; Billari et al. 2001; Billari 2004). Analyzing the transition out of the parental home among cohorts born around the 1960s, Billari and colleagues (2001) find that it is Italian men who leave the latest (on average at age 26.7 as compared to age 20.2 in Sweden, 21.5 in France, and 22.5 in the Netherlands). Italian adults actually tend to leave home so late that Billari (2004) refers to this group as the "latest-late." In addition to that, leaving the parental home is not perceived as being irreversible. Billari et al. (2008) analyze the leaving of and returning to the parental home and label this Italian peculiarity as "living apart together with parents." The authors argue that – though living with parents might occur because of choice and because of constraint – it offers a new *opportunity*: the opportunity to plan and organize life choices (such as attending university or stabilizing the job position) while minimizing risks. However, the consequence of this process is – among other things – a delayed entry into union. Whereas in other European countries cohabitation occurs mainly among adults in their twenties, this is not the case in Italy. Here couples rarely form partnerships before the age of 30 and this applies to both cohabitation and marriage (Kiernan 1999; Tobìo 2001).

Our analysis furthermore provides evidence that few couples decide for cohabitation when enrolled in studies at the university. This is true for both Bologna and Cagliari. Several studies point, indeed, to the fact that union formation and exit from the educational system are interrelated processes. However, though all of these studies find evidence that being a student diminishes the chance of entering any kind of union, they all agree in the assumption that educational enrolment seems to be more compatible with cohabitation than with marriage (Hoem 1986; Thornton et al. 1995; Baizán et al. 2001; Coppola 2003). In contrast, almost none of our interviewees decided on cohabitation when enrolling in university. In most cases, the decision to cohabit was taken after graduation.

6.3 The Meaning of Cohabitation

6.3.1 Bologna: Cohabitation as Definite Decision for the Partner

When Matilda (35) entered her first cohabitation seven years ago, she already had the idea to develop "something more serious, more enduring." At this point, Matilda was aware that cohabitation might unearth negative traits of her partner:

"Then of course situations can lead to different things: you might split up or discover that this person is different when you live together, because living together enables you to discover many sides of a person that you didn't know before."[28]

Despite this consciousness, she perceived cohabitation as prelude to marriage: "As far as I see it, cohabitation is a step that leads to marriage."[29] Two years later, Matilda entered marriage, shortly after the first of her two daughters saw the light of day. Although being aware of a possible failure of her informal union, Matilda, to a certain extent, disregarded this contingency and was on target for marriage right from the start. Lorella, aged 37, married and childless, made an even stronger point. In her view, love could overcome all problems and difficulties:

"And it is right to see how they behave and have a trial period, also to see what they're like, because you discover a lot of things when you live with someone, but I say that love will conquer all if you love someone enough. Basically you don't pick up a lot of things that could … because you are in love and well, when you are in love you don't even notice some things."[30]

In this way, Lorella disregards informal unions as a trial and highlights her personal perception of cohabitation as an entry into marriage. As we see, several women in the Bologna sample perceived their informal union as prelude to marriage. However, the extent to which these women appreciated cohabitation also as a trial varies considerably. Whereas only one interviewee rejected the possibility of testing the relationship, most women underlined the advantages of having a trial. Yet, most women aimed their informal union for marriage right from the start. For them it was important to marry within a certain period of time. These women could not imagine having a child prior to the wedding. Bearing that in mind, it is not surprising that these women especially emphasized the importance of previous experience, such as studying, traveling, visiting with friends, and so forth. Since cohabitation was supposed to lead to marriage, the beginning of an informal union resembled the definite decision for a partner. In this spirit, most of these women named the following points as preconditions for entry into an informal union: "love," "to be sure to have found the right person," and "at least one secure income." One woman said:

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[28] "Poi è chiaro che gli eventi possono portare a cose diverse, ci può anche essere una rottura o scoprire che nella convivenza questa persona è diversa, perché la convivenza ti fa scoprire molti lati di una persona che prima non conoscevi."

[29] "Per come la vedo io la convivenza è un passo che porta al matrimonio."

[30] "Poi è giusto vedere come ci si comporta, è giusto anche fare una prova, vedere anche il modo di fare perché tante cose anche quando si vive insieme magari vengono fuori, però io dico che se l'amore è grande supera tutto. Non fai caso insomma a tante cose che potrebbero … perché ami e poi quando ami non noti neanche certe cose insomma."

"In my opinion, the decision must be well thought-out and not made on the spur of the moment. It must not be an experiment, the decision must not be taken too lightly … I mean the desire to be together … to want to live together."[31]

Almost all interviewees who perceived cohabitation as entry into marriage came originally either from the southern part of Italy or had a strong Catholic background.

Other women entered cohabitation without the intention to marry in the foreseeable future; they put much more emphasis on the trial character of cohabitation. However, most of them changed their understanding of what cohabitation meant for them, as in the case of Federica. At age 30, after five years of living in an informal union, Federica pushed the decision for marriage forward. At the time of the interview, she had been married for three years and had two small children. She remembered the situation like this:

"Because, at a certain point, I said as we say in Italian, "we are neither one thing nor another" because first I went off to Berlin for a year and he stayed here at home, and then he went off to Hungary to work for another year. At a certain point I said "Look, before you leave" … anyway, before he left for Hungary I said "either we get married or … where are we going to end up?"[32]

Mara (36) experienced a similar development. Whereas she perceived her informal union initially as "trial" and as a "practical consideration," later on her union was much more consolidated. Being sure about her choice after six years of cohabitation, she described her union as an alternative living arrangement. Surprisingly, several women in the Bologna sample declared their union as an alternative to marriage. Women said, for instance:

"I think it is a very strong bond like marriage."[33]

"It is a choice that is linked to the fact that for me and also for Alessandro, my boyfriend, cohabitation resembles marriage."[34]

In fact, two of these women had already given birth to a child and did not see any reason to decide on a wedding. Eleonora (34) and her partner, for instance, planned to have their first child in the near future; but decided consciously against marriage. They justified their

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[31] "Secondo me deve essere una scelta ben ponderata non improvvisata. Non deve essere un tentativo, non va preso troppo alla leggera … cioè la volontà di stare insieme … di voler vivere assieme."

[32] "Perché ad un certo punto io ho detto come si dice da noi in italiano "non siamo ne' carne ne' pesce" perché prima sono andata io via a Berlino per un anno e lui stava qui a casa, poi andava via lui per lavoro un altro anno in Ungheria. Ad un certo punto ho detto "Senti prima che tu parta" … comunque prima che partisse per la Ungheria ho detto "o ci sposiamo o … dove andiamo a finire?""

[33] "Io penso che sia un legame molto forte come matrimonio."

[34] "È una scelta che è legata al fatto di … per me e anche per Alessandro, il mio ragazzo, equivale al matrimonio."

choice by arguing that they were not practicing Catholics and thus saw no need to formalize their union by going with friends and family to the church for a wedding ceremony. Furthermore, most couples underlined the positive aspects of cohabitation over marriage. As Claudia (28) argued:

"I think it is nicer to decide to stay with a person and not feel obliged by law, by a religious tie, that is to say by a vow. I think it is nicer to wake up in the morning and be happy to be with the person who lives with you. I think it is nicer if it is a choice, I believe it is easier to see whether it is a choice or not in the sense that when you live together you can split up from one day to the next, with marriage it is more complicated and I prefer to know that my boyfriend is with me out of choice and that I am with him out of choice, simply for this."[35]

Like Claudia, several women appreciated the fact that there was no legal tie between them and their partner – simply because, this way, they could be sure that their partner stayed with them, because he *wanted to* and not because he *had to*. However, on the other hand, choosing an informal union did not imply deciding on a less committed kind of union, as the following quote from Eleonora demonstrates. To the question on the necessary preconditions of cohabitation, she answered:

"The reasons are perhaps the same as those when you decide to get married, that is t say living together as a couple, the fact of being in love and wanting to spend the rest of your life together."[36]

Amazingly, we found women who represented modern attitudes toward cohabitation, as they perceived informal unions not as a prelude to marriage – as is often expected by scholars for the case of Italy – but as an alternative living arrangement. Most of these women were economically independent and had a strong desire to maintain this independence. As further preconditions they named: "respect and collaboration," "being able to make compromises" and "economic independency of both partners." At the same time, we observed that the same women declared traditional aspects as conditions for entering cohabitation as well, such as "having the desire to stay together throughout the whole life." Hence, cohabitation as alternative to marriage seems to be on target for an enduring alliance.

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[35] "Penso che sia più bello decidere di stare con una persona e non sentirsi obbligati da un vincolo legale, da un vincolo religioso cioè da una promessa fatta. Penso sia più bello svegliarsi la mattina ed essere contenta di stare con la persona che vive con te. Penso che sia bello che sia una scelta, credo sia più facile capire se è una scelta o no nel senso che con la convivenza puoi interrompere da un giorno all'altro con il matrimonio è più complicato e quindi preferisco sapere che il mio fidanzato stia con me per scelta e io sto con lui per scelta, semplicemente per questo."

[36] "Sono le stesse forse che ci possono essere per chi decide di sposarsi, cioè proprio di convivere come coppia, il fatto di essere innamorati, il fatto di voler passare tutta la vita insieme."

Only a small number of women in the Bologna sample perceived their union as an experiment, as one of several experiences. These women were generally rather young and still attended university or had graduated from university only a short time previously. Since these women were usually not (fully) economically independent, they tended to live in student flats and often shared a double room with their partner. Due to her economic dependence, Lisa, aged 21, experienced her cohabitation less as a real informal union:

"We are still students; mum and dad pay the rent for both of us. We do live together, yes, because we wake up together every morning and we go to bed together, but I mean I will only feel as if I truly live with him the day I pay the rent, do you see what I mean?"[37]

In general, these women were insecure as far as the future of their relationship was concerned. Although we cannot exclude the possibility that some of these unions might convert into a more serious kind of relationship – be it as alternative to marriage or even as conjugal union – we found evidence that these unions were not aimed at an enduring relationship when the couples decided to move in together. Rather, these young women were highly aware that their union might break up. Some of them had actually already experienced a previous informal union and subsequent separation.

To sum up, women in Bologna associated various meanings and purposes to cohabitation. Women who perceived their informal union as entry into marriage as well as those who considered it as an alternative living arrangement saw their relationship as a definite decision to stay with the current partner. In this sense, cohabitation resembled marriage. It is this increasingly common dynamic among the small group of women who perceive their cohabitation as only one one phase in a process which is new in Italian society, and which may be the factor that puts the most pressure on future family formation in Italy.

6.3.2 Cagliari: Definite Decision for the Partner before Cohabitation

At the time of the interview, Viviana was aged 36, had cohabited with her partner for about one year and experienced a previous relationship with him over 17 years. The couple had a strong intention to marry in the near future. However, a series of circumstances had not allowed for marriage so far: Viviana and her partner felt the necessity for both of them to

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[37] "Siamo ancora studenti, mamma e papà pagano a tutti e due l'affitto di casa. E' una convivenza si perché ci svegliamo tutte le mattine insieme e andiamo a letto insieme, però cioè io sentirò di convivere veramente con lui il giorno sarò io a pagarmi il mio affitto, no?"

have a stable employment position before deciding to go ahead with the wedding. Whereas her partner had managed to find a stable position shortly before the interview, Viviana was still looking for a job. Due to these problems the couple had postponed the wedding. Viviana argued that whereas cohabitation can be realized in a short period of time, a marriage requires much more stability and hence more time:

"After graduating he found work after three years, but it was awful because he always worked on a fixed-term contract … three or four months and then he didn't do anything, then he lived badly for another three months … he was also unemployed for long periods of time (…) Then after he found this job, which he has been doing now since last year … [living together] was something we could do more quickly, whereas marriage takes a bit longer, because of the preparations, etc. And so, instead of staying there and getting a house just for him, a room to rent as he had done until the year before when he was working here in Cagliari on another fixed-term contract. We got this house and we said let's go and live together (…) we wanted to be together and marriage took a little longer, although we are planning to get married. Let's say that first of all, before getting married, we also wanted to see how the job went. He had only just started, and getting married straightaway … well you never know (…) before making such a decision let's wait and look for a house … there's no point in looking for a house now Let's rent for the time being and when things settle down … well, now we are thinking of doing it."[38]

Viviana actually emphasized that, in her case, cohabitation would not have been necessary at all, as she and her partner had already known each other for ages. For the couple, it would have been fine to marry right away. Chiara, aged 39, married and mother of one child also argued that, if it would have been feasible, she would have entered marriage directly. After a relationship of more than ten years, the couple had finally decided to move in together and to marry. However, it took them four more years to buy and to renovate the flat. When finished, they had no more financial means to pay a wedding party. Thus, the "transitional period" of cohabitation served to save money for the wedding:

"It was just a temporary phase for us; we knew we would get married, it was just a problem of finance, I hadn't seen it as something permanent (…) it was the time we needed to get the house sorted out and have a bit of money, when you get married here in Italy, you need money, so we needed a bit of time for that. That was the only problem; I would have also got married before."[39]

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[38] "Lui dopo essersi laureato ha trovato lavoro dopo tre anni, però c'è stata una cosa molto brutta perché ha lavorato ma sempre a termine … tre mesi, quattro mesi e poi non faceva più niente, poi viveva male altri tre mesi … anche per lunghi periodi è stato disoccupato (…) Quindi una volta che ha trovato questo lavoro che ha attualmente dall'anno scorso … [la convivenza] era qualcosa che si poteva fare più velocemente, invece il matrimonio richiede un po' più di tempo, preparazioni ecc. e niente invece di stare lì e prendere una casa solo per lui, una stanza in affitto come aveva fatto fino all'anno prima quando stava lavorando qui a Cagliari con un altro lavoro a termine, abbiamo preso questa casa e abbiamo detto andiamo a vivere insieme (…) avevamo voglia di stare insieme e il matrimonio richiedeva un po' più di tempo, anche se è nei nostri progetti. Diciamo che innanzitutto prima di arrivare al passo del matrimonio volevamo anche vedere come si stabilizzava il lavoro, era appena entrato quindi anche sposarci subito … non si sa mai insomma (…) prima di fare un passo del genere vediamo un pochettino anche cercare casa … inutile stare a cercare casa adesso, andiamo in affitto momentaneamente e quando le cose si sono stabilizzate … infatti adesso ci stiamo pensando di farlo, ecco."
[39] "Per noi era solo una fase temporanea, sapevamo che ci saremmo sposati, avevamo solo un problema economico, non l'avevo vista come una cosa stabile (…) è stato un tempo che ci serviva per poter sistemare un po' meglio la casa e poi avere un po' di soldi, qui in Italia quando ci si sposa un minimo di soldi servono, e quindi avevamo bisogno di tempo per quello. Era solo quello il problema, io mi sarei sposata anche prima."

In this respect, cohabitation was seen as a prelude to marriage – however, as a prelude that would not have been seen as necessary by these women. It was merely external factors such as employment instability or the lack of economic means for the wedding party that led to the postponement of marriage. For these women, cohabitation had always been a temporary solution. In addition, none of them could imagine giving birth to a child before entering a conjugal union. As Chiara stated, "We wanted to have children as soon as we were married; this was a choice we took right at the start." Other interviewees also planned to marry in a reasonable period of time once they had entered cohabitation. Yet, they put much more emphasis on the importance of cohabitation as a trial period:

"I think you should have to live together by law, before making the announcements, you should have to prove that you have lived together for at least a year, this would avoid a lot of divorces and separations, in fact it would avoid a great deal, because some people can't get beyond monotony."[40]

"For me it is of fundamental importance, if I were a legislator and could make a law, I would make it compulsory before marriage, because I think it would prevent a lot of divorces."[41]

Despite the fact that these women stressed the need to test the relationship before choosing marriage, they underlined that once the informal union worked out, marriage should follow:

"Marriage is the logical consequence when you have lived together successfully. Getting married was a point of arrival, an objective."[42]

"On the whole it was a good experience for me. I think it is a good thing to do before getting married."[43]

Thus, women pointed to cohabitation as a temporary passage before entering marriage – the conjugal union is seen as the final goal of a couple's relationship.

As in Bologna, we also found women in Cagliari who perceived their cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Among them, several had already had a child. These women stressed that their union, especially if there were children, was a "true and real family."

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[40] "Io credo che dovrebbe essere obbligatorio per legge la convivenza, prima di fare le pubblicazioni, bisognerebbe dimostrare di aver convissuto almeno un anno, così si eviterebbero una marea di divorzi e di separazioni, proprio tanti, perché c'è gente che non supera la banalità."
[41] "Per me ha un'importanza fondamentale, se io potessi essere un legislatore e fare una legge, la metterei proprio come momento obbligatorio prima del matrimonio, perché credo che si eviterebbero molti divorzi."
[42] "Il matrimonio quando si è convissuto bene, è la logica conseguenza. Il fatto di sposarsi era un punto d'arrivo, un obiettivo."
[43] "In generale per me è stata una buon'esperienza, penso sia una buona cosa da fare prima del matrimonio."

Interestingly, almost all of these women entered cohabitation with the intention to construct something enduring. Right from the start, they made the effort to develop a serious relationship. Gabriella, aged 38, cohabiting and childless, emphasized that she never perceived her cohabitation as a trial. Whenever her friends lauded her decision as a good step to take before entering marriage, she answered that her choice was never intended as a test:

"Our friends said to us, 'You are doing the right thing because it might help you before you get married,' they thought we were doing the right thing because you should take a test, but no, it's not like that. For me it is as if he were my husband, it is not a test to see whether we get along or whether we argue (…) it's not a test, it's just starting to do something important … for me it is as if he were my husband, my family."[44]

Actually, these women saw no difference between their informal union and marriage, even as far as commitments were concerned. Instead, they pointed out "all the things that are attested via marriage are already valid now." However, as far as rights were concerned, the situation was perceived quite differently. Interviewees admitted to considering a wedding as an opportunity to achieve certain rights:

"To be honest, we are not particularly interested in getting married, we are only planning to get married later on because of the bureaucratic system and for a question of inheritance, and later for the pension and all those things that are protected by marriage and not when you live together; otherwise, we would live together forever. The idea is always to live together. If one day they were to give the same rights to people who live together, we would definitely carry on living together."[45]

Thus, in Cagliari we found several women who favored cohabitation over marriage. Nevertheless, they leaned toward entering a formal union in order to become entitled to certain rights. We also found that quite a few women faced difficulties with the question of how to refer to their partners. The Italian language offers several solutions: *ragazzo, compagno, fidanzato* (boyfriend, companion, fiancé). However, none of these terms captures the meaning that is generally attached to a partner in an informal union:

"It annoys me because when you speak about him you don't know what to call him, boyfriend, partner, fiancé all seem derogatory. A boyfriend yes, but you live with him and you can't call him your boyfriend, partner is

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[44] "Gli amici ci dicevano: "Fatte bene perché prima di affrontare il matrimonio vi può servire", ci davano ragione perché bisogna fare una prova e invece no, non è così. Per me è come se fosse mio marito, non è una prova per vedere se andiamo d'accordo, se litighiamo (…) non è una prova, è proprio incominciare a fare una cosa seria … per me è come se fosse mio marito, la mia famiglia."

[45] "Sinceramente non è che ci interessi molto il matrimonio, stiamo pensando di sposarci più in là solo per un sistema di tipo burocratico quindi eredità, più in là per la pensione e tutte quelle cose che vengono tutelate in un matrimonio e non in una convivenza, altrimenti convivremo sempre. L'idea è sempre quella di convivere, se un giorno dovessero dare gli stessi diritti ai conviventi, continuiamo a convivere assolutamente."

horrible, I don't like it. In the end I say he is my husband, although, at the end of the day, we don't have the ring or marriage certificate but for me it is as if he were my husband and it is the same for him."[46]

Among the Cagliari sample, we only found one woman who regarded her informal union as a passage or as one of several experiences. That one exception is Barbara, aged 32, cohabiting, and childless. When she entered cohabitation, she was still attending university. Although Barbara stressed that her union was "just another stage" in her life, she had already cohabited for five years.

Summing up, it can be pointed out that due to employment instability, economic factors had much more impact on the transition to cohabitation and marriage in Cagliari than was the case in Bologna. We identified more than a few women who had decided on cohabitation as a way to deal with problems of economic uncertainty. Whereas some women appreciated the chance to test their union prior to the wedding, others regarded cohabitation as unnecessary for that purpose. Furthermore, several women considered their informal union as an alternative to a marital union. These women underlined the equality of their living arrangements and emphasized that the commitment they undertook within cohabitation was much the same as that among married couples. Most of the women in the Cagliari sample had enjoyed a long-lasting relationship at the time they entered cohabitation. And both women who regarded their informal union as prelude to marriage and those who considered it as alternative, aimed at an enduring relationship. Thus, almost all the women had already made a definite decision in favor of their partner a long time before entering either cohabitation or marriage, and only one of them perceived her union as just another stage of life.

6.3.3 Comparing the Meaning of Cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari

Contrary to previous assumptions, women in both cities did not perceive cohabitation exclusively as a pre-marital phase. In Bologna and in Cagliari, we identified a considerable number of interviewees who regarded cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. In respect of the low diffusion of informal unions in Italy, this is rather surprising.

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[46] "A me dà fastidio, perché quando parli di lui non sai come definirlo ragazzo, compagno, fidanzato perché sembrano tutti dispregiativi. Fidanzato si, ma ci vivi e non puoi definirlo fidanzato, compagno è brutto, non mi piace. Alla fine dico che è mio marito, anche se poi alla fin fine non c'è la fede o l'atto di un matrimonio però per me è come se fosse mio marito e idem per quanto mi riguarda."

Prinz (1995) is one researcher who argues for a relationship between the diffusion of cohabitation in a given country and the meaning this living arrangement has for the individuals involved. With regard to Europe, Prinz distinguishes four stages in the development of informal unions: (i) cohabitation as avant-garde lifestyle, (ii) as preliminary stage before marriage, (iii) as socially accepted living arrangement (even when there are children), and (iv) as partnership equal to marriage. He further argues that, whereas in the Nordic countries non-marital unions are socially accepted as an alternative to marital relationships, in Italy cohabitation remains a precursor in the transition to marriage. Only about a decade later, however, our findings provide ample evidence for the notable changes that occurred with respect to the meaning of cohabitation in Italy.

A somewhat more differentiated classification of informal unions has been developed by Villeneuve-Gokalp (1991). She identifies five profiles of cohabiting couples: those experiencing cohabitation (1) as prelude to marriage, (2) as trial period, (3) as temporary union that might also include a separation, (4) as a stable union without commitments, and (5) as free union where the birth of a child might also occur. As to our findings, cohabiting couples that consciously take into account the possibility of separation are rather rare in Cagliari.

Manting (1996) emphasizes that the way cohabitation is viewed in society affects the interpretation of past developments in marriage: "For instance, if cohabitation is viewed as temporary phase before marriage, the emergence of cohabitation is interpreted as a cause of the postponement of marriage. Cohabitation viewed as an alternative way of living might, however, be seen as one of the underlying causes of a decline in marriage" (Manting 1996: 53). As to Italy, the still low numbers of informal unions give reason to argue that cohabitation is not a real alternative to marriage. However, as our results indicate, in Bologna, cohabitation is already seen as an alternative choice to a formal union. Thus, in the future, cohabitation as substitute for marriage may further increase in importance.

Further, our analysis reveals both differences and similarities among the two regional contexts we examined. As regards differences, we found evidence that women in Bologna attached importance to gaining experience before entering an informal union. They appreciated studying, traveling with friends, and dating different partners. In Cagliari, by contrast, women had already experienced very long-lasting relationships when they entered

cohabitation. These women tended rather to have one important and enduring relationship than to have several shorter ones. Often they had already met their partner at school or later at university. Together, they typically passed through various stages in life such as attending and graduating from university or entering the labor market. Moreover, in Cagliari, a high number of women, who declared their informal union as a transitional period before marriage, stressed the fact that external factors such as economic insecurity or the lack of financial means for the wedding had caused a postponement in the transition from cohabitation to marriage. This argument actually supports general assumptions that cohabitation might serve as "a poor man's marriage" (Kiernan 2000). However, it is most interesting that despite showing similar behavior, namely cohabitation, couples in both regional settings differ by their attitude toward this behavior: Whereas women in Bologna behave in a "modern" way because they prefer to do it like that, a great number of women in Cagliari chose cohabitation as a result of economic constraints. Their behavior contradicts their rather "traditional" attitude toward union formation. Thus, the motivation for entering an informal union varies considerably between both settings.

As to similarities among the two cities, the great majority of women aimed at establishing an enduring relationship when they chose to live together. Women who regarded cohabitation as a prelude to marriage, as well as women who considered it as an alternative, had set their sights on a life-long union. In Bologna, we only found a minority of (mainly young) women who considered their union as just another passage and were unsure about the future of their relationship. In Cagliari we identified just one such case. Thus, the greater proportion of informal unions in the sample is characterized by a high degree of stability. Additionally, women stressed the high commitment they undertake even if not married.

The way women perceive and describe their cohabitations leads to the assumption that informal unions in Italy are characterized by specific traits: Couples generally decide to cohabit in order to start an enduring life-long relationship that includes a high degree of stability and commitment. Women argue that because they have such high expectations as far as their relationship is concerned, they abstain from marriage: In their view, it is the actual absence of any official tie which guarantees that the couple stays together – that is, because they *want to* and not because they *have to*. These findings actually contradict earlier assumptions regarding informal unions in other countries. Manting (1996) emphasizes that

cohabiters are generally less convinced that their relationship will succeed in being a permanent, life-long commitment. Further, she states, informal unions are characterized by lower levels of commitment than marital unions. Lewis (2001) also describes cohabitation as a relationship with minimal ties. Other studies reveal that cohabiting living arrangements in the United States generally do not last long; either they convert into marriage or they end up in separation (Bumpass and Sweet 1989). In view of the differences in expectations and commitments related to cohabitation in Italy and other countries, we argue that a special kind of cohabitation is evolving in Italy. Rather than being short-lived and without obligations, informal unions tend to be as long-lasting and binding as marriages.

Casper and Bianchi (2002) argue that the likely future of family in a given country depends also on the meaning attached to cohabitation: If cohabitation resembles marriage – as we have seen from our findings for the case of Italy – family life will not alter substantially. Either cohabiters will convert their unions into marriage or they will act as if they are married. If cohabitation, however, is perceived as enjoying a relationship of convenience, its growth would favor the retreat from committed relationships and thus put pressure on family culture in Italy. Though our findings indicate that the latter is not yet the case for Italy, the few examples of women in Bologna who perceive their union as an experiment indicate that this kind of relationship might grow in the future.

6.4 Conclusion

Our analyses provide ample evidence that both the transition to and the meaning of cohabitation differ considerably from what earlier studies lead one to infer. Table 6.1 presents a summary of our findings. Especially in Bologna, we observed a strong orientation toward individualistic lifestyles, which is amplified through turning to alternative living arrangements, such as sharing a flat, living alone, or entering cohabitation. This applies to both young adults coming to the city in order to study as well as to those originating in Bologna and having their family nearby. These women, further, emphasized that it was important for them to gain experience (e.g. in respect to studying, traveling, or dating) before entering an informal union. In addition, a high share of interviewees perceived their union neither as prelude to marriage nor as a trial, but rather as a real alternative to marriage. In this respect, the transition to and the meaning of cohabitation seems not to differ that much from the situation in other European countries.

Table 6.1: Summary of findings on the transition to and the meaning of cohabitation

	Bologna	**Cagliari**
Living arrangement before entering cohabitation	*Student flat, living alone*	*Staying with family of origin, student flat*
Main reasons for leaving the parental home	*Studies, employment, residential autonomy*	*Union formation*
Sequencing of life-course events	*Gaining experiences of life (without a partner) before entering cohabitation*	*Gaining experiences of life together with the partner before entering cohabitation*
Meaning of cohabitation	*Pre-marital passage, trial, alternative to marriage, one experience among others* *In most cases, cohabitation is perceived as an enduring union.* *Cohabitation as CHOICE*	*Mainly as prelude to marriage* *Cohabitation is seen as transitory/ temporary solution.* *Cohabitation as CONSTRAINT*

As to Cagliari, we find a different pattern. Here, couples instead opted for one long-lasting relationship. In several cases, they experienced the transition to the most important turning points in life together, such as graduating from school, attending university, entering the labor market, searching for stable employment and so forth. Although some interviewees emphasized that they had decided to cohabit as an alternative to marriage, the clear majority of women described their informal union as a transitory passage on the way toward a (usually expensive) wedding. Taking also into account that most women coming from the city left home only after they had decided to cohabit, we observe a rather traditional path toward family formation.

However, despite these differences between the two regional contexts, a common characteristic of informal union in Bologna and Cagliari attracts attention. In both cities, the great majority of women emphasized that their aim was to establish an enduring union before – or at least when – entering cohabitation. Women underlined their willingness to stay together throughout life and to assume responsibility for their partner. In other European countries, this willingness is associated more with marriage than with cohabitation; generally, cohabitation is seen as a relatively short-lived living arrangement connected to rather low investment and responsibilities. The particular willingness of

couples to vouch for their partner contributes to the assumption that cohabitation in Italy differs considerably from that of other European countries. It seems that in the Italian context a specific kind of cohabitation has developed and is still evolving.

Chapter 7

The Transition to and Meaning of Marriage

7.1 Introduction

To understand the hesitant diffusion of cohabitation in Italy in greater depth, it is necessary to know how and why cohabiting couples decide to marry or not to marry – a question that up to now has been hardly addressed by researchers (Seltzer 2000).

Earlier studies have mainly focused on the interrelationship between childbirth and marriage, finding a strong correlation between the two events (Billari and Kohler 2005; Baizán et al. 2001; Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992). Other studies have referred to the strong influence parents have on their adult children when they are about to decide on marriage. It has been assumed that, in Italy, parents favor marriage over cohabitation. Given this preference, parents would use their financial means to bring pressure to bear upon their children (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). The impact of parents has been found in other studies too. Kertzer and colleagues (2008) discovered that women whose mothers worked when the women were age 15, had a lower risk of marriage; the authors also showed that women had higher risks of marrying when their fathers had no or low education. Women's' own level of education seems to be of importance as well: Having a low or a high educational level increases the risk of marriage – compared to women with a moderate level of education (Kertzer et al. 2008).

However, little is known about the way cohabiting adults perceive marriage and the way they enter into it. In the next two sections (7.2 and 7.3), therefore, we address the transition to and the meaning of marriage in Bologna and Cagliari.

7.2 The Transition to Marriage

7.2.1 Bologna: In the Tradition of Civil Marriages

Out of 28 interviewees, among the Bologna sample, 12 made the transition to marriage. Of these, at the time of the interview, 9 were mothers and 3 were childless. However, the

majority of married women entered their conjugal union before giving birth to their first child. Two women entered marriage while pregnant, and one interviewee experienced a birth prior to the wedding. The median age at entry into marriage among these 12 women was 32. They usually decided for the conjugal union after a median duration of cohabitation of about three years.

The strong correlation between childbirth and marriage that one might expect from this observation as well as from several earlier studies (Billari and Kohler 2005; Baizán et al. 2001; Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992) is actually retrieved in the qualitative interview data. Women gave their intention to start a family as one major reason for entering into marriage. Matilda, aged 35 and mother of two children, stated for instance:

"We made the decision after a couple of years, we decided to get married because we wanted to start a family, we planned to have children and so, well, I got married at the age of 30."[47]

The intention to have children in the near future accelerated entry into marriage not only among women with religious views on family formation, but also among those who were not Catholic. Susanna, aged 40 and mother of two children, emphasized:

"Basically, we lived together for a few years, for four or five years, and then, when we felt ready to have children, we decided to get married."[48]

However, both her motivation to get married and that of her partner were mainly rooted in their perception that having children born outside the conjugal union was in many respects too complicated:

"Everything is more complicated when you have children if you are not married in Italy, I mean … you always have to be present … both of you, for everything, you need the consent of both parents, whereas once you are married, one person is the same as the other, so it's easier basically."[49]

Several women in Bologna actually underlined the incentive to marry mainly because of legal reasons (see also Section 8.4). Elena, aged 28 and cohabiting, emphasized her desire to be protected, for example, in case of death:

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[47] "Dopo un paio di anni è arrivata anche la decisione, abbiamo maturato la decisione di sposarci perché volevamo mettere su famiglia, avevamo in progetto di avere dei figli e quindi insomma a 30 anni mi sono sposata."
[48] "Praticamente abbiamo vissuto insieme alcuni anni, quattro, cinque anni poi quando ci siam sentiti pronti per avere dei figli abbiamo deciso di sposarci."
[49] "In Italia se non sei sposato è tutto più complicato per i figli cioè … devi essere sempre presente … entrambi per qualsiasi cosa, c'è bisogno del consenso di entrambi mentre una volta che si è sposati uno vale come l'altro insomma ed è più facile allora."

"He doesn't want to get married, whereas I would like us to get married exactly for this bureaucratic reason. I mean, I want to think that we are protected if something happens to him or if something happens to me one day."[50]

Whereas interviewees perceived their male partners to be not too much interested in achieving the rights (and duties) connected to marriage, women themselves recognized these regulations as important. Not surprisingly then, we identified several women who – whether for legal reasons or because of romantic views about family formation – preferred marriage over cohabitation. Often these women tried to push their partner to decide on a wedding. Federica, aged 33, remembered it this way:

"Because at a certain point, I said, as we say in Italian, "we are neither one thing nor another" because first I went off to Berlin for a year and he stayed here at home, and then he went off to Hungary to work for another year. (…) Anyway, before he left for Hungary I said, either we get married or… where are we going to end up? And anyway, I have always wanted a family and children so … at a certain point we got married. He didn't exactly surprise me by asking me to marry him … I did pressure him a little."[51]

Asked for the ideal age of entering marriage, most women in Bologna referred to no special age. However, they were consistent with the precondition of being mature when taking an important decision such as marriage. Women stated, for instance, that only after age 30 are you mature enough to make that choice. Younger adults were often considered as inexperienced or still in some ways like a child.

From the 12 married women we interviewed in Bologna, 4 decided on a church wedding and 8 got married in the registry office. Although, in most cases, women with a religious affiliation chose a Catholic wedding ceremony, even women without such an affiliation were in favor of marrying in church. One of the latter described her attitude toward Catholic weddings like this:

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[50] "Lui non vuole sposarsi e io vorrei invece che ci sposassimo proprio per questo fatto burocratico, cioè io voglio pensare che un domani se a lui succede qualcosa o a me succede qualcosa siamo tutelati."

[51] "Perché ad un certo punto io ho detto come si dice da noi in italiano "non siamo ne' carne ne' pesce" perché prima sono andata io via a Berlino per un anno e lui stava qui a casa, poi andava via lui per lavoro un altro anno in Ungheria. (…) Comunque prima che partisse per la Ungheria ho detto o ci sposiamo o … dove andiamo a finire? Poi io ho sempre avuto l'ideale della famiglia, dei bambini e quindi … ad un certo punto ci siamo sposati. Non è stato appunto che lui mi ha fatto la sorpresa e mi ha chiesto di sposarlo … ho fatto un po' di presse io."

"The decision to get married in Church was mainly linked to a spiritual idea, which we felt more, basically … I mean, we are not so distant from the Church not to want to get married in Church, basically … although it wasn't a strictly religious decision, I do realize that."[52]

Despite having decided on a Catholic wedding, most of the interviewees had no strictly traditional wedding party, that is, a party with hundreds of guests celebrating until early the next morning. Interviewees instead opted for less cost-intensive and smaller parties and put the emphasis on inviting friends rather than the entire family – this accounted for both couples choosing a religious wedding and those getting married in the registry office.

However, among our sample more women decided on a civil wedding than a religious ceremony; among those intending to marry in the future, women favored the civil wedding. The wedding party for Carla (36) may serve as a good example of the type of wedding parties prevailing among the interviewees in Bologna:

"The marriage was held in two parts, in the sense that there was the actual day of the wedding, which was on a weekday, on a Thursday. It was quite a quick ceremony because we got married at the registry office and so it doesn't last … it doesn't last very long … it lasts about half an hour, maybe not even that. My parents came and his parents (…) and our colleagues from work, and our friends (…) and then, afterwards, we left the town hall …. The town hall is right in the square so there are bars outside with tables outside; we all went there and had something to drink, we proposed a toast and sat outside chatting at the tables (…) and then, two or three days later, it was the weekend and we had a party in a place outside Bologna that we had hired (…) and we held a party there. We invited all of our friends, my friends from abroad and his friends from all over Italy … there were about seventy people, and we danced and ate and stayed together … we had a wonderful party and some other colleagues of ours came, almost everyone … everyone we knew."[53]

So, for our Bologna sample, civil marriages were generally more important than church weddings. Only a few interviewees opted for the latter or emphasized the higher "spirituality" of getting married in church. In general, women and their partners preferred modest celebrations with friends and close family members rather than traditional parties with hundreds of guests. Interviewees furthermore named the intention to have children as one important reason for marriage: In doing so, Catholic women desired to avoid out-of-

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[52] "La scelta della Chiesa è stata soprattutto legata ad un'idea di spiritualità che avvertivamo di più, ecco … cioè non siamo così distanti dalla Chiesa per non fare un matrimonio in Chiesa, ecco … però non era una scelta strettamente religiosa me ne rendo conto."

[53] "Il matrimonio è stato in due fasi nel senso che c'è stato il giorno del matrimonio vero e proprio che era un giorno durante la settimana, era un giovedì. E' stata una cerimonia abbastanza veloce perché ci siamo sposati in comune e quindi dura … dura poco … dura una mezz'oretta forse nemmeno. Sono venuti i miei genitori e i suoi genitori (…) poi sono venuti i nostri colleghi appunto del posto dove lavoravamo, poi i nostri amici (…) e poi dopo siamo usciti e fuori dal comune … il comune è proprio in piazza quindi fuori ci sono dei bar con dei tavolini fuori, siamo andati lì tutti quanti e abbiamo bevuto un bicchiere, fatto un brindisi e siamo rimasti lì seduti fuori ai tavolini a chiacchierare (…) e poi dopo due, tre giorni è arrivato il fine settimana e abbiamo fatto una festa in un locale che c'è fuori Bologna che avevamo preso in affitto (…) e abbiamo fatto una festa lì. Abbiamo invitato tutti i nostri amici, i miei amici dall'estero, i suoi amici da altre parti d'Italia … eravamo una settantina più o meno e così abbiamo ballato, mangiato, siamo stati con le persone … abbiam fatto una bella festa poi sono venuti altri nostri colleghi, un po' tutti … tutte le persone che conoscevamo."

wedlock births in order to follow church rules, whereas non-religious interviewees strove for a higher level of legal rights once being married.

7.2.2 Cagliari: The Persistence of Church Weddings

In Cagliari we interviewed 11 women who entered marriage after having experienced a previous cohabitation. Of these, 6 were childless at the time of the interview, and 5 women had already had a child. However, all of these mothers conceived their first child or gave birth to it after having transformed their union into a marital relationship. Further, most of the married childless interviewees intended to have children, even though some failed to conceive. Similar to Bologna, the median age at entry into marriage was age 32 and the previous informal union had a median duration of three years.

Differently from what women reported in Bologna, interviewees in Cagliari named two factors as important preconditions for entering marriage: first of all, having a more or less stable employment position, and secondly, owning a flat or a house. Both married and cohabiting women underlined recurrently the importance of both requirements:

"Let's say that first of all, before getting married, we also wanted to consider the job situation (…) basically before making such an important decision, let's wait a while and look for a house."[54]

"At the time it was just not possible to consider getting married. Also because you always think of getting married when you have a stable job and a house."[55]

However, given the tight situation in the Sardinian labor market and the resulting economic insecurities, it is not surprising that young adults faced huge difficulties meeting these preconditions. Patrizia, aged 39, childless and cohabiting, suspected in fact that her partner abstained from proposing marriage to her because he had no job:

"We don't discuss the matter any more. I don't think he wants to talk about it because he hasn't got a job, I mean, he doesn't even have casual work, so how can a man propose to you if he doesn't have his own financial independence. I think that's why, and I've stopped asking him."[56]

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[54] "Diciamo che innanzitutto prima di arrivare al passo del matrimonio volevamo anche vedere come si stabilizzava il lavoro (…) insomma prima di fare un passo del genere vediamo un pochettino anche cercare casa."

[55] "All'epoca pensare al matrimonio non era possibile proprio. Anche perché l'idea è quella sempre di sposarsi quando si ha un lavoro stabile, quando si ha una casa."

[56] "Non affrontiamo più il discorso. Io credo che non si voglia affrontare perché non ha un lavoro e quindi cioè non ha neanche un lavoro a tempo e quindi come può un uomo proporti di sposarlo se non ha una sua indipendenza economica. Credo sia quello e non gliel'ho più chiesto."

Actually, as these individually perceived preconditions for marriage were hardly reachable in Cagliari, several interviewees opted not to marry. Others reconsidered the necessity of having stable employment and their own housing for entering a marital union and chose marriage despite failing to meet both requirements. In the latter case, however, couples tended to postpone the wedding for a considerable time – always with the hope of finding an adequate position eventually.

Another factor named as a precondition for marriage was maturity, though interviewees in Cagliari put less emphasis on this than women in Bologna. In addition, we found ambivalent opinions on this issue. Whereas some women considered it necessary to reach at least a certain age before marriage – often over 25 or 30 – others attached no importance to it.

Yet, in Cagliari, interviewees recurrently emphasized the relatedness of starting a family – that is, having children – and marriage. Both unmarried and married women shared this attitude. Chiara, aged 39, married and mother of a small daughter, remembered that she started to push her husband to get married when her desire grew to have children:

"Maybe I did pressure him a little to get married. Because first we lived together anyway we had already reached an important goal, we were happy. But time was passing, and we wanted to have children anyway, the intention was already there and I am almost thirty-nine years old. So I said listen {laughs} if we don't do it now, my biological clock was ticking, {laughs} and so maybe yes, I did push a little, but Marco agreed straightaway and so we started arranging everything and making decisions together. Yes, the motivation was wanting to have children and so we got a move on {laughs}."[57]

Other women actually opted for advancing the date of the wedding when they learned that they were pregnant. In some of these cases, women and their partners preferred their child to be born within marriage for legal reasons, as in the case of Leonarda (33):

"We intended to get married anyway, because we had already spoken about it, but without being pressured, without rushing (…) we told ourselves we'd get married one day. My getting pregnant hurried things along a little bit, because here in Italy de facto families are still not recognized and regulated properly, so having a child in this sort of system sometimes brings disadvantages, also in terms of being able to take advantage of

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[57] "Forse su quello ho spinto un po' io. Perché prima vivevamo insieme comunque avevamo raggiunto già un grosso obbiettivo, eravamo contenti. Però poi il tempo passava, l'idea comunque che volevamo avere dei figli, l'idea c'era già da prima e io ho trentanove anni quasi e quindi ho detto senti {ride} se non ci muoviamo adesso, erano un po' i tempi biologici, {ride} e quindi si forse ho spinto un po' io, però Marco è stato subito d'accordo e abbiamo iniziato un po' insieme a stabilire il tutto e a decidere. Si, la spinta è stata quella del voler avere bambini e quindi ci siamo dati una mossa {ride}."

assistance from the council, you usually have to be married, so we decided to hurry things along, as we were already planning to get married, so we decided to get married before Susanna was born."[58]

Thus, in Cagliari, both the preconditions posed for marriage as well as the relatively stronger relatedness of childbirth to marriage culminated in less flexible family formation patterns than was the case in Bologna. In addition, interviewees in Cagliari talked about rather traditional and cost-intensive wedding parties, which had an effect on the timing of marriage as well. Alice, age 32 and not (yet) married at the time of the interview, referred to the high cost of a traditional wedding party as one important reason for not considering marriage for the time being:

"Yes, we have thought about it [marriage] and the problem is strictly financial. We have different traditions: I am from the south of Sardinia and he is from the centre-north. Their traditions are more conservative than ours. Our weddings are very quick, with close relatives, for example there are about 80 guests at a wedding. Whereas their weddings are usually extremely lavish and extravagant, and also very expensive. At their weddings, there are about 500 guests, so you can imagine what it means to meet this sort of expense."[59]

Although not all couples decided on a traditional wedding of the kind Alice described, most spouses chose rather big celebrations compared to Bologna. Thus, even smaller weddings encompassed generally 70 to 100 guests. Whereas some interviewees attached importance to inviting mainly close family members, friends, and colleagues, other women saw themselves constrained to invite the entire family – that is, uncles, aunts, and cousins they had no strong attachment to. In several cases, however, parents supported their adult children by paying the necessary wedding expenses. We found some kind of gendered support patterns, as in the case of Clara (41); whereas her parents financed the wedding banquet, it was the parents of her partner who provided financial support for the purchase of a flat:

"My parents paid for the whole lunch, because who can afford to invite 150 people? And my in-laws gave us some money to buy a house."[60]

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[58] "Noi avevamo già intenzione di sposarci visto che ne parlavamo, però senza ansia, senza fretta (…) ci siamo detti un domani ci sposeremo. Il fatto di rimanere incinta ha affrettato un po' i tempi, perché qui in Italia il riconoscimento della famiglia di fatto ancora non è regolamentato bene, per cui avere un figlio in un regime di questo tipo a volte porta dei disagi, anche di poter usufruire di aiuti da parte del comune, spesso devi essere spostato per cui noi, visto che il matrimonio era nei nostri progetti futuri, abbiamo deciso di abbreviare i tempi e di sposarci prima che nascesse Susanna."

[59] "Si, ci abbiamo pensato (al matrimonio) e il problema è solo ed esclusivamente economico. Abbiamo delle tradizioni diverse: io sono del sud della Sardegna e lui del centro nord. Da loro ci sono delle usanze più tradizionaliste, da noi no. I nostri matrimoni sono molto veloci e con parenti stretti, quindi per esempio un matrimonio composto da ottanta invitati. Da lui invece si usa fare dei matrimoni fastosissimi, grandiosi e anche tanto dispendiosi. Da lui gli invitati sono sui cinquecento, quindi immaginati cosa vuol dire affrontare una spesa di questo genere."

[60] "I miei genitori ci hanno pagato tutto il pranzo, perché chi invitava per 150 persone, e i miei suoceri c'hanno dato dei soldi per comprare una casa."

In the Cagliari context, having a rather traditional wedding party means also having a church wedding. Although 5 out of 11 married interviewees chose a wedding at the registry office, half of the married and most of the cohabiting women argued for a religious wedding ceremony. Actually, several women did so even though they declared themselves not religious, as was the case for Erica (34). She and other women brought the argument forward that a church wedding gives something special to the relationship:

"I felt as if I had almost … received, how can I explain, my meeting with Alberto as a gift, and basically, I felt the need, in some way, to bless this meeting, also religiously. In fact, we chose to get married in church even though, to be honest, neither of us is particularly practicing, nor can we call ourselves devote Catholics, and today even less so. But perhaps it was the only way we knew to bless this wonderful gift."[61]

As we will show later (in Chapter 9), interviewees also opted for a Catholic wedding ceremony in order to satisfy their parents' wishes for that kind of wedding party.

In short, in Cagliari the transition to marriage was generally characterized by several obstacles – the perceived preconditions for marriage, that is, having a stable job position and one's own housing, as well as the relatively cost-intensive celebrations – that ended up in delaying marriage to a considerable extent. On the other hand, entry into marriage was accelerated by the desire to have children, as marriage and childbirth were interrelated processes in Cagliari. We further found a general prevalence of church weddings and only a scarce diffusion of civil marriages.

7.2.3 Comparing the Transition to Marriage in Bologna and Cagliari

Analyzing the transition to marriage in both regional contexts, our interview data confirm the strong interrelationship between marriage and childbirth which had also been found in earlier studies (Billari and Kohler 2005; Baizán et al. 2001; Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992). Although recently the percentage of extra-marital births started to increase, the vast majority of children are still born inside marriage. However, also with respect to births outside marriage, we find strong regional variations across Italy. Whereas, in 2006, the percentage of non-marital births reached 18.9% in Sardinia, it was even higher in Emilia

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[61] "Io pensavo che avevo proprio quasi … ho ricevuto, non so come dire, questo mio incontro con Alberto proprio come un dono e in qualche modo sentivo l'esigenza di sancire anche religiosamente questo incontro, ecco. Infatti abbiamo scelto di sposarci in Chiesa nonostante in realtà ne' io ne' lui fossimo particolarmente praticanti, ne' potessimo definirci dei cattolici convinti e oggi ancora meno. Però era forse l'unico modo che conoscevamo proprio per benedire questo regalo grande."

Romagna. In the latter, about 28.8% of children were born outside a marital relationship (ISTAT 2007). Yet, in comparison to other European countries, Italy is still located among those countries at the bottom of the table. In Sweden, for instance, in 2004 about 55.4% of all children were born outside marriage (Council of Europe 2005).

Thus, in Italy, marriage is still the most preferred living arrangement when giving birth to a child. Pérez and Livi-Bacci (1992) see actually a strong relationship between birth rates and marriage rates in the country. They argue that "[…] marriage has kept its central place in the Mediterranean countries as an intermediate variable of fertility. Therefore, the declines in nuptiality and fertility are strongly related to each other" (Pérez and Livi-Bacci 1992: 164).

However, our analyses show that the relatedness between both events, marriage and childbirth, is stronger in Cagliari than in Bologna. In both contexts, interviewees referred mainly to the legal drawbacks of out-of-wedlock births as a major reason for preferring marriage over cohabitation once there were children. Only a minority of women named religious motivations for their choice.

We further found that couples tended to marry according to the Catholic rite in Cagliari, whereas, in Bologna, interviewees demonstrated a strong tendency to decide on a civil wedding. This finding is actually in line with recent data on marriage rites in Italy. In 2006, about 66.4% of Sardinian couples chose a religious wedding. In Emilia-Romagna 51.7% did so (ISTAT 2007). Thus, in the latter about half of all couples opted for a civil marriage and against a religious one. Interesting, though, is our finding that in both cities – but especially in Cagliari – even non-religious women opted for a church wedding.

Additional differences between both regional settings concern the preconditions perceived as necessary for entering a marital union as well as their availability. Whereas women in Bologna named merely maturity as prerequisite, the overall majority of interviewees in Cagliari saw having a stable employment position and one's own housing as essential requirements for marriage. However, it is likely that interviewees in Bologna took the latter preconditions for granted since they faced much less difficulty finding fairly stable employment and acquiring a place to own and live. Young adults in Cagliari, by contrast, faced higher barriers to stable job positions and housing property – a situation that had a

delaying effect on marriage. In addition, our data revealed that spouses in Cagliari tended to celebrate big and therefore cost-intensive wedding parties. In Bologna, women instead reported low-cost weddings with far fewer guests. As a result, spending for the wedding party varied to a considerable extent between both cities – a fact that has impact on the timing of marriage in Bologna and Cagliari: Whereas in the North it was seldom necessary to postpone marriage for economic reasons, several couples in Cagliari found themselves in such a situation.

7.3 The Meaning of Marriage

7.3.1 Bologna: Toward Marriage as a Formal Act

In Bologna, interviewees perceived marriage as having a quintessentially religious significance. They underlined the important role church played and still plays in the Italian society and the strong impact this local culture has on religious and non-religious individuals living in that society (see also Section 9.4). Simona, aged 42, childless and cohabiting stated, for instance:

"In my opinion we are greatly influenced, even if we are not practicing, we are influenced a bit by a culture in which marriage is also felt greatly as a religious act. Especially here in Italy … whether we are practicing Catholics or not, or not even Catholics, we are nonetheless influenced by this religious culture."[62]

Especially atheistic women were influenced by this perception: As they tended to see marriage per se as religiously motivated choice, they decided against any kind of wedding – be it a church or a civil wedding. Other women emphasized that in Italy, marriage is widely seen as a normal and automatic choice. Due to that awareness, women considered marriage also as a step they would take, as in the case of Elisabetta, aged 53, married and mother of a son:

"In our society we know that that is the next step in the end, marriage is the next step, so for me … for me, but also for my husband I think it just came naturally."[63]

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[62] "Secondo me risentiamo molto, anche se non siamo praticanti, risentiamo un po' di una cultura nella quale il matrimonio viene sentito molto anche come atto religioso ecco. Cioè in definitiva noi in Italia … che siamo cattolici praticanti o non praticanti o nemmeno cattolici come appartenenza, però di questa cultura religiosa risentiamo comunque."
[63] "Sappiamo che nella nostra società alla fine il passaggio è quello, quello di passare al matrimonio e quindi per me … per me, ma anche per mio marito penso, è venuto naturale così."

Few women actually underlined the importance of marriage per se. In fact, only a minority of women described the entry into a marital relationship as a central goal in their life that was independent from other factors such as having children.

The majority of women, however, characterized marriage as a formal act. These women perceived no difference between cohabitation and marriage as far as living together was concerned. Having cohabited for more than twelve years, Simona, the interviewee we cited previously, reported that living together with her partner was no different from any married couple living together:

"I think that … there is no difference [between marriage and living together] in the sense that also, shall we say, from a material point of view, we have shared everything right from the very start, we have shared our money right from the very start, and our salaries when he had … I mean when there was the matter of his father [who had a serious illness], my role … I mean my commitment was the same as it would have been had I been married."[64]

Only when it came to having children or to legal issues such as inheritance regulations, etc. did interviewees highlight the differences between both living arrangements. In many cases, women stated their willingness to enter a marital relationship once they had children themselves – some actually did so. Yet, generally, women were rather uncertain about actual regulations concerning children born outside marriage (see Section 8.4 for more details). Since several interviewees were in favor of a marital relationship in order to save their own rights and/or rights of their children, marriage was often seen as purely a contract:

"Rightly or wrongly, I mean, I don't want to sound callous, but it's a contract. The parties make an agreement and contribute to family life, as best they can."[65]

"Marriage represents a commitment, shall we say … a legal commitment … it's not nice to say it, but that's the way it is, it also binds you legally, you officially something that already exists, but which hasn't been made official, so I see it more as a commitment to society."[66]

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[64] "Mi pare che … di notare nessuna differenza [tra matrimonio e convivenza] nel senso che comunque anche da un punto di vista diciamo così materiale abbiamo messo in comune i nostri averi fin da subito, i nostri soldi fin da subito, i nostri stipendi quando lui ha avuto … cioè quando c'è stata la vicenda di suo padre [che aveva una malattia seria], io ho avuto un ruolo … cioè il mio impegno è stato come sarebbe stato l'impegno se fossi stata sposata."

[65] "Bene o male, non voglio essere cruda ecco, però è un contratto. Si prende un accordo tra le parti e ognuno contribuisce alla vita della famiglia nel modo in cui può."

[66] "Il matrimonio ti mette di fronte ad un impegno, diciamo … legale … è brutto dirlo ma è così, ti impegna anche legalmente, ufficializzi qualcosa che c'è già, ma che non è ufficializzato e quindi lo vedo più un impegno di fronte alla società."

This rather instrumental and unromantic view on marriage might also be due to the experiences interviewees had in their families of origin. As several women grew up with mothers who cohabited, separated, divorced, or decided to remarry, these women learned that marriage was not an absolutely necessary step to take, nor was it always connected to lifelong parental relationships. Mara, aged 36, cohabiting and childless, stressed this point:

"I don't really know what I think of marriage, maybe because my parents are divorced, my mother has married again, I mean marriage isn't … it is an institution and anyway, yes, it may offer advantages from a legal point of view, from a financial point of view maybe, I don't know. But from a moral point of view I don't think it has any advantages to living together. For me, if you love someone and you are sure that that person loves you because you have proven it to each other in some way. There's no need to announce it before the mayor rather than before the priest or before Filomena's aunt. It doesn't change anything."[67]

So, we may assume that the relatively formal perception of marriage that prevailed in Bologna is strongly related to the diversity of living arrangements the parent generation experienced.

On the other hand, we found evidence that a few young adults held marriage in such high esteem that they felt discouraged from entering this kind of relationship. These interviewees had very ambivalent views on marriage. While underlining the respect they had for marital unions, they believed themselves not to be able to have such relationships. Carlotta, aged 26 and cohabiting, spoke about it:

"Marriage is serious for me, so I don't consider getting divorced, if I get married it's because I believe in it and I'd rather avoid upheavals, like divorce."[68]

However, with reference to the uncertainty of every relationships outcome, she also admitted:

"They are always experiments, because marriage doesn't necessarily work out, so since there is this risk, you might as well not make such an important commitment, shall we say."[69]

Similarly Claudia, aged 28 and cohabiting, argued:

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[67] "Io non lo so di preciso che cosa penso del matrimonio, forse perché i miei genitori hanno divorziato, mia madre si è risposata, cioè il matrimonio non … è un'istituzione e che comunque sì, può avere un vantaggio dal punto di vista legale, dal punto di vista finanziario forse, non so. Però dal punto di vista morale non credo che abbia dei vantaggi sulla convivenza. Per me se tu ami qualcuno e sei sicuro che qualcuno ti ama perché comunque ve lo siete provato in qualche modo. Non c'è bisogno di dirlo davanti al sindaco piuttosto che il prete, piuttosto che la zia Filomena. Non cambia niente."
[68] "Io lo vivo seriamente il matrimonio, quindi non penso all'idea di divorziare, se mi sposo è perché ci credo e vorrei evitare traumi come il divorzio."
[69] "Sono sempre esperimenti perché non è detto che il matrimonio duri e quindi dato che c'è questa insicurezza tanto vale non prendere impegni così importanti diciamo."

"Maybe I believe in marriage so much that I think it is an extreme request, I don't think a person can promise to love another person for the rest of his/her life, I think it is impossible, I mean I think it is just something that is impossible. In my opinion, swearing undying love is the biggest lie that exists."[70]

Overall, in Bologna, the perception of marriage as a purely formal act prevailed. Despite the fact that some women highlighted the importance of marriage per se and its strong integration in Italian society, most interviewees perceived marriage as an instrument for gaining a higher degree of social security once there were children. The prevalence of this view seems to be related to the diversity of living arrangements experienced in and transmitted through the parent generation.

7.3.2 Cagliari: Marriage as Emotional Choice

In Cagliari, interviewees recurrently underlined the significance of marriage as an important or even very important choice that goes beyond a simple agreement or contract. In doing so, some women referred to the meaning of marriage as a sacrament, as did Chiara, aged 39, married and mother:

"For us, from a religious point of view, we have clearly fulfilled our obligations, and that's important, too, (…) because basically, not being able to be a good Catholic does bother me a little bit because that's the way I am. It's good knowing that at least I have done something good. I have managed to do a part of what I am supposed to."[71]

Other women did not relate to the special meaning of marriage for the Catholic church, but emphasized the importance of marriage per se. They described the entry into a marital union as a "life-task." Arianna, aged 41, married and childless, described the meaning marriage had for her this way:

"I decided to get married because I was in love with the man I had been seeing for several years, so I decided to make an important decision. We also experienced living together, as well as a very long period of engagement, and for me, marriage had a far more important value, which goes way beyond a signed contract, it was a project for life. (…) Getting married is an act of responsibility, it's no different from before, but it's the process that, it is the doing it, it is a very fine balancing point, which maybe you have to experience at a

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[70] "Io forse ci credo così tanto al matrimonio che penso che sia una richiesta eccessiva, non penso che uno possa giurare per la vita di amare una persona, penso che sia impossibile, cioè penso che sia una cosa impossibile. Giurare l'amore eterno è la cosa più bugiarda che esista secondo me."
[71] "Per noi dal punto di vista religioso, chiaramente siamo in regola, e quindi anche quello è importante, (…) perché un po' mi pesa per come sono fatta io, non riuscire ad essere una brava cattolica praticamente, però il fatto di sapere che almeno qualcosa di buono l'ho fatto, sono riuscita a fare una parte di quella che dovrei fare, è una buona cosa."

certain point, I don't know, but I realized that it was important for me and then, through experience, I discovered that it is different from living together."[72]

After having entered marriage, she perceived her relationship as "more complete, more responsible and more mature" than beforehand. Also Erica, aged 34 and married, underlined the higher significance of marriage compared to cohabitation:

"I remember that I really wanted to get married. I just felt the need basically. (…) We could also have carried on living together, but we kept telling ourselves that living together was like giving each other 99.9%, whereas by getting married we could also give that extra 0.01%."[73]

The description of marriage as a more responsible commitment toward another person is recurrent in the Cagliari interviews. The data actually provide evidence that the strong importance of marriage and the accentuation of legal rights assured to married individuals go hand in hand in Cagliari. In contrast to those in Bologna, women appreciated marriage not for the legal advantages per se, but rather for their partners' willingness to take over the responsibilities connected to such a choice. Given the economically difficult situation in Cagliari, couples were much more exposed to situations in which reciprocal support was needed than was the case in Bologna. We assume that women's sensitivity for this kind of situations enhanced the esteem they showed toward marriage. Clara (41), married and childless, put it this way:

"[Marriage is] very important, because you feel tied to your partner in a different way, you feel a stronger bond, perhaps because you know that you are protected legally, which gives you that security and that psychological peace of mind, which you don't have with just living together. You acquire a couple's rights and responsibilities better, with more peace of mind."[74]

Thus, despite the fact that women stated they chose marriage as a romantic act rather than for legal reasons, they were quite aware of the legal advantages a wedding implied. They emphasized, for instance, that one is "much, much more protected" within marriage than

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[72] "Ho deciso di sposarmi perché l'uomo con il quale stavo, già da diversi anni, lo amavo, quindi ho pensato di fare una scelta importante, abbiamo fatto anche l'esperienza della convivenza oltre un fidanzamento molto lungo e un matrimonio per me aveva un valore molto più importante, che va al di là di un contratto firmato, era un progetto di vita. (…) Sposarsi è proprio un atto di responsabilità, non è diverso da prima, però è quel meccanismo che, è il farlo, è un punto di equilibrio molto sottile che ad un certo punto, non so forse si deve provare, però io mi sono resa conto che per me era importante questo e poi ho scoperto con l'esperienza che è una cosa diversa dalla convivenza."

[73] "Io ricordo che proprio mi volevo sposare. Sentivo questa voglia, ecco. (…) Avremmo anche potuto continuare a convivere, però noi ci dicevamo sempre che convivere era come darci al 99,9%, sposandoci avremmo messo anche quello 0,01% in più."

[74] "[Il matrimonio ha] una grande importanza, perché comunque ti senti legato al partner in una maniera diversa, senti che c'è un legame più forte, perché forse sai che c'è una tutela legale che ti da quella sicurezza quella tranquillità psicologica che la semplice convivenza non ti da. Acquisisci meglio con più tranquillità diritti e doveri di coppia."

outside a marital union, and that marriage is a choice to take into account especially once children are involved. Particularly those interviewees, who themselves or whose partners had experienced already the loss of a job and who were married at that time, referred to the possibility of state support:

"When Alberto was working, he could declare me as his dependent and so although it is very little, because it's certainly not a great amount, at least we had that, and I can do the same with him. If we hadn't been married, we wouldn't even have been able to have this."[75]

In sharp contrast to the general prevalence of perceiving marriage as an emotional and partially legal choice, few women in Cagliari declared that they saw marriage purely as a contract or practical consideration:

"Judging from the way things are here, I think marriage is nothing but a contract."[76]

"I don't have a very romantic view of marriage. (…) I see it more as a practical issue."[77]

To sum up, most Cagliari interviewees esteemed marriage as a romantic act. Though they were fully aware of the legal advantages connected to entry into a marital relationship, they seldom chose a wedding solely for instrumental reasons.

7.3.3 Comparing the Meaning of Marriage in Bologna and Cagliari

Analyzing the meaning marriage had for women in Bologna and Cagliari, we found both similarities and differences. Among both regional settings, we identified women who had a rather romantic view of marriage and chose that kind of living arrangement for emotional reasons. At the same time, however, other women referred to the significance of marriage as a purely instrumental act for gaining a higher degree of social security. Despite these commonalities, our data revealed that the extent to which interviewees referred to the one or the other meaning of marriage varied to a considerable extent in Bologna and Cagliari.

Whereas, in the former, more interviewees emphasized their perception of marriage as a formal act, in the latter, a higher number of women saw marriage as romantic and

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[75] "Quando era Alberto che lavorava poteva dichiarare me come coniuge a carico e quindi per quanto un aiuto minimo perché proprio non è che ci siano grandi finanziamenti, però almeno quello lo abbiamo avuto e lo stesso posso fare io con lui. Se non fossimo sposati non potremmo avere neanche questo."
[76] "Ritengo che per come sono le cose qui, il matrimonio non sia altro che un contratto."
[77] "Io non ho una visione molto romantica del matrimonio. (…) Lo vedo più come una questione pratica."

emotional choice. As to Bologna, it seems actually that interviewees were strongly influenced by the experiences their parents had: Given the relatively high number of parents who underwent living arrangements alternative to marriage, it is not surprising that women saw marriage in a less romantic way and referred mainly to the legal advantages of entering this kind of union. Though women in Cagliari were well aware of the legal consequences a wedding implied, they emphasized much more the emotional element of marriage. In addition, they were less inclined to marry only for legal reasons than women in Bologna. Nevertheless, these women showed a notable sensitivity for issues regarding reciprocal support within marital unions. We assume that this sensitivity was mainly due to the tight situation at the Cagliari labor market that made it necessary also to vouch financially for each other.

Furthermore, our investigation revealed that religious as well as non-religious women referred to marriage as a sacrament. Whereas non-religious interviewees took this as an incentive not to marry at all (neither in church nor in the registry office), Catholic women felt urged to enter a marital union. This result is actually in line with earlier research findings. Castiglioni (1999) showed, for instance, that men and women who attended religious services have a higher probability of marriage.

In addition, especially in Bologna, we found cases where women opted to abstain from marriage by referring to the general uncertainty of any relationship's final outcome. These women esteemed marriage in such a strong way that they perceived themselves to be unable to perform the conditions they attached to a marital relationship. Casper and Bianchi (2002) argue similarly: Due to the increased uncertainty about the stability of marriage, today more women are inclined to choose cohabitation than was the case in former times.

Although we found a considerable number of women in Bologna – and even some women in Cagliari – who saw marriage mainly as a formal act for gaining additional rights, we shall consider this finding carefully. As our sample is based on women experiencing or having experienced a non-marital relationship, we are not able to make any statement about the meaning of marriage among women who chose a direct entry into a marital union. And the latter case is by far the prevailing one in Italy (Kiernan 2000). Marriage continues to be the main reason for leaving the parental home (Ongaro 2003). Also the fact that 95% of all

marriages are formed by couples entering their first marital union highlights the unbowed significance of marriage in Italy (Prati 2002). At the same time, however, studies give evidence for a considerable decrease of marriages – especially among the younger age groups, that is, young adults aged 25 to 29. In this context, Tobìo (2001) underlined an important fact: Whereas cohabitation is low in Portugal and Greece because marriage is high, this is not true for Italy and Spain. In the latter two countries, among the young generation, both cohabitation and marriage are low. One may wonder whether this is just a sign of postponement or in fact a rejection of weddings (Rosina 2002).

There are indeed reasons to believe that in most Western and European countries the meaning of marriage has shifted. Given the higher labor force participation of women, the perception of marriage as a means of gaining economic security and independence from parents has weakened. Marriage has also lost its significance as a prerequisite for an intimate sexual relationship, for bearing and rearing children, and for living with a partner (Manting 1996). Whereas historically, marriage was the only realistic alternative to being single, this is not the case anymore (Thornton et al. 2007).

However, the question that arises is whether and to what extent this is also true for Italy. Our findings show that among a rather selective group of forerunners, namely those choosing cohabitation as one of the first in their generation, the significance of marriage weakened – and this is particularly the case in Bologna, where cohabitation is most diffused.

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the question of how cohabiting couples enter into marriage and what meaning they attribute to that choice (see Table 7.1). As far as Bologna is concerned, our analyses provide ample evidence of a general weakening of the institution of marriage. Not all, but most women characterized marriage as a formal act and underlined its significance as an instrument for gaining additional rights. We further found the tendency to choose a registry office wedding rather than one in church. In doing so, most interviewees opted for modest wedding celebrations that were usually not too expensive.

In Cagliari, by contrast, women instead emphasized the romantic and emotional aspects of entering into marriage. At the same time, they were generally aware of the legal advantages a wedding entailed. Contrary to Bologna, the legal and emotional aspects of marriage were equally important. In addition, we found the persistence of church weddings and only a slight openness toward civil marriages. Thus, in Cagliari, a rather traditional view on marriages prevailed. Women related special preconditions necessary for marriage, namely, having stable employment and their own housing. Together with rather cost-intensive wedding parties, Cagliari interviewees faced generally strong barriers toward marriage. This had severe consequences for family formation, which in many cases was postponed.

Although we found a shift in the meaning of marriage in Bologna and a still high evaluation of marriage in Cagliari, both settings shared a common feature: a strong relationship between childbirth and marriage. In both contexts, women were inclined to marry as soon as they desired children or conceived. This link was actually more pronounced in Cagliari than in Bologna. Women referred to legal regulations and religious reasons as major motivations for that choice. However, in Chapter 9 we will also focus on the role of parents and their attitude toward births out-of-wedlock for the transition to marriage.

Table 7.1: Summary of findings on the transition to and the meaning of marriage

	Bologna	**Cagliari**
Entry into marriage	*Interviewees were generally more inclined to marry at the registry office than in church. They further opted for low-cost weddings with few guests.*	*Most interviewees decided on a church wedding, even if they were not very religious. In addition, they tended to celebrate cost-intensive wedding parties with many guests (extended family, friends, colleagues, neighbors and so forth). Interviewees also emphasized the need for stable employment and their own housing as precondition for a wedding.*
Meaning of marriage	*Accentuation of marriage as a formal act prevailed among our interviewees: they generally appreciated and emphasized the legal advantages of marriage. Women expressed concerns about the increasing uncertainty of marriage, which induced some interviewees to abstain from a marital union and to choose cohabitation instead.*	*Marriage was mainly seen as a romantic and emotional choice. Nonetheless, women were sensitive to the issue of reciprocal support within marriage.*

Chapter 8
The Impact of Formal Institutions

8.1 Introduction

On the basis of the theoretical considerations presented in Chapter 2, we argue that both formal and informal institutions influence the choice for cohabitation in Italy. Whereas *formal institutions* are generally created and arranged by agents (law, political systems, economy), *informal institutions* do not rely on an external authority's monitoring (social norms, conventions) (Voss 2001).

In this chapter, we focus on the impact of formal institutions on non-marital union formation. Since the Italian welfare state is strongly shaped by a familialistic structure, it assigns major responsibilities to the family. This is true especially for those responsibilities regarding young adults' costs of living. Given this situation, both the family (as an informal institution) and the labor market (as a formal institution) gain in importance as far as young adults' economic independence is concerned. In this chapter, we concentrate, in particular, on the latter, and thus on the Italian labor market and its impact on the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy (Section 8.2). We have hypothesized that the precarious labor market situation with its prevalence of unstable and fixed-term contracts hinders young adults when deciding about an informal union. Furthermore, the tight situation in the Italian housing market, which is characterized by home ownership, high rents, and rigidity, seems to be another obstacle for the diffusion of cohabitation (Section 8.3). See Table 8.1 for the summary of our theoretical assumptions.

However, as our interviews indicate, another factor impacts the development of cohabitation in Italy as well: the perception of legal regulations regarding marriage and cohabitation (Section 8.4). We found that the perceived legal drawbacks of cohabitation influence couples when they are about to decide between a marital and a non-marital union.

Table 8.1: Formal institutions and theoretical assumptions

Formal institutions	*Theoretical assumptions*
Welfare state approach	Through the familialistic structure of the welfare state and the low degree of welfare development, the family is obliged to support its members. The precarious dualism of the welfare state protects young adults only inadequately against social risks and disregards their interests.
Labor market approach	Insecure, low-paid, and precarious employment affects mainly the youth, leading to high rates of youth unemployment and high levels of economic insecurity.
Housing market	Given the prevalence of housing property and extraordinarily high rents, young adults face significant barriers in finding adequate and affordable housing.

8.2 The Labor Market Situation and its Influence on Cohabitation[78]

Several studies have found evidence that in Italy cohabitation is a choice for people who are economically independent (Grillo and Pinnelli 1999; Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002). In this respect, it is quite interesting that the more prosperous regions of the North show higher percentages of informal unions, whereas cohabitation is much less prevalent in the South, where the economic system is affected by mismanagement, unemployment, and the informal economy. At the macro level, this suggests an interrelationship between the diffusion of cohabitation and the regional economic situation. In this section, we are particularly interested to see, whether this effect holds at the micro level too. So we aim to clarify how job insecurity affects cohabitation – or more precisely: How are job insecurity

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[78] A previous version of this subchapter has been published as:
Schröder, Christin (2008). Economic Insecurity and Cohabitation Strategies in Italy. *MPIDR Working Paper* WP 2008-004.

and resulting economic shortages related to the so far hesitant spread of cohabitation in Italy?

8.2.1 Bologna: Economic Insecurity at the Initial Stage of the Professional Life

As described earlier, young adults in Italy generally face severe difficulties in finding an adequate employment position. The women we interviewed in Bologna experienced the same situation; they actually experienced *economic insecurity at the initial stage of their professional life*. Even though most of our interviewees had achieved high or very high levels of education, they reported instability and uncertainty in their career. Primarily, women faced difficulties finding a position that corresponded to their education and training. Especially at the beginning of their professional life, interviewees had to rely on occasional jobs and unpaid internships. Sofia, aged 39 and cohabiting, finished her studies at age 30. She stressed the variety of jobs she had to take after graduating from university:

"I started by standing in for a teacher giving lessons at primary school. Apart from that, I did various things. I was an actor for a certain period of time. Or I worked in summer as kitchen help in restaurants. For several years I worked with teenagers at risk."[79]

Among this range of jobs there was only one occupation that related to her training. Other women had similar experiences to Sofia's; they often worked as waitress, secretarial help, conference hostess, or did some private teaching. In light of their educational degrees, interviewees pointed out that the lack of employment and the instability of available jobs was "de-qualifying" them in terms of their professional development. Several women held temporary jobs or project contracts from several months to one or two years. As these jobs ended after a short period of time, they offered a low level of social security. Federica, aged 33 and married, reported, for instance, that her contract was not renewed when she became pregnant with her first child. Despite the high degree of social insecurity, several interviewees managed to reach relatively secure positions – mainly in the public sector. These jobs were generally characterized by open-ended or at least longer-lasting contracts. In addition, women benefited from flexible working hours in these jobs – an important advantage when anticipating childbirth. Still, it took these women several years to get hired for such positions that allowed for *economic stability later in life*.

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[79] "Prima facevo delle supplenze nella scuola elementare oltre ho ancora fatto i lavori più svariati tra cui ho fatto l'attrice per un periodo o ho lavorato come aiuto cucina nei ristoranti così d'estate, ho lavorato per diversi anni con gli adolescenti a rischio."

Male partners in Bologna, in contrast, seemed to face much less of a problem. Despite the fact that fewer males held university degrees than their female partners,[80] they often had managerial positions.

Given the occupational – and consequently economic – difficulties, women in the Bologna sample acted in different ways to realize their desire of cohabitation. One group of women – exclusively those who came originally from Bologna – opted for an *economically secure path*. That meant they waited until they graduated from university, searched for and found an adequate job, and only then moved out of the parental home. Thus, their strategy was to wait until they reached a certain level of economic security before risking the major step of leaving home. Most of them then lived on their own or shared a flat before deciding to cohabit, but they could only afford to follow this path if they were taking studies in their hometown. Eleonora (34), who was cohabiting, remembered the situation this way:

"I started work and when I saw that the job gave me some kind of guarantee that I was economically independent from my parents, I decided to start living in this flat."[81]

Further, women who chose the economically secure path stated recurrently that at least one income was necessary before deciding to cohabit. In addition, this income should be "secure," in the sense that the employment position should be more or less permanent. One woman said:

"One needs … at least one secure job; I don't say two, but at least one among the couple. If not, it gets, let's say, a bit problematic, because already living with someone is an important step. If there is also a problem with work, that is, at least one of both needs to have a secure job."[82]

However, in general, male partners tended to have these more secure positions when entering cohabitation. And women often implicitly referred to their partners when emphasizing the importance of *one* secure income. Interviewees characterized their partner's employment position as follows:

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[80] Twenty two women in the Bologna sample had attained a university degree. On the other hand, only fifteen male partners held a degree. Ten men had a higher secondary level of education, and three men had a lower secondary level of education.

[81] "Avevo iniziato a lavorare e dopo che ho visto che il lavoro mi dava una certa garanzia del fatto che ero indipendente dai miei genitori per vivere, economicamente a quel punto ho deciso di venire a vivere in questa casa."

[82] "Ci vuole … il lavoro fisso almeno uno dei due, non dico tutti e due, ma almeno uno dei due perché se no diventa diciamo un po' problematico perché già la convivenza è un passaggio importante se poi hai anche il problema del lavoro, almeno uno dei due deve avere un lavoro fisso…ecco."

"He has a – 'quote'– important job. I mean, it's not that it's more important than mine, but for sure he earns more and he is very busy … more than I am."[83]

"From an economic perspective, he's more secure than I am; he has a higher salary than I have."[84]

Clearly, these interviewees attached great importance to having a certain level of economic security. Only when they had reached this level did they decide to leave home – and to enter cohabitation later on. As a consequence, both leaving the parental home and entering cohabitation were postponed until the precondition of economic stability was achieved.

A second group of women followed an *economically insecure path*, meaning that they left their parental home before having reached a certain level of economic security. All of them left home to continue their education and came to Bologna from outside the city. After their studies – seldom right in the middle – women moved in with their partner. At that point, they were still looking for an adequate employment position. Thus, when entering cohabitation they often suffered economic instability and uncertainty. Elena, aged 28 and cohabiting, left her parental home at age 24. She said:

"Me and Paolo, we don't have secure jobs; so from an economic viewpoint, we always manage, but it's been a bit of a gamble. We are never sure that we earn that amount of money every month."[85]

Carlotta (26), who graduated from university about one year prior to the interview, faced huge problems in finding a job. At the time of the interview, she was working part-time for an educational institution, yet her income was not sufficient to rent a flat. Therefore, Carlotta was still sharing the flat with other people and lived with her partner in a double room:

"It's not living with someone … in the conventional sense. It is sharing a room in a flat, because, mainly because of economic reasons. We could never share a flat on our own, only us (…) it's not possible at the moment because I don't earn enough (…) I don't have a lot of money. Once I pay the rent, I have very little to live on."[86]

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[83] "Lui fa un lavoro tra virgolette importante, cioè non che sia più importante del mio però sicuramente guadagna di più ed è molto impegnato…più di me."
[84] "Lui è economicamente più solido di me, ha uno stipendio più alto del mio."
[85] "Io e Paolo non abbiamo dei lavori sicuri e quindi a livello economico ce l'abbiamo sempre fatta ma era un po' una scommessa, non abbiamo mai la sicurezza che tutti i mesi noi guadagneremo questo."
[86] "Non è una convivenza … in senso stretto, è una condivisione di una stanza all'interno di un appartamento perché soprattutto perché per ragioni economiche non potremmo mai condividere solamente una casa, una casa da soli (…) comunque è impossibile al momento perché io non ho abbastanza reddito (…) io ho pochi soldi quindi, una volta che do i soldi dell'affitto mi rimane molto poco."

Women who followed the economically insecure path had to confront a very high level of economic insecurity. The quotations from the interviews provide evidence of the remarkable effort these young adults had to put out when deciding to opt for an informal union.

As to the transition from cohabitation to marriage, exclusively women coming from the southern regions of Italy pointed to the influence of economic factors. They referred, for instance, to high wedding costs as a reason for postponing marriage. Most women in Bologna, however, reported no additional economic conditions for marriage as compared to cohabitation. Instead, they mentioned ideational preconditions, such as the willingness to overcome common difficulties and achieve maturity. The women seldom opted for big celebrations when entering marriage. In Emilia-Romagna almost 50% of weddings were in fact conducted at the registry office rather than in church (ISTAT 2006b). It seems that the economic preconditions to enter cohabitation were almost the same as for marriage. Thus, in the context of Bologna, marriage was not necessarily seen as an expensive choice. Only women coming from southern regions pointed to the high costs of the wedding party and further preconditions of marriage, such as owning a flat.

8.2.2 Cagliari: Prolonged Economic Insecurity

Since the labor market situation tended to be worse in Sardinia and the South, interviewees in Cagliari encountered even more problems than the Bologna sample in finding an adequate employment position. Only a few women managed to find an open-ended position, although the majority of them still tried to locate contracts of this kind. In general, women did several jobs at the same time or had one short-term contract after the other, sometimes interrupted by periods of unemployment. Barbara, aged 32 and cohabiting, graduated from university at age 30. At the time of the interview, she had "no real employment" and "did various things." From time to time she assisted a professor, worked as a tutor, did internships, engaged in some cultural projects and similar short-term jobs:

"So, at the moment, after my studies, it happens that I'm collaborating with the professor who supervised my master's thesis. I do some translations, organize conferences, and so forth. I'm working as a tutor for another professor as well. After my studies I did an internship here [at a cultural institute] and … it was an institute, which I knew only by name, but I was very interested in it. …. Besides that, I did various things. I participated in the political life in Cagliari, which was somewhat important to me as it is a particular interest

of mine. Then, by chance I met some people who did some volunteer work at the cinema, and then I also volunteered there and learned to show movies; I organized cinema reviews, and so forth. This was an important experience, too. (…) I mean, my family even gives me some money. I have some money from the assistant work I did with the professor. Some more – but very little – I got from the work as tutor. They actually approve 25 hours, that's 25 hours per semester (…) But there are a lot of projects and with my friends, those from the cinema, we hope to organize a festival in the summer and hope to have some funding. So, a little bit [of money] comes in. Also, with work, I do whatever comes up, translations and things like that."[87]

Most of the jobs Barbara engaged in were poorly paid, others not at all. Other interviewees complained that all positions were only fixed-term contracts. Viviana (36) even reported that women faced much more difficulty in finding a job in Cagliari than men did. As employers were afraid that married women might become parents soon, they preferred to hire unmarried women:

"The problem is the following: It is really difficult to find employment here in Sardinia and also here in Cagliari. Women who are married often don't have a chance. When I go to job interviews, they ask me whether I'm married, whether I have children or even whether I'm engaged. It's like: "Let's see whether she's going to get married."" [88]

In fact, after having had several fixed-term contracts, at the time of the interview Viviana was unemployed. She was cohabiting and childless, but was planning the wedding for the following year. Viviana felt under much pressure to find a more or less secure employment position before entering marriage; however, after having experienced the bad employment situation in Sardinia for almost sixteen years, she seemed to have given up hope. Other interviewees tried to counter employment insecurities by continuing to assert their qualifications. For example, during or after their studies, women completed internships, took private lessons, or went abroad in order to gain further knowledge. Despite these

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[87] "E quindi adesso dopo la laurea mi capita di fare delle collaborazioni per la professoressa con la quale ho fatto la tesi all'università, traduzione, organizzazione di convegni e così…poi sto facendo anche un tutorato per un'altra professoressa. Dopo la laurea ho fatto il tirocinio qua [un'istituto di cultura] e … che era un centro che io conoscevo solamente per nome e però mi interessava molto (…) Poi ho fatto anche svariate cose partecipando diciamo un po' partecipando alla vita politica cagliaritana e quindi questo va beh ha significato molto per me perché si tratta di un'area un po' particolare e poi…così per…per pura casualità ho conosciuto delle persone che facevano volontariato in un cinema d'esse e ho fatto volontariato à e imparato a proiettare le pellicole, ho organizzato rassegne cinematografiche e così e anche quella lì è stata un'esperienza importante (…) No, allora …in realtà un po' di soldi me li danno i miei, un po' di soldi li ho dalle collaborazioni che faccio con la professoressa della tesi, qualcosa che è molto poco dal lavoro di tutorato … perchè comunque riconoscono 25 ore, riconoscono 25 ore per ogni semestre (…) Però ci sono molti progetti e adesso con questi altri amici, con i quali è il mio gruppo di cinema, speriamo di riuscire ad organizzare un festival in estate con un finanziamento quindi comunque qualcosina arriva. Poi, insomma come lavori faccio anche quello che mi capita, traduzioni o cose del genere."
[88] "Il problema è questo, qua in Sardegna trovare lavoro è veramente difficile e anche qui a Cagliari. Il curriculum di una donna sposata non viene preso in considerazione. Quando vado a fare i colloqui mi chiedono se sono sposata, se ho figli e addirittura se sono fidanzata cioè del tipo "Sentiamo un po' se questa si deve sposare.""

efforts, they had very little success when entering the labor market. Patrizia, aged 39 and cohabiting, reported on this phase of her professional career:

"After my studies – I graduated in 1996 – I started to apply for jobs but didn't manage to find a steady job, I mean to say, a job I can stay in for the rest of my life. I have some job experience in the sense that I worked in an assurance company for some time, [I earned] enough to pay the petrol for the car and these things and I didn't have much income (…) Later, in 1998, I started to work for the local authority and I am still working there but my contracts are renewed regularly, every year or so, every semester or so. Now I have a contract that ends in January 2007."[89]

Given her occupational prospects, it seems that the effort Patrizia invested in her training did not result in a corresponding outcome. The pattern applied to several of our interviewees. Although they engaged in several activities, they were seldom rewarded adequately.

As in Bologna, women in the Cagliari sample tended to have higher educational degrees than their partners; whereas 22 interviewees graduated from university, only about 16 male partners did so.[90] Some men managed to have a secure employment position, working for instance as a researcher, teacher, or in another white-collar job. However, most of them faced difficulties finding a job too. Some experienced the unexpected loss of a job; others had problems finding an open-ended contract. Alice, aged 32 and cohabiting, reported on the unfavorable payment practices her partner was exposed to:

"[He has] a fixed contract that gets renewed, I don't know, every six months or every year or so. But always for a fixed period. Also, the salary is not paid monthly. They pay only if the region pays the money he is paid from … for example, September, October, November, December, and they pay him in January. So, in January he gets four months' salary. Then he works in January, February, March, and April and they give him the money in May or June. This means that he needs to be well organized. He needs to be organized; if not, he's not able to live on the money during the months he doesn't receive pay. All the contracts are like that. That's the only way he can possibly work."[91]

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[89] "Dopo la laurea, mi sono laureata nel "96, ho iniziato a presentare curriculum però non sono riuscita a trovare un lavoro duraturo diciamo così, a tempo indeterminato. Ho avuto delle esperienze lavorative nel senso che ho lavorato in una compagnia di assicurazioni per un periodo, giusto per pagarmi la benzina per la macchina e queste cose così e non avevo gran che entrate (…) Poi nel "98 ho iniziato a lavorare per il comune e da lì sto lavorando da tempo con pratiche con contratti rinnovabili di volta in volta, annuali, semestrali e adesso ho un contratto che mi scade a gennaio del 2007."

[90] However, among the male partners who finished university, five completed the doctorate. Among the Cagliari sample, eleven men reached higher secondary level of education and one man had a lower secondary level of education.

[91] "[Lui ha un contratto] a tempo determinato e viene rinnovato non so se di sei mesi in sei mesi o di anno in anno. Comunque tutto a tempo determinato. Tra l'altro la retribuzione non ha una cadenza mensile, ma viene pagato sol quando la Regione stanzia questi contributi per cui lui lavora … per esempio Settembre, Ottobre, Novembre, Dicembre e i soldi glieli danno a Gennaio. Per cui a Gennaio avrà quattro retribuzioni. Poi lavorerà Gennaio, Febbraio, Marzo e Aprile e i soldi glieli danno a Maggio o a Giugno. Quindi lui deve essere ben organizzato. Deve essere organizzato altrimenti non riesce poi a vivere nei mesi in cui non percepisce lo stipendio. Tutti i contratti sono così. Lui lavora solo ed esclusivamente in questo modo."

As a consequence, some of the interviewed women were – at least temporarily – the main breadwinners within the couple or family. Under these circumstances, the importance of the women's income increased.

Among the Cagliari sample, most interviewees stressed the impact of their individual labor market situation on their choice of cohabitation. Nicoletta (36), for instance, left her parental home at age 26. In order to cohabit, she and her partner went to Scandinavia. At that time the couple was still attending university and believed they could afford to live together only there:

"Because it was possible there, and not here. Here it wouldn't have been possible. Impossible since the economic arrangements are different; they don't give you the chance to stand on your own feet. So we went there and we started working right away, we did both, we studied and we worked. Here it wouldn't have been possible. I think that my story is in some way emblematic of a situation that is almost universal here. Here you marry late and you miss out living with someone. Many do that because it gives them a lot of trouble to get the means necessary for this phase of transition where you decide what to do in life. You study, you risk having a job that maybe is not the one you really want …."[92]

According to Nicoletta, it is the economic instability – caused by an unstable labor market and the lack of public support for young adults – that hampers the diffusion of informal unions in Italy. In her view, many more couples would prefer to move in together if they had the financial means to do so. The interviews actually showed that most couples postponed entry into cohabitation until they had reached an adequate level of economic security. This financial security, however, was always preceded by the highly time-consuming graduation from university and the extensive search for a job. The (partly dramatic) postponement of cohabitation is actually evident in the data, when observing the average age at union formation among the sample. As emphasized in Chapter 6, on average, women met their current partner at the age of 26.5 years. However, they entered cohabitation on average at age 31.3. In eight cases, couples decided on an informal union only after 9 to 16 years of being in a relationship. These couples were oriented to follow an *economically secure path* toward cohabitation. Two quotations serve to illustrate this path:

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[92] "Perché era possibile lì e non qua. Qui sarebbe stato impossibile. Impossibile perché il tessuto economico è un altro, non ti dà l'opportunità di vivere sulle tue gambe così noi siamo andati là e abbiamo cominciato a lavorare subito, a studiare e a lavorare insieme. Qui sarebbe stato impossibile. Quindi penso che quello … che la mia storia sia in qualche modo emblematica di una situazione che qui è generalizzata, per cui ci si sposa tardi e si salta il passaggio della convivenza che molti farebbero proprio perché si stenta ad avere i mezzi per vivere insieme e a vivere quella fase transitoria in cui si decide cosa si farà nella vita. Si finiscono gli studi, rischi di fare un lavoro che magari non sarà quello definitivo …"

"We had to wait until we were able to pay for the flat. We needed to have the money. I had to wait until I graduated from university, until I found a job. He first had one job, then he changed jobs, and we had to wait until he found a permanent position."[93]

"He also said that he preferred to have a situation economically stable enough not to have problems later, not to have worries. I don't say that now everything is fine, but we can pay the rent, the expenses, the cars. Before, we wouldn't have been able to."[94]

In addition, we found that interviewees and their partners evaluated a male's earnings as more important when compared to the woman's, as can be seen from the first of the preceding quotes. This not only accounts for cohabitation, but is also true for marriage. Patrizia (39) reported, for instance, that her partner held off proposing marriage to her, as he was unemployed and feared he would not be able to take care of her economically.

Whereas some couples opted to work toward a higher degree of economic security, others simply saw no way to realize cohabitation with the financial means at their disposal. These women emphasized that they had wanted to cohabit earlier, but that "their precarious job did not allow doing so." Though most couples sought economic stability, the lack of both secure and insecure employment positions resulted in most cases in a situation of *prolonged economic insecurity*. During cohabitation, interviewees and their partners recurrently lost their jobs and were constrained to search for new opportunities to re-enter the labor market. Under these conditions, many cohabiting couples chose to postpone marriage too. Katia (27), in fact, pointed out that she chose cohabitation and not marriage, as she did not have the economic means to engage in a more serious kind of union:

"My choice was intuitive, I didn't think a lot about it. A choice in the sense that I didn't have a fixed job, I worked on temporary work contracts, in a very precarious position … so it was an intuitive choice as there was nothing certain at the economic level."[95]

However, this group of women differed from the Bologna interviewees who chose an economically insecure path to cohabitation, in that they regarded a relatively higher level of economic security as a necessary requirement for cohabitation. Secondly, they perceived their informal union as a prelude to marriage and postponed the latter until being able to

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[93] "Dovevamo aspettare di poterci pagare una casa. Dovevamo avere la possibilità. Ho dovuto aspettare di laurearmi, di trovare un lavoro, lui prima faceva un lavoro poi l'ha cambiato e dovevamo aspettare che lui trovasse un lavoro sicuro."

[94] "Anche lui ha detto che preferiva avere una situazione economica stabile per non avere problemi poi, per non dover avere preoccupazioni. Non dico che adesso vada benissimo, però possiamo pagare l'affitto, le spese, le macchine. Prima non l'avremo potuto fare."

[95] "La mia scelta è stata una scelta istintiva, poco pensata. Una scelta nel senso che comunque non avendo un lavoro fisso io, ma lavorando con contratti a termine, con un lavoro molto precario … cioè comunque è una scelta istintiva perché non c'era niente di sicuro a livello economico.

afford its economic preconditions and its costs. Thus, in Cagliari, economic uncertainty influenced union formation in two ways: First, it delayed entry into cohabitation and, second, it provoked a postponed transition from cohabitation to marriage. In the latter case, cohabitation served as a kind of "less-than-ideal solution" until being able to afford a (usually expensive) wedding. Thus, the serious lack of stable and unstable employment made it impossible for several couples to opt for cohabitation. However, once an "adequate level of work and economic instability" was reached, cohabitation was more compatible with insecurity than marriage. Further, given the high costs associated with marriage (due to both a cost-intensive wedding and higher requirements linked to marriage, such as a flat they could buy), the decision for a conjugal union was highly expensive. Nonetheless, the interviews provided ample evidence that most couples in Cagliari had the desire to get married.

8.2.3 Comparing the Impact of the Labor Market on Cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari

Much past research, both theoretical and analytical, has been done on the interrelationship between economic factors and the transition to marriage (Becker 1981; Oppenheimer 1997). However, in sharp contrast, only a few studies address the interrelationship between economic factors and the transition to cohabitation. Scholars have, for instance, argued that informal unions – in contrast to marriages – are more compatible with the new demands of today's labor market, such as mobility, flexibility, and the resulting insecurity. This applies both to Western countries in general (Oppenheimer 1988; Mulder and Manting 1994) as well as to Italy in particular (Rosina and Billari 2003). Lewis et al. (1999), who analyzed young Europeans' orientations to family and work, assumed that "in the context of longer periods spent in education or training and the growing insecurity of work, the participants appear to live in an extended present, where current work-life priorities remain sharply in focus. As a consequence … it is difficult for them to plan for future work and family arrangements" (Lewis et al. 1999: 83). In line with this argument, cohabitation appears to be an adequate alternative to marriage, since it allows for living together without taking on long-term responsibilities that are usually associated with an enduring union such as marriage. Thus, a further increase in insecure jobs would, in the long run, promote the diffusion of informal unions.

In fact, however, this assumption is only partially supported by our findings. As for Bologna, we observed that women who did not come from the city, opted frequently for an economically insecure path when entering cohabitation: Their higher amount of flexibility (due to having already left their parental home) was indeed more compatible with new kinds of living arrangements. To some extent, these women already lived in a financially insecure situation. Cohabitation did not downgrade their position, but allowed them to share both time and expenditures with their partner. In fact, the high number of temporary though unstable jobs allowed them to be together before finding stable employment. On the other hand, a considerable number of interviewees chose an economically secure path, meaning that they entered cohabitation only once they had attained economic independence.

In Cagliari, we observed two types of influence the labor market had on the women we interviewed. Firstly, the majority of couples *had to* postpone the entry into their first union as they could not afford to pay the rent for a common flat. Couples in Cagliari, in general, postponed their transition to an informal union to a much stronger extent than couples in Bologna did. Whereas some women in Bologna decided out of choice to follow an economically secure path to cohabitation, women in Cagliari did so out of constraint. This observation actually contradicts the "compatibility assumption." Secondly, our data provide evidence that several couples opted for cohabitation as a "less-than-ideal solution." The high value attached to marriage relationships which we found in Cagliari leads to the assumption that many couples would rather opt for marriage than for cohabitation as their first union. As a stable employment was seen as precondition for marriage, couples postponed the wedding. In this respect, labor market uncertainty deterred couples from taking the risk to make the transition from cohabitation to marriage. Though women showed rather conventional attitudes toward union formation, they opted for the new kind of living arrangement – which, in the end, gives at least some support to the compatibility argument. Actually, the observed pattern of sequencing, in this case "stable employment as precondition for the next life-course transition," has also been found in other regional settings. Bernardi et al. (2008) showed, for instance, that the same reasoning is at work when couples in western Germany are about to decide on parenthood. These couples also perceive a secure job as a precondition.

Scholars have argued that the transition to marriage involves a much higher cost than the choice of cohabitation, since social norms dictate a certain standard of living once a couple decides to marry (Oppenheimer 1994). Clarkberg believes that the same social norms are *not* in force when it comes to informal union formation: "Because cohabitation – a relatively uninstitutionalized form of union – carries few prescriptions for an 'appropriate' lifestyle, the failure to meet some 'suitable' level of income may not be a barrier to forming a non-marital union" (Clarkberg 1999: 951). As a consequence, couples facing strong economic insecurity might be inclined to cohabit rather than marry. However, the extent to which couples may decide against marriage and in favor of cohabitation depends to a huge extent on societal norms, as expressed by Wilson: "The weaker the norms against pre-marital sex, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and non-marital parenthood, the more that economic considerations affect decisions to marry" (Wilson 1996: 97). Based on these considerations, couples living in poorer economic conditions would rather opt for cohabitation than for marriage – provided that at least a certain level of acceptance of informal unions prevails.

Our findings actually show that this was rarely the case in Bologna: Women generally attached similar preconditions to marriage as they did to cohabitation. When they decided on an informal union, they did so because of the attitudes they had toward cohabitation rather than for economic reasons. However, in sharp contrast to the Bologna sample, women in Cagliari justified their choice for non-marital cohabitation by referring to financial aspects. They perceived marriage as very expensive and, at least partially, an unaffordable choice, since it was connected to a high-priced wedding and the desire to own a flat when starting a family. Generally, women in Cagliari referred to at least one stable employment position as major precondition for a marital union. Thus, for Cagliari we find support for Clarkberg's assumption of "marriage being a more expensive choice than cohabitation."

8.3 The Housing Market and Its Influence on Cohabitation

The Italian residential housing market is characterized by a high ratio of ownership and a low number of rentable flats. In addition, rents tend to be extraordinarily high – especially in metropolises such as Milan, Rome, or Bologna (Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002). In the context of these problems, our analysis of the influence of housing markets on cohabitation aims at understanding how cohabiting couples counter these difficulties and how the residential market impacts the decision to enter an informal union.

8.3.1 Bologna: Home Ownership

The interviews in Bologna provided evidence of a general aspiration toward home ownership. Almost half of the interviewees could live in a flat owned by the family or were already purchasing a flat when entering cohabitation. These women had either first lived on their own or shared the flat with roommates before their partner moved in. The other group of women had been living in rented flats at the time they entered informal union: Either their partner moved into their flat or vice versa. About half of these couples decided to purchase a flat later on. Several of them were not (yet) married when they acquired the property. In sum, about three-quarters of the women lived in freehold flats at the time of the interview. According to most of them, renting a flat is not only highly expensive but also risky: As a landlord might change the rental conditions to the disadvantage of the renter, the renter faces the risk of losing the home:

"Those who are in a position to be able to buy a house do so because, unfortunately, rental conditions are prohibitive and above all extremely precarious … and we could say that those who are able to make this investment in the house also making great sacrifices, because otherwise you risk finding yourself, especially when you are getting old or living on a pension, having difficulty in keeping a rented house, so you make the sacrifice."[96]

Recurrently, women emphasized the difficulties that housing issues caused to them. They talked about "microscopically tiny" flats and about extraordinarily extensive searches for adequate housing. Federica (33), for instance, reported that the flat she currently owned

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[96] "Chi può la casa se la compra perché purtroppo le condizioni d'affitto sono proibitive e soprattutto molto precarie ecco … e quindi diciamo che questo investimento della casa chi può farlo anche con grandi sacrifici lo fa perché diversamente è molto rischioso trovarsi magari soprattutto in previsione di giungere in età avanzata o anche a una condizione di vita in pensione diventa difficile eventualmente poter sostenere una casa in affitto allora uno fa il sacrificio."

became too small after she gave birth to her second child. Together with her husband, she wanted to purchase a bigger flat. Federica stressed that they had already been searching for years:

"We have to move house and it will be a commitment … we have been looking for a house for three years and we haven't found one because prices here in Bologna are really ridiculous and you have to make a sacrifice."[97]

In order to purchase a flat, interviewees usually took a loan from a bank. An obstacle they had to overcome, though, was the advance payment. Here, generally, parents stepped in and helped their adult children pay this deposit. Once they had repaid the deposit, interviewees paid on average only the same monthly amount they had disbursed previously for rent. In this respect, purchasing a flat was indeed advantageous.

Only two women had stayed with their families prior to cohabitation. One of them, Benedetta (34), purchased a flat together with her partner *before* cohabitation. As soon as they furnished the flat, the couple moved in together. Benedetta mentioned that "once you buy a flat you commit yourself to someone else" and "if you want to do that, it means that you want to spend your whole life together."[98] In this particular case, the couple invested a lot of money before having ever lived together. The peculiarities of the Italian housing market induced the couple to act in the most rational way: to invest right away in home ownership without "throwing money down the drain." This way, they overcame a very high barrier prior to cohabitation.

Couples who could not afford to buy a flat emphasized the unpredictable rise of rental costs. Whenever landlords increased the rent substantially, interviewees were constrained to leave the flat and to search for a solution. Marina (40) and her partner were actually looking for a way out and found a residential co-op as an alternative to home ownership or renting. Financed by the region, the co-op offered a range of flats to individuals who paid a monthly amount. This amount was, however, lower than a normal rent. Although the residential co-op remained the owner of the property, individuals had the right to stay in the flat for life and to bequeath the "co-op membership" to their children. Despite these advantages, Marina mentioned also the disadvantages:

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[97] "Dobbiamo cambiare casa e sarà un impegno…è tre anni infatti che cerchiamo e non troviamo perché i prezzi qui a Bologna i prezzi sono veramente ridicoli e lì si tratta di fare un sacrificio."
[98] "Quando acquisti una casa comunque ti leghi ad un'altra persona e se lo vuoi fare vuol dire che vuoi passare il resto della vita con lui, ecco."

"Because in any case since the cooperative assigns housing according to the same, let's say … criteria for example as the Council, since we are not married. If we were married, perhaps we would have already been given a place with an extra bedroom, but as we are two people living together they can give us a room with a kitchen and bathroom … but just one bedroom."[99]

The lack of affordable housing together with the general prevalence of home ownership made it difficult for couples to adjust their dwelling according to their needs, e.g. once they had bought a one- or two-room flat, it was difficult to live there as a couple with children. Due to high rental costs, Carlotta (26) and her partner were not able to leave the student flat where they shared a double room. The couple had to postpone the move into their own flat until being they could afford the extraordinarily high rents for flats in Bologna. The rigidity of the residential market is illustrated best by the fact that almost all couples started cohabiting in the flat of either the male or female partner – couples seldom looked for a new common flat when they entered informal union.

In spite of these problems, some couples reacted with resourcefulness and creativity to the rigidity of the housing market. Carla reported that, when looking for a common flat, her partner moved into the flat next to hers and they opened up the wall in between:

"When our neighbors left, we seized the opportunity and my husband came here to stay and then … we opened up the wall between the two flats."[100]

To summarize, interviewees in Bologna perceived renting a flat as a precarious and risky undertaking. Almost all couples aspired to home ownership and most interviewees had realized this desire already. Several women felt restricted by their housing situation as their dwelling did not met their needs, for example with regard to space or privacy (in student flats). Some couples actually had to postpone moving into their own flat since they could not afford the extraordinarily high rent.

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[99] "Perché comunque con il fatto che la cooperativa assegna le case seguendo le stesse diciamo … indicazioni ad esempio del Comune, non essendo sposati, se eravamo sposati forse ci dava già una casa con una camera in più, ma essendo due persone che convivono comunque ci possono dare una camera con cucina, bagno … ma una camera sola."
[100] "Quando i vicini di casa sono andati via noi abbiamo preso la palla al balzo e mio marito è venuto a stare qui e poi … abbiamo fatto un buco tra i due appartamenti."

8.3.2 Cagliari: Striving for Home Ownership

Since women in Cagliari tended to stay with their families until union formation or to live in student flats, most couples had to search for a new flat when entering an informal union. Couples usually faced the difficulties of finding affordable and adequate housing prior to cohabitation, yet they showed high aspirations toward housing ownership. However, few couples found the money for purchasing a flat right in the beginning – some even believed they would never be able to manage it at all. In addition, hardly any couple could rely on access to family-owned property (as in Bologna). As a consequence, about two-thirds of interviewees started their informal union in a rented flat. Only later on did half of these women acquire a flat. Mariagrazia (40) justified her decision for home ownership like this:

"We were evicted from that house and we said, 'Why carry on throwing money away paying rent?' We got a quote for a mortgage and we saw that the mortgage rate was more or less the same as the rent, so we said 'let's buy a house.'"[101]

In general, couples in Cagliari had to put the purchase off until they had reached a certain level of economic stability. Diana (31) reported, for instance, that she and her partner had not been able to acquire a flat so far. Although they had the necessary financial means, the unstable employment she and her partner had did not enable them to get a bank loan:

"Yes, we've rented a flat because we can't buy one right now. Actually, we could buy one now because we would pay the same as the rent, but at the moment our work situation is not stable and no bank would give us a mortgage (…) Now all I'm doing is giving away money and that's it, and I don't get anything in exchange."[102]

Due to financial insecurity, therefore, couples tended to buy housing property later on, and to experience a postponed transition from renting to owning. In addition, couples showed the tendency to purchase housing together instead of doing it alone.

Nonetheless, about one-third of interviewees started their informal union in a flat that they owned. Most of these couples purchased their flat together before entering cohabitation. Women said they started cohabitation "as soon as they had enough money to buy a flat."

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[101] "Siamo stati sfrattati da quella casa e abbiamo detto "perché continuare a buttare via i soldini pagando un affitto?." Ci siamo fatti fare un preventivo per un mutuo, abbiamo visto che la rata del mutuo veniva su per giù quanto l'affitto e allora abbiamo detto "compriamo casa.""

[102] "Si, abbiamo preso un appartamento in affitto perché adesso non possiamo comprarlo. In effetti adesso potremmo comprarlo perché fare un mutuo, pagheremmo la stessa rata che per l'affitto però adesso non abbiamo una situazione lavorativa stabile e nessuna banca ci farebbe un mutuo (…) Adesso sto regalando dei soldi e basta e non ho niente in cambio."

As this condition was usually reached only after graduating from university and finding a stable employment position, these couples had to postpone entry into cohabitation. for some time. Furthermore, interviewees commented on the long period of time between starting to search for a flat and actually moving in. Gabriella (38) stated:

"Well, it all lasted about one year, but it lasted that long just because of the property market, in the sense that if we had found the right house for us after two days, we would have gone to live together immediately. Whereas unfortunately, we didn't have very much money, but then we found what we were looking for and we took it immediately. About one year, twelve, thirteen months."[103]

Chiara (39) experienced an even longer wait time. Due to the peculiarities of the housing market, Chiara and her partner entered their informal union four years later than initially intended. Although Chiara desired to move in together as soon as possible, her partner wanted to invest the money right away in the purchase of their own flat instead of wasting it on rent money. In the end, it took the couple four years to purchase and to renovate their flat. Only then – at age 32 – did Chiara leave her parental home and move in together with her partner:

"I wanted our relationship to change, because, you know, after so many years together, always at my mother's house, it was a little wearing. Nothing ever changed, fourteen years as girlfriend and boyfriend, at home, like this. Things didn't evolve and I felt the need to change something to make our relationship grow, otherwise being girlfriend and boyfriend forever was not right. Marco has his feet more on the ground. He says, 'We can't afford to pay rent now' because I suggested renting a house so we could go and live together, but he preferred to pay the mortgage on a house that will one day be ours. And he was right, but a turning point was needed after all these years, to grow in that sense.'"[104]

As we see from these responses, especially when couples tried to avoid "throwing money down the drain" by acquiring housing before entering cohabitation, they faced significant barriers in finding affordable dwellings. As a consequence, they postponed entry into cohabitation. Actually, property ownership seemed to play a more important role than private savings as can be seen in the case of Patrizia (39), cited earlier. She reported that her partner's family inherited some amount of money. Instead of saving or investing the money, they decided to use this capital to finance the deposit for a flat:

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[103] "Allora, il tutto praticamente è durato un anno però è durato così tanto a causa proprio del mercato immobiliare, nel senso che se noi l'avessimo trovata dopo due giorni la casa per le nostre possibilità saremmo andati subito a vivere insieme. Invece purtroppo avevamo pochi soldi, però poi abbiamo trovato quello che faceva al caso nostro e l'abbiamo presa subito. Un anno circo, dodici, tredici mesi."

[104] "Io volevo che il nostro rapporto cambiasse, perché sai tanti anni insieme, però sempre a casa di mia mamma era un po' stancante, non cambiava, quattordici anni fidanzati così, in casa, le cose così non evolvono e sentivo l'esigenza di cambiare qualcosa, di fare evolvere questa nostra storia, altrimenti fare gli eterni fidanzati non andava bene. Marco è molto più con i piedi per terra, dice: "Adesso non possiamo permetterci di pagare un affitto' perché io proponevo una casa in affitto per andare a vivere insieme, ma lui preferiva pagare il mutuo per una casa che diventerà nostra ed aveva ragione, però dopo tanti anni c'era il bisogno di una svolta, di crescere da quel punto di vista."

"His parents had inherited some money (…) and they split the amount into three parts. One for their daughter who was getting married, to buy a house, one for themselves, and another for their son. But of course, it wouldn't have been profitable to keep it in the bank, so they wanted to buy a house for their son too. So he found himself with this house that he didn't want, wasn't looking, and hadn't intended to set up home. We might say he found himself catapulted into this life, so to speak, which he hadn't wanted yet and wasn't yet ready for. I mean his mother was looking for a house, and he went to see it with his mother."[105]

The fact that keeping the funds in the bank was perceived as "fruitless" by the family, is symptomatic of financial business in Italy: In recent times, financial institutes have recurrently made the headlines as they misapplied private savings. Hence, interviewees had little trust in banks. In this regard, Barbara emphasized her point:

"When I manage to scrape a little sum of money together, I just pay it into my small post office account because I don't like the way banks treat you, and that's my own choice."[106]

So it is not surprising that interviewees sought to acquire their own homes not only in order to avoid wasting money on high rents, but also to make a secure financial investment.

In short, couples in Cagliari often moved into their first flat when entering cohabitation. As a result, they had to search for affordable housing prior to informal union formation. Although most couples hoped to achieve home ownership, their insecure employment situation delayed the purchase of property. Couples who looked for a flat to rent as well as those who were searching for one to buy, all faced significant barriers in finding adequate possibilities. As a result, several couples had to postpone the beginning of their informal union.

8.3.3 Perception of Housing Market and Consequences on Cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari

In both settings, in Bologna and in Cagliari, interviewees perceived renting a flat as a precarious and risky venture. As landlords could increase rents substantially or cancel the rental contract, individuals bore the risk of losing their dwelling. In addition, rents tended

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[105] "I suoi genitori hanno avuto un'eredità (…) e avevano diviso la quota in tre parti. Una parte alla figlia che si stava sposando per acquistare la casa, una parte l'avrebbero tenuta per loro e un'altra parte al figlio. Però ovviamente tenerla in banca sarebbe risultato infruttifero e quindi volevano prendere la casa anche al figlio e si è ritrovato con questa casa che non voleva, non la stava cercando e non era sua intenzione mettere su casa e quindi diciamo che si è ritrovato catapultato in questa vita, diciamo così, che ancora non voleva, non era pronto. Lui la casa, cioè la cercava la mamma e lui andava a vederla con la mamma."
[106] "Io semplicemente quando riesco a racimolare un gruzzoletto me lo sistemo in un piccolo conto che ho alle poste tra l'altro perché non mi piace il trattamento delle banche, quella è una scelta mia."

to be extraordinarily high. Consequently, renting was seen as a waste of money; the acquisition of their own housing, in contrast, was desirable for interviewees in both cities. Couples in both Bologna and Cagliari made considerable efforts to purchase their own flat. Despite this common aspect, interviewees in both contexts showed different patterns in overcoming housing difficulties. The data revealed, on the one hand, that couples in Bologna to a higher extent relied on property (such as a flat) owned by family. On the other hand, these interviewees showed a high potential of affording home ownership. Women, especially, purchased a flat prior to cohabitation. Later on usually their partner moved in. In contrast, couples in Cagliari had much less chance to rely on family property. As couples entered their first flat only when choosing cohabitation, they usually had to search for a new flat. Couples, thus, rented or purchased the dwelling together. However, due to employment instability, several couples had to postpone acquiring their own housing; other women saw actually no chance to purchase a flat at all. Hence, it is not surprising that in Cagliari fewer couples made the transition from "renting" to "owning." All in all, 50% of couples in Bologna owned a flat when entering cohabitation, whereas only about 25% did so in Cagliari (see Figure 8.1).

Because couples in Bologna moved into the flat of the male or female partner, they usually searched for adequate housing only after having entered cohabitation: either they looked for an appropriate flat to buy or they tried to purchase another, bigger flat. In Cagliari, couples had to shoulder the search for affordable and proper housing prior to cohabitation. As good offers for both rentable and purchasable flats used to be rare in Cagliari, couples often postponed moving in together and starting cohabitation. Especially those who decided to acquire a dwelling had to significantly delay cohabitation. In this respect, couples in Cagliari were much more affected by the housing market than those in Bologna – they experienced very strong obstacles when wanting to start an informal union.

Figure 8.1: Distribution of housing arrangements among interviewees in Bologna and Cagliari (at the entry into cohabitation and at the time of the interview)
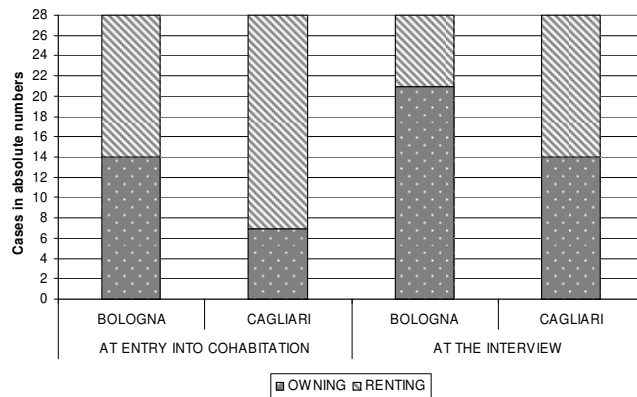
Our findings actually support suggestions by Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda (2002), who argue that the prevalence of housing property is one major reason for the low diffusion of alternative living arrangements in southern Europe. In their view, it is the rigid structure of the Mediterranean housing market which hinders young adults in the flexibility of choosing the living arrangement they prefer. As few young adults can afford *not* to buy when intending to live together, they instead opt for postponing or even withdrawing from cohabitation (Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002). Our results point to the strong importance of housing cost considerations on the choice for cohabitation. Frequently, in the study population these considerations were of high value when couples intended to live together. As shown previously, couples delayed cohabitation until they were able to purchase their own flat as renting was perceived as a waste of money. In other cases, couples had to postpone living together to a considerable extent until they had found adequate and affordable dwelling. In these ways, the housing issue proved to be another major obstacle for the diffusion of informal unions in Italy.

8.4 Perceived Legal Regulations and Their Consequences for the Diffusion of Cohabitation

In Italy, as in most European countries, cohabiters and married couples enjoy different social rights and responsibilities. Whereas wives and husbands are compelled to vouch for their partner in various situations of life, the same is not true for cohabiters. At the same time, married individuals are entitled to several rights and benefits that are not valid for couples living in informal unions. In contrast to general assumptions, however, since 1975

Italian children born out-of-wedlock have had basically the same rights as children born to married couples, especially with regard to the right to alimony (Kindler 1993). Before we highlight the actual legal situation of cohabiters in the country in more detail, we present the way interviewees in each regional setting *perceived* juristic regulations and how this *perception* influenced the way they saw cohabitation and marriage. As we will see, this perception had a strong impact on their choice, whether it was for cohabitation or marriage.

8.4.1 Bologna: Marriage as Social Security for Children and Future Social Protection

Almost universally, interviewees in Bologna perceived legal disadvantages of cohabitation compared to marriage. This view concerned both the social protection of children as well as women's own social security, for instance, in the case of death of the partner. Being unmarried was seen by interviewees as "having almost no type of social protection."[107] Women were, for instance, aware of the fact that unmarried individuals are not entitle to draw benefits such as the partner's old age pension once he died:

"I got the chance to verify it:. It's just the fact that when one of the two people dies … say if I died, my boyfriend would not be able to have the pension … say at the age of 60 he wouldn't be able to collect the pension."[108]

Further, cohabiting women feared inheritance regulations. They assumed that in case of death, their belongings, such as savings or property would become the property of their family of origin. However, in their view, it was their partner who should keep these possessions that they held more or less in common. Interviewees suspected that whether, in the end, their partner would retain these belongings or not would be up to the family of origin:

"He can't have things that are ours, which, in my opinion, are rightfully … which should rightfully become his. And instead, perhaps they'd go to other people – I mean to people you love, but who are no longer your family, your first family."[109]

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[107] "Non c'è quasi nessun tipo di tutela.

[108] "Ho avuto occasione di verificare: è proprio il fatto che nel momento in cui una delle due persone venisse a mancare non … non so se io non ci fossi più il mio ragazzo non potrebbe avere la pensione … che so a 60 anni non potrebbe ricevere la pensione."

[109] "Non può ricevere cose che sono nostre che per me è giusto che siano … diventino sue e invece magari vanno ad altri, voglio dire a persone a cui vuoi bene che adesso però non sono più la famiglia, la prima famiglia di cui uno fa parte."

"In other words, if I were to … to die today, it all depends on my family's kindness to leave everything to Alberto rather than keep it for themselves, doesn't it?"[110]

Despite these preoccupations, women worried also about regulations in the event of illness. They feared especially situations where one of the partners might be seriously ill. They were afraid they would not be allowed to make important decisions for their partner or vice versa and that they might not be recognized as a family member:

"What worries me is that maybe you won't be recognized as their husband or wife, so you won't be able to be near your partner in times of … need."[111]

"But it is crazy that people who have lived together for thirty years, twenty years … when one of them, say … falls seriously ill, the other person is not even considered or not even allowed to visit this person. It's crazy, it makes no sense at all."[112]

As a consequence of these future-oriented worries, several women considered entering into a formal union. Although not really wanting marriage, they preferred to risk this step in order to gain all the rights that married individuals have. Marina (40) was actually sure that there was a whole range of legal aspects that might convince cohabiting couples to get married. Elena (28) actually stated that she wanted to get married for reasons of reciprocal social protection:

"Whereas I would like us to get married just because of this bureaucratic problem, in other words, I want to think that we are protected if anything were to happen to me or him one day."[113]

Benedetta (34) admitted to perceiving marriage exclusively as a legal act. If people living in informal unions could have the same rights as married persons, she would not even contemplate a wedding:

"I see marriage as something to be done more on a legal level, because in my opinion if there was a law in Italy that gave de facto couples the same rights as married couples, in all honesty I would not want to get married. At the moment, I want to because it is the only way to give us both more rights."[114]

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[110] "Cioè se io dovessi … morire adesso, cioè dipende tutto dal buon cuore della mia famiglia di lasciare tutto a Alberto piuttosto che tenerselo, no?"

[111] "La mia preoccupazione magari è che non si venga riconosciuti come compagni quindi non si possa stare vicino al proprio compagno in momenti in … dove c'è necessità."

[112] "Ma è assurdo che delle persone che convivono da trenta anni, venti anni … il giorno in cui uno dei due non lo so … ha un brutto male non venga neanche considerata l'altra persona, non venga neanche data la possibilità all'altra persona di visitare questa persona, sono cose assurde, non hanno completamente senso."

[113] "Io vorrei invece che ci sposassimo proprio per questo fatto burocratico, cioè io voglio pensare che un domani se a lui succede qualcosa o a me succede qualcosa siamo tutelati."

[114] "Il matrimonio la vedo come una cosa da fare a livello più legale, perché secondo me se ci fosse in Italia una legge che parifica le coppie di fatto alle coppie sposate io sinceramente non desidererei il matrimonio, in questo momento lo desidero perché è l'unico modo che mi da, sia a me che a lui più diritti."

Though most interviewees emphasized that cohabiting individuals are only inadequately protected against social risks, they stressed much more the legal disadvantages of cohabitation once a child is born. The women believed that children tended to be socially better protected within marriage than within an informal union. Simona (42), cohabiting and childless, regarded marriage as necessary as soon as a child is born. In her view, marriage prevents children from irrational choices of parents once they decide on a separation:

"If there are also children probably (…) marriage surely becomes more necessary. If the couple separates, if they are married, the children are protected differently (…). When a couple only lives together, everything is left, how can I say, to the maturity of the mother and father, but you can't always expect two people who then split up to have the strength and ability to behave … not to let this situation affect the children."[115]

In fact, Simona was aged 32 when she got pregnant and experienced a miscarriage. In the initial stage of pregnancy, the couple started planning for a wedding. However, after the miscarriage, Simona and her partner abandoned the plan and stayed unmarried. She summarized it this way:

"We had thought of possibly combining marriage with the birth of a child. As there was no longer this factor, we decided not to get married."[116]

Actually, the perceived disadvantages of births out-of-wedlock induced cohabiting women to reconsider marriage. Susanna (40) and her partner decided to get married once they felt ready to have children. Their decision was based on the assumption that daily life involves too much bureaucratic effort if children are born outside marriage:

"We thought (…) it was easier to have children if we were married (…). When we felt ready to have children, we decided to get married. In the end, this was the main reason. Otherwise, we wouldn't have had a problem carrying on like this. But in Italy everything is much more complicated for the children if you are not married. I mean … both of you always have to be present…for anything, you need the consent of both, whereas basically, once you are married, one person is like the other – so it's much easier."[117]

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[115] "Se ci sono anche dei figli probabilmente (…) il matrimonio diventa sicuramente più necessario. Nel caso di separazione se c'è un matrimonio i figli sono tutelati in maniera diversa (…) quando c'è solo una convivenza il tutto è lasciato come dire alla maturità del padre e della madre, però non sempre si può pensare che poi due persone che si separano abbiano la forza e la capacità di comportarsi … di non far pesare sui figli questa cosa."

[116] "Avevamo pensato di legare l'eventuale matrimonio alla nascita di un bambino. Non essendoci più questo elemento non abbiamo pensato di sposarci lo stesso."

[117] "Pensavamo (…) per avere dei figli fosse più facile essere sposati (…) quando ci siamo sentiti pronti per avere dei figli abbiamo deciso di sposarci. Alla fine il motivo fondamentale è stato questo, se no non avremmo avuto problemi a continuare così. Però in Italia se non sei sposato è tutto più complicato per i figli cioè … devi essere sempre presente…entrambi per qualsiasi cosa, c'è bisogno del consenso di entrambi mentre una volta che si è sposati uno vale come l'altro insomma ed è più facile allora."

Women stated that "a wedding would not be necessary, if children of couples in informal unions would have the same rights as children born in marriages."[118] Interestingly, quite a few women favored marriage over cohabitation by referring to legal disadvantages of births out-of-wedlock. However, the great majority of interviewees were not aware of actual legal regulations. They said, for instance, that "it appears" to them that "marriage guarantees more rights to the child" or that they "think that it works like that." Only a few women emphasized their intention to check the real advantages and disadvantages of non-marital births once this became an issue. Marina (40), cohabiting and childless, is one of these very few exceptions:

"You must really understand what changes for the child, with the parents being married or not. Well, as I don't have children at the moment I haven't yet … we haven't looked into it yet, but it could also be … a time to rethink marriage, possibly in a registry office, well, in any case not a religious marriage. A civil marriage."[119]

Whereas almost all interviewees among the Bologna sample referred to legal drawbacks of informal unions that concerned future-oriented social protection and/or childbirth, only one woman addressed the immediate effects of this type of union. Giuseppina (34), married and childless, underlined that in the case of separation, marriage protects not only children, but also the mother:

"Especially, for example, if a couple is not married and has a child, if you are married and you then split up, you have guarantees in the sense that you can also get money for … well, maintenance. Whereas, if you aren't, if you are not married, the mother or father … will give the money to the child and that's it. Guarantees in this sense, financial guarantees."[120]

To sum up, both married and cohabiting women in Bologna perceived a whole spectrum of legal disadvantages of cohabitation compared to marriage. Cohabiting interviewees feared both inadequate social protection in their future (e.g. in case of illness or death of the partner) as well as drawbacks when having non-marital born children. Yet, only a minority of women were aware of the real legal situation; most women "assumed" that they would suffer disadvantages without knowing what precisely. Given this limited knowledge,

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[118] "Se le coppie di fatto avessero più diritti e soprattutto i loro figli fossero tutelati come i figli nati in un matrimonio non sarebbe così necessario."

[119] "Bisognerebbe capire bene ad oggi che cosa cambia per il bambino, per i genitori essere sposati oppure no, ecco per il momento non avendo figli non ho ancora … non abbiamo ancora esaminato però potrebbe essere quello anche … un momento per ripensare ad un discorso di matrimonio eventualmente in comune, ecco non religioso comunque. Civile."

[120] "Soprattutto per esempio se una coppia non è sposata e ha un figlio con il matrimonio se ci si separa hai delle garanzie nel senso che puoi avere anche dei soldi per … per il mantenimento insomma. Se invece non lo sei, se non sei sposato il padre o la madre … darà i soldi al ragazzino e basta. Garanzie in questo senso, economico."

it is surprising that a number of women intended to enter marriage in order to gain additional rights.

8.4.2 Cagliari: Marriage as Social Protection for the Present

Not surprisingly, interviewees in Cagliari perceived legal drawbacks of cohabitation, too. They stated "not feeling protected."[121] As some couples purchased a dwelling together, they worried about regulations once "anything occurs," such as a serious disease or the event of death. Tiziana (40), cohabiting and childless, is one of these women. This was her opinion:

"Every now and then we think about the fact that living together doesn't give any guarantees from a legal point of view. So, well, I don't know, for example we bought ourselves a house and we bought it as cohabitants. We specifically asked for the deed of purchase to be made out in both our names, stating that we were not married. So, if anything were to happen to one of us, the person who is left behind is not protected by the law and the inheritance would go, for example, first to the closest relatives like brothers and not to the cohabitant."[122]

Other women feared legal disadvantages in old age. They knew that individuals living in informal unions are not entitled to the pension of their partner. Sabina, for instance, was aged 52 at the time of the interview and had been married for about two years. Beforehand, she had experienced a very long lasting cohabitation of about 16 years. Although not appreciating a formal union, over the years the advantages of marriage convinced her and her partner to venture this step:

"For example, something that is very important is the pension, here in Italy when someone retires, if he/she is married, if the husband or wife dies, the other person can have his or her pension, the dependant's pension, if I were only living with my partner, if one of us were to die, the person who is left does not have the right to claim the dependant's pension. We thought about getting married now because after such a long time, I am 52 years old and my partner is 46. So you start to think about things that you didn't consider initially. Basically about this sort of thing, I have been thinking about the future a little, about being protected in some way."[123]

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[121] "Io non mi sento tutelata."

[122] "Ogni tanto noi ci pensiamo al fatto che la convivenza non dà comunque delle garanzie dal punto di vista giuridico, per cui insomma non so, per esempio noi ci siamo comprati la casa e l'abbiamo comprata da conviventi. Abbiamo proprio chiesto che l'atto di acquisto fosse fatto a nome di entrambi dichiarando che non siamo sposati e quindi se dovesse succedere qualcosa a qualcuno di noi due, la persona che rimane da sola non è tutelata dalla legge e quindi entrerebbero per esempio in una questione ereditaria prima i parenti più stretti come i fratelli che non il convivente."

[123] "Per esempio una cosa importantissima, è la pensione, qui in Italia succede che quando uno va in pensione si è sposato, se uno dei due coniugi muori, l'altro può usufruire della sua pensione, la pensione di reversibilità, se io fossi solo convivente con il mio compagno, se uno dei due muore, chi resta non ha diritto alla pensione di reversibilità, a noi è venuto in mente di sposarci adesso perchè dopo tanto tempo, io ho 52 anni e il mio compagno 46 mi sembra, quindi uno pensa a delle cose che prima non teneva in considerazione. Sostanzialmente su queste cose così, ho pensato un po' al futuro, di essere un po' tutelati."

Besides Sabina, several women took marriage into consideration – merely as a way to secure certain rights. Diana (34) claimed not to be really interested in a wedding. Nonetheless, she and her partner planned to marry for bureaucratic reasons. She stressed, for instance, inheritance and pension issues. Yet, Diana put emphasis on the fact that she would not decide on a wedding if "one day they would give the same rights to cohabiting couples."[124]

Despite worries about their own future social protection, interviewees referred to the disadvantages of informal unions as soon as children are involved. They believed that children in cohabiting unions have a worse position than offspring of married couples. Women complained about "less guarantees" and "discrimination," though without specifying the way in which children are unprivileged.

"Another negative thing I think for the children is that there are fewer guarantees and everything … guarantees in a bureaucratic sense."[125]

More salient, however, is the extent to which interviewees in Cagliari referred to immediate advantages and disadvantages of informal unions and marriage. Patrizia (39), cohabiting and childless, complained about the fact that unmarried couples are not entitled to benefits such as family allowances. As, at the time of the interview, Patrizia's partner was without a job, the couple would have in fact profited from any additional source of income:

"I have said to him many times, if we were married maybe they would also give me a family allowance. Basically, someone who is married, whoever works, if the other does not work, he or she is then a dependent spouse. Whereas when you live together, you don't have this and so, well, there are financial drawbacks. Cohabitants who don't have a salary get a family allowance if they have a dependent spouse. It might only be a little, but you can use that little bit of money to pay the electricity bill."[126]

Yet, the couple postponed marriage because of the partner's occupational situation. The lack of economic means, caused by the partner's unemployment, hindered the couple in celebrating with an expensive wedding party.

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[124] "Se un giorno dovessero dare gli stessi diritti ai conviventi, continuiamo a convivere assolutamente."

[125] "Un'altra cosa negativa penso si per i figli, ci sono meno garanzie e tutto quanto … le garanzie nel senso burocratico."

[126] "Molte volte gliel'ho detto, se ci fossimo sposati magari mi darebbero anche gli assegni familiari. Ecco, in effetti uno che è sposato chiunque lavori se l'altro non lavora è un coniuge a carico e invece convivendo non ce l'hai e quindi ecco, gli svantaggi economici ci sono. Il convivente che non ha uno stipendio se ha un coniuge a carico ha l'assegno familiare, magari poco però quel poco ti serve per pagarti la bolletta della luce."

Angela (23), cohabiting and mother of a one-year-old son, appreciated the additional social protection of marriage. At the time of the interview, she was actually at the beginning of her occupational career and still looking for a first job. Angela's partner was present at the interview and started to intervene in the discussion when talking about advantages and disadvantages of different types of union. Whereas Angela was very much in favor of a wedding, her partner Giulio felt he was disadvantaged by marriage:

Angela:	"(…) but when you are married you are protected, a lot more. This is another reason why I think marriage is important (…) and men are protected too. Of course they are protected, it depends on how the relationship ends up.
Giulio:	But it makes no difference, because if my mother gives me the house before I get married, that house will never be yours.
Angela:	I'm not saying that.
Giulio:	So what then?
Angela:	I am protected for a lot of other things. For the money for the child, for the things we build together.
Giulio:	But if I were to leave you, of course I would give you the money for the child, even if we were not married.
Angela:	Not necessarily. You can up and leave. You can like I can …
Giulio:	We have a child together, that's enough.
Angela:	But I have no responsibilities and rights over you and you have no responsibilities and rights over me.
Giulio:	We have the child's best interests at heart.
Angela:	Yes, but also mine? One day you can up and leave.
Giulio:	Yes, but also if we were married.
Angela:	No, no, you can't. After marriage you have rights and responsibilities, like I do. Whereas like this we have nothing.
Giulio:	In any case the man always comes off worse."[127]

Apart from the fact that advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation and marriage are differently evaluated by gender, the passage gives evidence of the perceived importance of marriage as a means of social protection, e.g. in case of separation. This finding is actually in line with the initial argument derived from our theoretical considerations (Chapter 2 and

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[127] A: "(…) però con un matrimonio si è tutelati molto, ma molto di più. Anche per questo io ci tengo al matrimonio (…) ma anche gli uomini sono tutelati. Certo che sono tutelati, dipende da come va a finire il rapporto.
G: Ma non serve a niente, perché se mia madre dà la casa a me prima di sposarmi, tu quella casa non l'avrai mai.
A: Ma io non sto dicendo quello.
G: E allora cosa?
A: Per tante altre cose sono tutelata. Per i soldi della bambina, per le cose che costruiamo insieme anche.
G: Ma se io dovessi lasciarti i soldi della bambina di sicuro li do, anche se non siamo sposati.
A: Non è detto. Tu puoi prendere e fuggire. Tu con me e io con te …
G: Abbiamo una bambina in comune, basta.
A: Ma io non ho diritti e doveri su di te e tu non hai diritti e doveri su di me.
G: A noi interessa la bambina
A: Si, ma anche su di me? Tu puoi prendere un giorno e andare via.
G: Si, ma anche con il matrimonio.
A: No, assolutamente. Ce li hai dopo il matrimonio diritti e doveri come li ho io, li hai anche tu. Così invece non abbiamo nulla.
G: Comunque l'uomo è sempre svantaggiato."

in particular Section 2.2.5). We argued that the inadequate childcare system in Italy forces women to resign from employment as soon as they give birth to a child. In this situation, women tend to be better protected when being married than within an informal union. For that reason, we assumed women to prefer marriage over cohabitation once they had children. Actually, the fact that interviewees in Cagliari stressed this point to a much stronger extent than women in Bologna, suggests that the particularly tight situation in the Cagliari labor market reinforces this effect. We assume that a weak economy and missing job opportunities sensitized women to the issue of social security. On the other hand, differences in gender relations in each regional setting might contribute to the different accentuation of marital advantages as well. Women in Bologna might take it for granted to combine motherhood with employment. Thus, they might fear economic worries to a lesser extent than women in Cagliari. The latter might perceive it as a matter of course to interrupt (or even terminate) their occupational career once they had children. We will highlight this issue in much more detail in Section 8.5.

8.4.3 Comparing the Impact of Perceived Legal Disadvantages of Cohabitation among Women in Bologna and Cagliari

After focusing on the individual perception of legal regulations concerning cohabitation and marriage among our interviewees, we shall now summarize the actual legal situation in the country.

In 1975, fundamental improvements in Italian family law assigned basically the same rights to children born outside marriage (*filiazione naturale*) as to those born to married couples (*filiazione legittima*), especially regarding the right of alimony. Previous, children born out-of-wedlock had to suffer legal drawbacks. In principle, unmarried parents have the chance to accept parenthood officially. This acknowledgement leads to the legal validity of rights and duties toward the child. Furthermore, since 1975, it has been possible to secure parenthood juridically. The ascertainment has the same consequences as the voluntary acknowledgement of parenthood, i.e. the validity of rights and duties toward the child (Kindler 1993).

As for non-marital unions, the legal situation is much more complex and less transparent. So far, Italy has witnessed no real establishment of legal regulations that regard informal

unions. Judgments are basically made on the basis of respective situations. An independent field of law has not yet developed (Kindler 1993). In recent times, courts had to work on cases of unsettled ownership structure, e.g. when unmarried couples separated after having purchased a dwelling together. Especially when they had omitted to specify who of the partners paid which amounts of money for what purpose, problems might arise. In any case, individuals living in informal unions have less protection compared to married couples when they are about to lose their partner, be it through separation or death. They are neither entitled to alimony, nor do they have access to the partner's old age pension (Asprea 2003).

Moreover, our findings show that in both regional contexts, women perceived these legal drawbacks of cohabitation in contrast to marriage. Yet, interviewees in both cities placed different emphasis on these disadvantages. Women in Bologna feared inadequate social protection in old age (e.g. in the case of illness or death of the partner) as well as heritance regulations. Further, and more importantly, interviewees perceived legal drawbacks of informal unions as soon as children are involved. Although not being aware of the actual regulations, rights, and obligations, women "assumed" that non-marital born children suffer less social protection. Worries about both insecure social protection in old age and the perceived disadvantages for non-marital born children led women to consider entry into marriage. It is actually surprising that women had so little information about the de facto equalization of children born to married and unmarried couples – despite the fact that the current regulations have been in place for more than 30 years.

In general, marriage was seen as a means for ensuring a higher standard of social rights; some women married actually only in order to gain these rights. Women in Cagliari pointed to the same legal drawbacks of cohabitation as women in Bologna did. However, additionally to these disadvantages, they emphasized the immediate legal implications of type of union. Interviewees stressed the fact that conjugal unions are entitled to family allowances and that married women – in contrast to cohabiting women – are socially protected during motherhood and after separation. We assume that the considerable accentuation of immediate social protection of marriage among the Cagliari sample is due to the strong confrontation of interviewees with a high degree of unemployment and social emergencies across the region. We guess that, as a consequence, women developed a higher

demand for social security than women in Bologna did. In both regional contexts, interviewees reacted to the perceived and actual legal drawbacks of cohabitation by considering entry into marriage – and some women actually did opt for marriage.

The question that inevitably arises here is: Does both the *limited knowledge* about actual legal regulations as well as *actual legal inequalities* between married and cohabiting couples contribute to the hesitant spread of informal unions in Italy? And if so, why is that the case – bearing in mind that other countries with high rates of cohabitation witness basically the same legal regulations. Our findings provide in fact profound evidence that both factors have an impeding effect on informal union formation in the country. In both regional settings, most interviewees were aware of the legal drawbacks of cohabitation. In addition to that, interviewees perceived additional legal disadvantages that are de facto non-existent. For several of them, both were reason enough to choose marriage over cohabitation. We assume that the particular situation young couples in Italy are living in (in respect to strong labor market insecurity, the tight housing market, and difficulties combining family and work, etc.) reinforces the influence of social protection regulations and perceptions on union formation choices. Individuals seem to be particularly sensitized to the issue of social security. This might explain why similar policies have a stronger hampering effect on cohabitation in Italy than is the case in other European countries.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the impact of formal institutions on the decision for cohabitation in Italy. Our analyses provide ample evidence that surrounding conditions are rather unfavorable for the diffusion of informal unions in the country (see Table 8.2 for a summary).

In both cities, but especially in Cagliari, interviewees suffered from an insecure and precarious labor market, unemployment, underpayment, and the prevalence of time-limited contracts. Whereas, in Bologna, the availability of unstable jobs ensured at least a certain level of economic stability, this was not the case in Cagliari. In Bologna, cohabiters profited from this relative security by experiencing fewer barriers toward cohabitation than in Cagliari. In the latter, couples frequently opted for postponing the transition to informal

union formation as they were not able to afford the related costs. On the other hand, in Cagliari the transition toward marriage involved even more costs: usually a high-priced wedding and the desire to own a flat when starting a family. In this situation, several couples opted for cohabitation as a "less-than-ideal solution," despite favoring marriage. Accordingly, to a certain extent we find support of the general assumption that labor market insecurity is more compatible with cohabitation than with marriage (Oppenheimer 1988; Mulder and Manting 1994; Rosina and Billari 2003). However, our data revealed as well that, in the Italian context, at least a certain level of economic security is necessary for taking the risky step of living together. Especially when young adults have difficulties in evaluating their future job prospects, as is the case in Cagliari, they tend to postpone cohabitation until they have reached a certain level of *relative* economic security.

We have further seen that the Italian housing market is another factor that affects the transition to cohabitation. In both regional settings, couples strove for home ownership by referring to the long-term insecurity connected to rising rental costs and to the belief that renting a dwelling is the same as throwing money down the drain. However, whereas couples in Bologna were relatively successful in realizing their desire for their own flat, couples in Cagliari came up against several obstacles when planning to either rent or buy a flat. In this situation, the latter were frequently constrained to postpone union formation for some time.

As to the perception of legal regulations, our findings show that both the de facto disadvantageous position of cohabiters as well as inadequate information about official rights of children born outside marriage contribute to a general aspiration toward marriage. In several cases, marriage was considered and motivated merely by legal considerations. This suggests that a convergence of rights among cohabiters and married individuals would favor the spread of informal unions and downsize the advantages of marriage. Furthermore, especially in Cagliari, interviewees attached high importance to the immediate effects of marriage, such as social protection when giving birth to a child or after separation. We assume that due to an extraordinarily difficult labor market situation, women in Cagliari were much more sensitized toward issues of social security than women in Bologna. In this sense, the high accentuation of marriage as social protection for the present might be understood as an effect of the economic difficulties among that regional context.

Table 8.2: Summary of influence of formal institutions on cohabitation

Formal institutions	**Bologna**	**Cagliari**
Labor market approach	*Given the availability of temporary, though unstable jobs, women were able to choose an economically insecure path toward cohabitation.* *Women deciding for an economically secure path did so out of* **choice**.	*In light of the precarious labor market situation, most women were* **constrained** *to enter cohabitation on an economically secure path.* *Nevertheless, in most cases, women perceived their informal union as a "less-than-ideal solution" until being able to afford the costs related to marriage.*
Housing market	*Both the availability of family property and student flats (though rather expensive) provide the chance to move in together as soon as couples decide on cohabitation.* *Interviewees showed usually a high potentiality to afford home ownership.*	*Couples usually lived with their family of origin until entry into an informal union. Consequently couples had to shoulder the expensive and time-consuming search for adequate housing* **prior** *to cohabitation.* *In addition, couples had less chance to acquire housing property as their economic situation did not allow doing so.*
Legal regulations regarding cohabitation and marriage and their perception among interviewees	*Women feared inadequate social protection in old age as well as inadequate inheritance regulations.* *More importantly, though, was the general assumption that children born outside marriage would suffer from legal disadvantages (which is actually not the case).*	*As in Bologna, Cagliari women perceived legal drawbacks with regard to non-marital childbirth, social protection in old age, as well as inheritance regulations.* *Additionally, women emphasized the* **immediate legal implications** *of cohabitation and marriage: the entitlement to family allowances, and protection during motherhood or after separation.*

Given these findings, one might assume that in Italy different – more favorable – surrounding conditions should facilitate the transition toward cohabitation. A higher level of economic security – be it through the availability of more secure jobs or through state support – might encourage young adults to venture into cohabitation. Further, the accessibility of affordable housing might increase couples' mobility, and, last but not least, the equalization of cohabiters with married individuals might leave people the choice between one of the two living arrangements without forcing them to choose marriage for legal reasons. However, there are many more factors that influence the decision for

cohabitation – factors we subsumed under the label of *informal institutions*. In Chapter 9, we shall concentrate on the impact these factors have on informal union formation in Italy.

Chapter 9

The Impact of Informal Institutions

9.1 Introduction

Following the analysis, in Chapter 8, of the impact of formal institutions on the development of cohabitation in Italy, in this chapter we focus on the relevance of informal institutions. Recently, scholars have emphasized the importance of the informal context for a more comprehensive explanation of demographic behavior (Greenhalgh 1990, 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997). In Chapter 2, we elaborated the theoretical importance of informal institutions on cohabitation diffusion in Italy, focusing on the influence of strong family ties, religion, and gender relations. In this chapter, we address particularly the impact of family (Section 9.2.), friends (Section 9.3.), religion (Section 9.4.) and gender relations (Section 9.5.) on informal union formation in Italy.

We assume that all these factors – perhaps with the exceptions of the influence of friends – constitute a social climate that is rather unfavorable toward cohabitation and which has at least until now hampered a rapid spread of this new living arrangement in the country. Parents, for instance, seem to favor marriage over cohabitation as the latter is not accepted in society. Researchers have assumed that, in order to enforce their position, they have used financial support as a means for bringing pressure to bear on young couples (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). It is further known that the Catholic Church strongly disapproves of living together without being married. Studies document that this position has a major impact on individuals affiliated to that religion in that Catholics show much lower rates of tolerance toward cohabitation than the non-religious (Angeli et al. 1999; Castiglioni 1999). Thus, informal institutions seem to have major effects on the development of cohabitation in the country. We actually wonder to what extent a change of attitudes toward cohabitation among informal institutions would impact the diffusion of this kind of living arrangement. With reference to the delayed transition to first birth in Italy, Kohler and colleagues (2002) argue that a behavioral change of innovators would have an indirect effect on the normative context, leading to a more rapid and persistent postponement of first childbirth than has been the case in other countries. If this should be true with respect to cohabitation as well, a change of attitudes among informal

institutions would not only imply a change in the development of cohabitation per se, but actually a very rapid change. Table 9.1 presents a summary of the informal institutions and theoretical assumptions.

Table 9.1: Informal institutions and theoretical assumptions

Informal institutions	*Theoretical assumptions*
Role of family ties and religion	Given the strong interdependencies within the Italian family, young adults feel compelled to accommodate toward their parents' wishes when making important decisions, such as entering into cohabitation. Due to economic dependencies, though, young adults can only decide to cohabit if parents agree with that choice. Given the strong importance of Catholic values and moral concepts, public opinions toward cohabitation are rather negative.
Gender approach	The familialistic structure of the Italian welfare regime has an unequal effect on gender relations: Whereas men are considered as breadwinners, women are assumed to be responsible for child rearing, housework, and care for needy individuals. Consequently, women are not supported by the state in fulfilling these responsibilities; that is, the state offers only limited possibilities for reconciling work and family life. Consequently, mothers especially are constrained to leave the labor market and to depend de facto on their husbands.

However, earlier studies fail to provide profound insights into the way informal institutions such as parents, friends, religion, and gender roles impact the development of cohabitation in Italy. Apart from basic assumptions, little is known about the way these factors affect non-marital union formation. In contrast, our approach – the analysis of qualitative data – is well suited for a deeper understanding of these questions.

9.2 The Influence of Parents and Intergenerational Interdependencies[128]

As summarized in Chapter 2, scholars have argued for an interrelationship between the prevalence of strong family ties in Italy and the low diffusion of cohabitation in the country. It has been assumed that parents tend to discourage their adult children from behaving in a way that is socially disapproved – such as cohabitation – by using their financial support as a means of bringing pressure to bear on their adult children. It has been argued that adults would only decide to enter a new living arrangement if their family accepted this choice – a condition that would apply, in particular, to families in northern Italy with highly educated fathers. In this respect, the father's level of education is seen as a proxy of the family's level of openness toward modern living arrangements (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007).

However, in our quantitative analysis at the national level (see Chapter 4) we discovered that the mother's education – also relative to the father's – has an even stronger positive impact on the daughter's entry into cohabitation. We believe that mothers with a higher level of education degree relative to that of the father have reached a higher level of emancipation and a higher level of decision-making autonomy than their counterparts of lower education (again, relative to that of the father). Consequently, one may assume that these mothers tend to have rather open-minded attitudes toward any modern living arrangements of their daughters. In Chapter 4, we supposed that these mothers either use their autonomy to provide greater emotional support when their daughters enter cohabitation (also against the wishes of the father), or that they transmit modern values and attitudes to their daughter right from the start.

Since there is only limited knowledge about the actual mechanism through which parents influence the choices of their children, we are interested in the question of how – if at all – parents intervene in the choices their children make about entering cohabitation, and whether young adults are indeed hampered by their family when it comes to non-marital union formation. Specifically, we address the following questions: How do young adults perceive the attitudes their parents have on cohabitation? What kind of importance does

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[128] A previous version of this subchapter has been published as:
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the opinion of parents have? How far do economic and non-economic interdependencies influence the decision for cohabitation? How do parents and children communicate about cohabitation? What is the parental reaction to cohabitation? How does the relation between parents and adult children change after entry into an informal union? To sum up, this section contributes to answering the question, "In what ways does family influence the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy?"

9.2.1 Parental Influence in Bologna

Analyzing the influence parents had on the decision in favor of cohabitation (and subsequent marriage) among our Bologna sample, three different patterns emerged. One might summarize these patterns as follows:

Settling the conflict: In the first group were women who see cohabitation as a pre-marital step. They had strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceive that their parents have attitudes opposing cohabitation. The greater majority of these women approached their parents when deciding to cohabit; only a few women opted for keeping their union secret. On approaching their parents, they discovered that the parents indeed had negative attitudes toward cohabitation. Although all these women decided to cohabit as a pre-marital step, that is, their union was aimed toward marriage right from the start, parents had considerable difficulties with that choice. Parents tended to ask their daughters to marry right away. Generally, this conflict was settled as soon as the women entered marriage.

Ignoring the conflict: The second group comprised women who also assumed that their parents would have rather negative attitudes toward informal unions. However, these women had only weak motivation to comply with parental wishes. The group was characterized by the fact that adult daughters tended to have different attitudes from their parents toward cohabitation – and this difference was rather long-lasting. Whereas parents wanted their daughters to enter marriage, daughters chose cohabitation not as a pre-marital step but rather as an experience per se or even as alternative to marriage. These women did not respond to their parents' demands, but instead tended to ignore this underlying disagreement.

Agreeing with parents: In the third group we found women who perceived their parents to encourage entry into cohabitation. These women had strong motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In fact, they experienced strong parental support when entering cohabitation. In some cases, parents even proposed that their daughters take this step. Women in this group chose cohabitation as experience or as alternative to marriage.

In the following analysis, we shall focus on each of these patterns separately and analyze them in more depth.

9.2.1.1 Settling the Conflict

This group comprised about one-third of the interviewees. These women saw cohabitation as a step aimed at marriage right from the start. They had strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceived that their parents oppose cohabitation. Actually, parents wanted their daughters to marry right away. Half of the women in this group originally came from the South. Several of them grew up in small villages, and their families continued to stay there. Although they had all have lived in Bologna for many years, they were regularly confronted with the rather closed attitudes of their parents. Most of the women declared themselves as religious. They all regarded marriage as desirable; nevertheless, they yearned to live with their partners before marriage. Most of them reported that they entered cohabitation because they wanted to spend more time with their partner or because of convenience.

Being aware of their parents' opposition to cohabitation, the women tried to settle the conflict with them. This attempt ranged from settling the conflict via negotiation to settling it via entering marriage after a secret cohabitation. Yet, most interviewees sought parental acceptance. They tried to prepare their parents for cohabitation by putting their intention carefully to their families, by entering slowly into their new living arrangement, and by calmly negotiating a solution. Emanuela, now aged 36 and married, announced that she had "grossi progetti" (big plans) such as marriage and having children. This conciliatory declaration calmed her parents down and opened the way to informal union formation:

"[My parents] accepted it but for sure they are not enthusiastic about it because in the end they would have preferred marriage right from the start. But they understood the situation and did not stop me. They always

said that they prefer marriage to us living together, but once we told them what we wanted to do, even they were OK with our decision."[129]

This way, cohabitation generally served as a pre-marital living arrangement that evolved into marriage. The possible failure of this pre-marital cohabitation – expressed in some couples' separation – was not taken into consideration at all. From the outset, to be in cohabitation was to be on target for marriage. In Emanuela's case, we believe that an informal union that was not aimed at marriage would have caused many more problems and difficulties with her parents. Emanuela managed to negotiate a compromise, as did most other women of this group. However, the compromise was only temporary, as parents accepted cohabitation for the time being but not for an indefinite period.

At a certain point, parents usually tended to (re)start asking for marriage. Daughters generally gave in and finally decided to get married. Whereas most parents continued to insist upon the Catholic rite, some of them minimized their reservations and were pleased with any kind of marriage. Here, the adult child's behavior also influenced the attitudes of parents. Parents who initially demanded a church wedding changed their minds and were satisfied even with a civil wedding at the registry office. Nevertheless, the majority of parents did insist on a church wedding.

Interestingly, when discussing cohabitation and marriage, it was the mother, almost exclusively, who made the approach to the couple. In most cases, the mother rather than the father acted as the direct negotiator. In turn, women in the sample also tended to refer to their mothers, rather than their fathers, when announcing intentions or decisions. In fact, all mothers of this group were married and, as interviewees reported, they tended to discourage their daughters from cohabitation and encouraged them to enter a conjugal union right away. Almost all interviewees described their families as "traditional" and having a rather "closed mentality":

"I grew up in a very traditional family, in the South of Italy, thus in an atmosphere very different to where I live today, very traditionalistic, very closed. It was a small village in the South, with a very restricted mentality. Thus, with certain things I had many restrictions during my youth. Up to a certain age I could not even go out with boys and such things."[130]

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[129] "Dunque…non erano cioè hanno accettato ma sicuramente non con entusiasmo perché comunque avrebbero preferito un matrimonio da subito però hanno capito la situazione quindi non mi hanno mai ostacolato. Hanno sempre espresso la loro preferenza al matrimonio piuttosto che alla convivenza però una volta chiarite le nostre intenzioni, anche con loro non ci sono stati problemi."

[130] "Io sono cresciuta in una famiglia proprio molto tradizionale nel sud dell'Italia, quindi in un'atmosfera molto diversa da quella in cui vivo oggi molto tradizionalista, molto chiusa che poi era un paesino del sud con

"[My parents] are … I don't say rigid, but less open. The principles of the family on certain roles, on certain things … have always been fixed, all in all."[131]

About half of the mothers in this group had been housewives all their life. As regards parental education, we observed that low levels of education among both mothers and fathers were common, although this did not apply to all parents. We assume that the rather closed mentality of parents was a result of their isolation from modern attitudes and behaviors. Many families lived in small villages and only had contact with people with the same traditional attitudes and values. In addition, mothers tended to have even fewer opportunities to mingle with people of modern attitudes and behaviors, as they usually had fewer contacts outside their home.

Analyzing the economic situation of women in this group, we found that nearly all of them had a more or less stable employment position and were economically independent, that is earning their keep (including when they entered cohabitation). Women received economic support, mainly for the purchase of a flat, home renovation, and/or furniture. Interestingly, in nearly all cases support was given, but strongly connected to the actual marriage – either shortly before the wedding or afterwards. Nevertheless, no single woman emphasized such a relation. It seems that it was not economic dependence per se that explained a young adult's accommodation but the *prospect* of financial help to meet housing and furniture needs.

Non-economic support was an important factor as well. Generally, parents in this group were strongly involved in the lives of their adult daughters. Women, for instance, had emotional support after childbirth. Interviewees also emphasized that they sought spatial proximity. In today's Italy, non-economic support, such as childcare, is highly important for young families. Women know that they have to rely on families' non-economic support when having children, all the more so if they wish to continue work. This fact might promote accommodation toward parental wishes too. In respect to childcare, Alessandra (30), cohabiting and childless, emphasized:

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una mentalità molto ristretta, quindi per certe cose ho avuto molte restrizioni nella mia giovinezza, poi io fino ad una certa età non potevo neanche uscire con i ragazzi o cose così insomma."
[131] "[Miei genitori] sono … non dico rigidi, però ecco meno aperti. I principi della famiglia su certe regole, su certe cose … insomma sono stati molto fermi."

"If I live … in Turin for instance, I will be calmer because my parents would be there. So I could work and could be sure that someone looks after my children (…). If we think about the future, how should we organize things when there are children? It's a problem. I see a couple who are on their own here. It's really very exhausting; you don't have time for yourself anymore, for anything. The only thing you do is run around the city like maniacs – and that creates anxiety."[132]

Clearly, all these women regarded their families as very important. These strong emotional ties between adult daughters and parents – especially mothers – explain the power of parents. To conclude, women in this group tended to differ from their parents only slightly in attitudes toward family formation. They evaluated cohabitation as a first step that leads to marriage, whereas their parents preferred a direct entry into marriage. Actually, these women perceived (and got to know later) that their parents were strongly against cohabitation; however, they showed a strong motivation to comply with the parents' wishes. This high motivation seems to be result of two factors: First, the economic and non-economic support that parents might give in the future; second, the fact that all the women in this group showed very strong family ties. In the end, these women opted for settling the conflict between their own wishes to cohabit and the parental preferences for marriage.

9.2.1.2 Ignoring the Conflict

Among this somewhat smaller group we found women who also perceived that their parents opposed cohabitation. However, one major difference between this and the previous group regarded the motivation to comply with parental wishes. Whereas women in the previous group showed strong motivation, those in this group tended to have weak motivation to comply with parental desires. These women did not act in line with their parents' wishes on family formation. They perceived cohabitation not simply as a pre-marital step, but rather as a trial, or even as an alternative to marriage (in fact, two cohabiting women had already given birth to their first children).

None of these women had decided for marriage so far, although some of them said they might opt for a marital union later on. Thus, they further differed from the first group in that their union was not aimed at marriage right from the start. Though their parents had

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[132] "Se poi abiterò…a Torino ad esempio, sono più tranquilla perché ci sarebbero i miei genitori quindi potrei lavorare e starei sicura che i miei figli qualcuno me li guarda, (…) se pensiamo ad un futuro, con i bambini come si fa? E' un problema. Cioè io vedo le coppie che sono sole qua, è veramente molto faticoso perché non hai più tempo per te, per niente. Si corre solo dentro la città come dei pazzi e questo fa paura."

opposing attitudes on cohabitation, they did not usually pressure their adult daughters to enter marriage. Thus, the conflict between parties had not broken out (even though it lingered at the subliminal level). Parents only sporadically encouraged marriage. This encouragement, however, had little influence on the adult children. In general, the women tended to ignore the fact that their parents were against cohabitation.

As to family relations, we observed that in most cases the child–parent relationship was tense, not only in respect to the underlying conflict but also in terms of past family relations. Valeria (40), for instance, had been involved in serious quarrels with her parents when a teenager. When deciding to leave home and to start studying, she refused any support from her parents. Especially in the Italian welfare state, which focuses on the family as the main actor of solidarity, this decision had strong consequences for her. Valeria had to make demanding efforts to overcome her economic problems and to finish university. As a result, step by step, Valeria gained her parents' respect. This respect allowed her to decide independently about her life – even if her parents had a completely different point of view:

" … I know that this is the result of exhausting and painful work, because I also had … moments – in the past when I felt vulnerable, with problems, even some big ones, also some economic ones and … it wasn't easy to have … In addition it was very difficult for me to say 'Mama, Papa, I'm in a deep mess, help me'. Thus, it was quite hard, … but it developed this kind of relationship which I like a lot, of great respect, so I think that … maybe they have the desire, but … out of respect for my choices, they never pushed it, I mean also regarding the fact that I have a child out-of-wedlock, my mother never ever influenced …"[133]

The early emotional and economic separation from her family allowed Valeria to develop a relationship with her parents that was characterized by a high degree of equality. A similar pattern – although the result of a completely different situation – is the case of Simona (42). She talked about the fact that the (traditionally oriented) parents of her partner had to enlist the couple's assistance, as one of the parents had severe health problems. Although these parents never pressed her to marry, Simona always perceived that they – and especially his mother – had this desire:

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[133] " … so che questo appunto è il risultato di un lavoro faticoso e anche doloroso se vuoi, perché magari ho avuto anche … dei momenti cioè, nel passato quando mi sentivo fragile, con problemi anche molto grossi cioè, anche proprio di tipo insomma economico e…non è stato insomma molto facile avere … poi mi sono fatta anche violenza nella cosa di dire "Mamma, papà sono nella cacca, aiutatemi." Quindi è stato insomma duro, … però ti dico ha creato questo tipo di rapporto cioè che mi piace molto, di grosso rispetto, quindi penso che … loro forse hanno questi desideri però …per una questione di rispetto delle mie scelte non sono mai venute fuori, dico anche rispetto al fatto di avere un figlio venuto fuori con mia madre dopo, cioè mai e poi mai mi ha fatto influire il fatto…"

"The relatives on the father's side of my partner are numerous, very numerous. They all live in Calabria and all of them are married and have children. The weddings are events that are particularly important. So, he's the only one who hasn't done that and in this sense … it is noticed: in the stories about the cousins' weddings … and we are the only ones who have not marr … but apart from that, it's quite, there has never been a push or a specific request."[134]

The dependence of Simona's in-laws upon the couple's support explains to a very large extent the parents' chary position regarding marriage. In both cases (Valeria's and Simona's), the breakup of conventional support patterns (on the one hand, the declining of parental economic help, and on the other hand, the reversion of support and thereby change of power structure in favor of the couple) gave way to independent decision-making about family formation.

Interestingly, only the women in this group perceived and emphasized a connection between parental economic support and parental interference in the relationship. Thus, most of these women avoided financial help. Only a few younger ones were constrained to rely on financial assistance from their parents – and were often distressed by that situation. Marcella (29) pointed to the direct connection between economic support and demand for non-economic help:

" … if they help you, there is always a price to pay {laugh}, that means that they give you…, but they also ask you for something in return (…) in the end, for sure, there is always a power relation. It's always like that … in the end it's the money."[135]

All women reported that their parents had rather traditional attitudes and values. Analyzing their educational background, we found that some parents had low and others a high level of education. In some cases, mothers were housewives; others worked. The interviewees, in contrast, had rather modern value orientations. However, these women experienced only an underlying conflict. Two factors seem to explain the different consequences of cohabitation for these women: First, the *affective distance between parents and child* and second, the *absence of economic dependence*. In addition, we observed that some women had rather bad experiences as far as their parents' marriage was concerned. It is likely that these women

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[134] "I parenti del mio compagno dalla parte del padre sono numerosi, molto numerosi, vivono tutti quanti in Calabria e sono tutti sposati con figli. I matrimoni sono stati degli eventi particolarmente importanti. Allora, lui in pratica è l'unico a non aver fatto questa cosa e quindi in quel senso lì, ecco…si è notato. Nei racconti dei matrimoni dei cugini … e quindi noi eravamo gli unici che non si erano spos … però voglio dire aldilà di questo in maniera molto tranquilla non c'è mai stato una spinta o una richiesta specifica."
[135] " … quando ti aiutano c'è sempre una tassa da pagare {ride}, cioè loro ti danno ma ti chiedono anche (…) cioè è sempre un po' sicuramente un rapporto di…di potere ovviamente. È sempre così…il denaro comunque."

perceived their parents to live by double standards in terms of traditional values such as marriage.

So, to sum up, women in this group opted for cohabitation as a passage or as alternative to marriage. They were aware that their parents would oppose cohabitation. Nevertheless, they followed their own desires and ignored their parents' wishes for them to marry. Both, the absence of close kinship ties and of economic support seem to explain the low motivation to comply with parents' wishes. These adults simply ignored convention. As a result, we find a high potential for social change among this group.

9.2.1.3 Agreeing with Parents

A third pattern of behavior observed was "agreeing with parents." This group encompassed the highest number of women in the sample. They had strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceived encouraging attitudes toward cohabitation. One major difference compared to the first and second patterns is that parents in this group supported their daughters when entering cohabitation and even pushed them to take this step. These parents tended to have relatively tolerant attitudes on cohabitation – this applied also to informal unions that were not aimed at marriage at all. Most women decided for cohabitation as trial, passage, or alternative to marriage. Here, mothers themselves had often had experienced cohabitation, separation, divorce, or remarriage. They had cohabited or separated in years past and some of them were among the first to use the option of legal divorce, introduced in Italy in 1970.[136] These mothers can be seen as constituting a select group, since both cohabitation and divorce was even less diffused at that time. In fact, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1989) assume that parents who went through the divorce revolution welcome a "new life-course" for their children. Parents in this group often had a very high level of education (university degree) and in some cases mothers had a higher education than their partner. Moreover, mothers were largely employed and worked as teacher, white-collar worker, or freelancer.

Again, daughters confided in their mothers when making important choices. But in contrast to the first pattern presented, these mothers often supported their daughters when

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[136] Despite the strong opposition of the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church, the Italian government passed the divorce law in 1970. A referendum failed in 1974.

entering cohabitation. Most probably, mothers would not even have disagreed should their daughters have decided to give birth outside marriage. Although none of the women in this group had a child yet, several intended to give birth soon. These women generally did not expect their parents to have opposing attitudes on that choice. The acceptance of the adult daughter's decisions by parents was also rooted in the respect and confidence parents had for their child. Recurrently women emphasized this aspect:

"As to that, however, they never tried to hinder me and from my point of view they respect me and hence I respect them."[137]

" … they always used to trust in my judgment, so if it was OK for me, it was OK for them, too."[138]

Thus, in contrast to the previous group, the women had strong emotional ties to their parents – particularly to their mothers. This was also found among the first pattern presented here. Frequently this strong mother–daughter bond had its origin in the kind of living arrangement both experienced during the daughter's childhood and youth. Since some mothers were separated or divorced, they brought up the daughter on their own. Fathers had generally no or much less importance; this strengthened, of course, the mother–daughter tie. Actually, previous research supposes that female-headed households exhibit unusually low intergenerational conflict (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989).

As regards economic support by parents, women in this group generally abstained from financial help, although in some cases where the daughters were still students, parents supported them economically. The renunciation of financial help was frequently motivated by the fact that parents had already supported them in past times (e.g. during studies) and daughters found it embarrassing to ask for further help. If parents were willing to provide support nevertheless, women in this group generally accepted it, but with hesitance.

As in the first group, women in this group were strongly influenced by their parents. The mechanism, however, worked differently. Family formation experiences of mothers and the strong mother–daughter bond induced women to have tolerant attitudes on family formation too. Interestingly, none of the women perceived their mother's living arrangement as something bad or unacceptable. Their knowledge about the mother's way

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[137] "Però non hanno mai cercato da questo punto di vista di ostacolarmi e questo secondo me è una forma di rispetto nei miei confronti e di riguardo io rispetto loro."
[138] " … hanno sempre avuto abbastanza fiducia sul mio giudizio per cui se andava bene a me, andava bene anche a loro."

of life (e.g. experiencing a family model other than the conventional one), led women to behave in a similar way. In contrast, parental influence through economic support was of no importance here. It seems, in fact, that parents and especially mothers influenced their daughters via socialization, but much less so via social control techniques.

9.2.1.4 Conclusion: Parental Influence in Bologna

The analysis revealed the different levels of acceptance that parents had with regard to cohabitation. Traditionally-oriented parents tended to criticize the informal union of their adult daughters, although the daughters themselves defined their cohabitation as a pre-marital step. Parents with modern values and attitudes, in contrast, accepted any kind of cohabitation, i.e. cohabitation as alternative to marriage or as a trial. And they did so without imposing any conditions.

Especially in cases where daughters and parents had strong emotional family ties, as in the first ("settling the conflict") and third ("agreeing with parents") patterns, adult daughters tended to approach their mothers when deciding upon important matters. Thus, the strength of their family ties seems to explain their higher motivation to comply with parental wishes. Whereas the mothers who regarded marriage as an important step in a woman's life tended to push their daughters to enter a marital union, the mothers with more tolerant attitudes on family formation encouraged their offspring to go ahead with both leaving home and entering into cohabitation.

Our analysis showed that – as far as parental influence is concerned – three factors are important: *traditional vs. innovative attitudes* among parents, the strength of *family ties*, and *considerations of economic and non-economic support*:

First, as to *attitudes* among the parents, we found that parents who opposed the daughters' decisions were usually married and religious. Some of them came from the South and lived there in small villages. "Encouraging parents," on the other hand, had gained experience with other kinds of living arrangements and had no religious affiliation. As indicated previously, our statistical analysis on the entry into informal union in Italy provided evidence for the positive impact of the mother's level of education – also in relation to the father's level of education (see Chapter 4). Thus, we were interested to see whether this

factor was of importance in our qualitative sample too. In fact, we found that low levels of education among both mothers and fathers were more common among the first group, although this did not apply to all parents. The third group consisted to a higher extent of parents with a very high educational level (university degree) and mothers with a higher level of education than their partner. Additionally, about half of the mothers in the first group were housewives throughout their lives. Mothers in the third group, in contrast, were largely employed and worked as a teacher, white-collar worker, or freelancer. Given the differences in educational and employment career, it is not surprising that mothers in the third group had more liberal attitudes compared to those of mothers in the first group. Thus, it seems that the higher extent of emancipated values among mothers facilitated and accelerated the daughters' entry into cohabitation. In this respect, the level of *tradition vs. innovation* among the parent/mother generation impacted daughters' choice for cohabitation to a large extent.

Secondly, women in the first and third groups were strongly *bound to their parents*, unlike women in the second ("ignoring the conflict") group. Whereas adult daughters with *strong emotional attachment* to their parents tended to replicate their parents' attitudes on family formation, daughters with *shattered relations* generally developed value orientations that contradicted those of their parents. Their motivation to comply with parental desires was much lower. In short: Only parents with good relations to their offspring transmitted their own values successfully.

A third factor that seems to explain the strong motivation to comply with parental wishes is the prospect of *future economic and non-economic support*. Women in the first group, who settled the conflict with their parents when choosing cohabitation, did not mention this connection at all. Most of them received parental support shortly before or after their wedding, indicating that in most cases support is conditioned by parental approval of the current living arrangement. Parents contributed to the purchase of a flat or they bought the furniture for the flat. This pattern shows that parents indeed used economic resources as means of social control. However, it is not economic dependence per se that explains women's accommodation, but rather the desire for economic support. Thus, women who wanted to rely on parental support accommodated their parents' attitudes and desires without even mentioning such a connection. Possibly they were not even aware of it. In this sense, parents used their economic power to interfere in the choices of their adult

children, whether intentionally or not. Women in the second group, on the other hand, avoided any economic support. Women with tense family relations were the only ones who emphasized the connection between parental economic support and interference. Since parents failed to transmit their own values via socialization, they might have tended toward the use of financial help as a means of bringing pressure to bear.

9.2.2 Parental Influence in Cagliari

In the Cagliari sample, we again found different patterns of parental influence on cohabitation. However, the groups we identified here differed in several aspects from the groups found in Bologna. The groups may be characterized as follows:

Stringing parents along: Although the informal union of these women was aimed at marriage, the couple had to postpone the wedding. The lack of secure employment positions for both partners as well as inadequate housing induced the couple to perceive cohabitation as if it were a passage within their life, rather than a pre-marital step. Women in this group showed a very high motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In almost all cases, the relation between family and adult daughter was characterized by very strong ties. Since parents generally opposed cohabitation and daughters saw no way to marry soon, they tended to "string their parents along," i.e. they kept their parents on hold to wait for marriage to happen. Women, however, postponed the wedding until they had reached the economic security they perceived as a *sine qua non* to marry.

Standing up to parents: Cohabitation was generally perceived as a long-lasting passage or alternative to marriage. Although women were aware of their parents' opposing attitudes toward informal unions, they decided for cohabitation. Moreover, they stood up to parents and realized their preferred style of union. Whereas some parents reacted in a very negative way and did not accept cohabitation at all, others became resigned to it when they saw that it was at least a serious decision. All the women reported that they had weak ties to their families, and parents rejected the idea of assisting with housing or furniture when daughters entered cohabitation.

Agreeing with mothers: Women in this group were strongly supported by their mothers when entering cohabitation. Most women decided for an informal union as alternative to

marriage. Although in some cases fathers were not satisfied with the cohabitation decision, mothers stepped in and convinced their husbands. The relations between parents and daughter, but especially those between mother and daughter, were characterized by strong ties. Both emotional and economic support were common among this group.

9.2.2.1 Stringing Parents Along

In terms of the number of cases, the "stringing parents along" group was the largest group in the Cagliari sample. Here we found mainly women who stated the desire to marry sooner or later. However, the couple's economic situation did not match the preconditions they considered necessary for marriage. In most cases, these preconditions would include both partners having a more or less stable employment and the opportunity to purchase their own flat. Thus, although women in this group wished to marry, their cohabitation did not necessarily end up in a conjugal union. Parents generally opposed cohabitation as they desired their daughter to marry right away. Due to missing economic preconditions, interviewees tended to string their parents along and parents accepted or had to accept cohabitation. To a certain extent, parents were able to relate to the decision for cohabitation as the labor market situation was rather tense in Sardinia. However, some parents had huge difficulties with their daughter's choice. One interviewee, for instance, feared parental reactions so much that she asked her sister to talk to the parents. Even though most parents reacted less unpleasantly than expected by the interviewees, parental response still tended to be negative. As regards the interviewees who had decided for cohabitation already several years before, they reported that cohabitation was seen by their families as "something absolutely not to do" and as "shameful."

Especially those parents who lived in the smaller villages of the Sardinian countryside were less willing to accept cohabitation. About half the women in this group came from Cagliari – they faced far fewer difficulties with parents than the women from rural areas. Parents in this group tended to have low or medium educational levels, and almost all mothers were housewives. All these factors might explain their rather traditional views on cohabitation.

However, although parents at a certain point accepted cohabitation, they accepted only for the time being. Parents generally continued to expect marriage, as in the case of Viviana (36 and still cohabiting). As her mother understood the necessity to save money for the

wedding party, she gave her temporary agreement. However, she continued to insist on marriage:

"My mother is waiting for us to marry because, of course, she has a certain mentality. She does not agree very much with living together before getting married, although she understands very well that this is the situation we are in right now, a necessary transitional stage, as the marriage demands much more time. But of course, what she's asking me every time we meet is, 'Well, so what about the marriage?'"[139]

Once a certain economic situation was achieved, several women complied with parental wishes and entered marriage. Although these women emphasized that their decision for marriage was not driven by their patents' wishes, they admitted these were of importance too – not only when choosing to marry, but also deciding whether to marry in church or in a civic ceremony:

" … moreover, the fact that around us there would be a positive reaction, an acceptance, the pleasure, the desire of my parents and my relatives allowed us to feel better. But we took this decision irrespective of that (…) and then also because my parents believed firmly in this and therefore I wanted also to meet their desire."[140]

"To please my parents, because my father and my mother still want to see me get married in church and so maybe to please them or out of tradition…."[141]

The experience of Patrizia (38 and cohabiting) demonstrates the high importance of parental approval to women in this group. Patrizia perceived her parents to have negative attitudes toward informal unions. As a consequence, she was not open to cohabitation. Surprisingly, one day Patrizia's mother proposed cohabitation:

" … when I came back one morning my mother said to me: "But why don't you go and live with him?" and I took this advantage, I snapped at the chance and left. What my parents might have thought was a big impediment for me. I knew that they were against it and I didn't want to make them sad. The moment I had almost their agreement, I left."[142]

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[139] "Mia mamma sta aspettando che ci sposiamo perchè naturalmente ha una certa mentalità. Non è d'accordissimo con la convivenza, anche se capisce benissimo anche lei che è un momento e un passaggio obbligatorio perché il matrimonio richiedeva molto più tempo insomma. Però naturalmente quello che mi dice lei è "allora, questo matrimonio insomma?' tutte le volte che la vedo."

[140] " … poi il fatto che intorno ci fosse una positività un'accettazione, anzi il soddisfare il desiderio dei miei genitori e dei miei parenti ci ha fatto stare meglio, ma noi l'abbiamo presa a prescindere questa decisione (…) e poi perché i miei genitori credevano fermamente in questa cosa e quindi ho voluto assecondare anche il loro desiderio."

[141] "Per accontentare i miei genitori, perché mio padre e mia madre appunto ci tengono e vorrebbero vedermi sposare in Chiesa e quindi forse più per accontentare loro o per tradizione."

[142] " … e una mattina che sono rientrata mia mamma mi ha detto: "Ma perché non vai a vivere con lui?' e io ho approfittato, ho preso la palla al balzo e sono andata. Sentivo come un grosso impedimento quello che potevano pensare i miei genitori, sapevo che erano contrari e non volevo dargli questo dispiacere. Dal momento che ho avuto quasi un benestare da parte loro sono andata."

Parental approval was crucial for Patrizia's decision to leave home and to move into her partner's flat. Furthermore, she emphasized that previously she had set that choice aside since she did not want to hurt her parents' feelings:

"… I did not want to make them sad and I didn't feel like breaking up completely. With their agreement I felt calmer and I could do it."[143]

Again, we found that most interviewees approached their mothers when it came to informal union formation. Most women reported that they had rather intensive relationships with their families. Some interviewees visited their families and home villages every two to three weeks. Sometimes this behavior was driven by the desire to see their family; in other cases it was caused by parental need for support and care. Several quotes demonstrate the high importance family had in Cagliari. The family was seen as pivot for the most important decisions in life, among them the decision to leave home and the choice of when and how to enter a couple relationship. It is not surprising that adult children faced difficulties in announcing their intention to enter an informal union.

As for economic support, most interviewees had been supported already prior to the time of entering cohabitation. It is striking that the male partner's family usually contributed to the purchase of a flat, whereas the woman's family tended to pay for the furniture. Although support was generally given at the beginning of cohabitation, it was often aimed at the couple's future. Even though there was no promise to marry, parents seemed to invest their money with the prospect of a future wedding – as shown for instance in the statement by Patrizia's father. Disappointed about the fact that his daughter was still not married, he said, "If I would have known, I wouldn't have done it." [144] Other parents announced support for a marriage, e.g. for the wedding party. Viviana (36) for instance, reported:

'Look, from my parents' side, I can tell you for sure yes, because they already told me that they set money aside and that it's for the wedding. Actually, my mother told me: 'Don't come and tell me that you are not getting married and then ask me for this money. This money is for the wedding. So, if you don't marry, don't ask me for it, I will not have it.'"[145]

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[143] " … io non volevo dare a loro un dispiacere e non me la sentivo di tagliare completamente. Con il loro benestare mi sono sentita più tranquilla e l'ho fatto."

[144] "Se l'avessi saputo non l'avrei fatto."

[145] "Guarda posso dirti con certezza da parte dei miei genitori si perché mi hanno già detto che i soldi sono messi da parte e sono per il matrimonio. Anzi mia madre mi ha anche detto: "non venirmi a dire che non ti sposi e poi magari mi chiedi anche quei soldi, quei soldi sono del matrimonio. Quindi se non ti sposi non chiedermeli, non li avrai'."

To conclude, women in this group tended to postpone marriage until they reached a certain degree of economic stability. Parents generally were not satisfied at all with that situation, but since they knew about the precarious economic situation of their adult children, they more or less accepted that choice. We assume that very strong ties with family led to the wish to comply finally with parents. Additionally, we found that several parents invested high amounts of money for furniture or housing previous to the young couple's marriage. In view of this investment, adult children might have felt obliged to take the step their parents expected them to make. Moreover, parents often provided money toward the wedding party.

9.2.2.2 Standing Up to Parents

This mid-sized group consisted of women who perceived cohabitation as an important and rather long-lasting passage or as alternative to marriage. Three women had already given birth to a child. Frequently, these women had moved to Cagliari to study or find a job. They grew up in rather small villages on the island of Sardinia. These women experienced strongly negative reactions from family when entering an informal union or even when announcing the intention to cohabit. Some interviewees were afraid to tell their parents about their informal union. Tiziana (40), for example, told her family only after several months that she had moved in with her partner. Although all the women had expected strong reactions, they still decided for cohabitation. They had low motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In fact, all the women in this group had stood up to their parents as far as cohabitation was concerned. Whereas some parents became resigned to it after several years, others did not easily come to terms with their daughter's choice. By far the most resistance was encountered by Fabiola (44). When she left home for cohabitation her mother seriously rebelled against that choice. In the end, the relation between daughter and mother started to shut down completely and the whole family suffered in that situation:

"I had problems with my mother, who did not accept that I started living with a man. Thus, for several years the relation with my mother was non-existent (…) For my mother it was important that I "would leave home in my wedding gown,' but this had no importance for me (…) In fact, the first time I lived with someone, the

whole family suffered from the problems I had with my mother, because I wasn't there at lunches, at festivities, at Christmas."[146]

It seems that for Fabiola's mother it was more important to enforce the commonly accepted way to leave home – namely via marriage (which was contrary to Fabiola's intentions) – than to keep a good relationship with her own daughter. Also when she lost contact with Fabiola, the mother did not reconsider her attitude. Obviously, marriage was so important for Fabiola's mother that she was willing to risk the consequences of her rigid action. It is striking that Fabiola, as well as other interviewees, characterized their mothers as *severe*, *dominant*, or *rigid*. Among this group, it was especially the mothers who had problems accepting their daughter's choice for cohabitation. Generally they never thought of the possibility that their daughter might leave home before marriage. Often they were disappointed and frightened and tried to convince their daughters to rethink their decisions. These mothers asked their daughters to "regularize" their union and finish with this phase of "uncertainty." Though fathers often held the same position as their wives toward cohabitation, they frequently reacted in another way. In Fabiola's case, it was actually the father who took the initiative and convinced his wife step-by-step to rebuild relations with their daughter. After three to four years, the relationship started to improve. Some interviewees emphasized that their father had finally become aware that his daughter had reached an age where she was able to decide on her own which path to take. Although often finding themselves opposed to the decision, fathers conceded to allow the daughters to learn from the experience. However, when doing so, they made the point that in the end their daughter would have to answer for her own mistakes:

"He told me "In principle you're an adult person,' (at that time I was 32) and "you're grown-up, so if necessary you'll need to pay for your choices'."[147]

In contrast to mothers, fathers were often perceived and described as *affectionate* and *respectful* toward the daughter's decisions. It is remarkable that despite these differences, interviewees mainly confided in their mothers when choosing to live in an informal union. However, this behavior seems to be part of the Sardinian family tradition: In Sardinia, mothers always used to have a high decision-making autonomy (Oppo 1991, 1992). Among

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[146] "Ho avuto dei problemi con mia madre che non ha accettato che io andassi a vivere con un uomo, quindi per parecchi anni i rapporti con mia madre azzerati (…) Per mia madre era importante che io saltassi la porta vestita da sposa, mentre per me non aveva nessuna importanza (…) infatti quando c'è stata la mia prima convivenza e quindi problemi con mia madre ne ha risentito tutta la famiglia di tutto questo perché allora io ero quella che mancava ai pranzi, quella che mancava alle feste, quella che mancava il giorno di Natale."

[147] "Mi ha detto "Infondo tu sei una persona adulta', all'epoca avevo 32 anni e "sei grande, eventualmente sarai anche disposta a pagare per le tue scelte'."

this group (but also among the whole Cagliari sample), women rarely addressed their father directly. Fabiola, actually, believed in a relation between parental attitudes and their personal experiences of life:

"He was an artist, so he was very open, whereas my mother was a housewife. She stayed at home, took care of the children, and had no opportunity to open up mentally. She visited the nuns, who were almost the same. They were actually a pillar for this mentality. Thus, my father had his experiences outside home and managed to accept – very respectfully – the decisions his children took: 'Anything that's OK for you is OK for me too. The important thing is that you are fine.' And my mother, on the other hand, was like: 'No, I want my daughter to do this and if not, I will have nothing to do with her.'"[148]

The commonly negative attitude of parents toward modern living arrangements such as cohabitation seems to be connected to their relative isolation from societal innovations. Most of them lived in smaller villages; they generally had low or middle levels of education, and mothers tended to be housewives. Moreover, religious traditions and canons were important for them. The higher acceptance of informal unions among fathers might be explained partially by their higher level exchange of information and attitudes at work. As for this rather closed mentality, it is not surprising that some parents opted to hide the informal union of their daughter from the entire family. Interviewees, for instance, reported that none of the family members – apart from parents – knew that she cohabited.

It is striking that almost none of these women were in the habit of relying on their parents when they had problems or had to make important decisions. Generally they had weak ties to their parents and other family members.

As for economic and non-economic support, we observed that most women were already financially independent when deciding for cohabitation. These women were not financially supported when entering their informal union. Whereas parents of the "stringing parents along" group offered support for housing and furniture, these parents did not. Some of the interviewees pointed out that since there was no approval of cohabitation, there was no help for making it happen:

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[148] "Lui era artista quindi era molto aperto, mentre mia madre era casalinga, stava a casa, badava alle figlie e non aveva possibilità di aprirsi mentalmente. Frequentava le sorelle che comunque erano uguali. Erano proprio di sostegno in questa mentalità, quindi mio padre aveva la sua esperienza anche fuori di casa e riusciva ad accettare, molto rispettoso delle decisioni che prendevamo noi figli "tutto quello che per te va bene, va bene anche a me. L'importante è che tu stia bene'. E mia madre invece era "no, quello voglio da mia figlia altrimenti non c'è nessun rapporto con mia figlia'."

"I bought everything, for instance, the pots and all things of that kind. I bought everything. Because, not agreeing completely [with cohabitation], there was no such help."[149]

In short, women in the "standing up to parents" group perceived their union as passage or alternative to marriage. Although their parents opposed cohabitation, they stood up against their reactions. Whereas some parents tended to oppose very strongly, others became resigned after some years and accepted their daughter's choice. Thus, in the end, the daughters asserted themselves. All the women showed low motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. This, in turn, seems to have been caused by very weak ties to parents and other family members. Additionally, parents refused any economic support for housing or furniture. However, as the women themselves were economically independent, they did not have to rely on that support.

9.2.2.3 Agreeing with Mothers

Only a few women in the Cagliari sample could be assigned to the "agreeing with mothers" group. These women were characterized by regarding cohabitation as alternative to marriage. In particular, their mothers tended to have rather modern values and attitudes. Thus, they supported their daughters when entering cohabitation. Most of the interviewees came from Cagliari, and their parents represented all strata of education, although some mothers had higher levels of education than their husbands. Moreover, most mothers worked; only a few were housewives. This group was mainly distinguished by the transmission of values of independence by mothers. Valentina (52 years old and married), for instance, admired her mother for always having an opinion of her own – sometimes even opposing her husband – although she had always been a housewife and therefore dependent on him. Valentina described her mother as follows:

"She's a very liberal woman, although she grew up with a certain kind of education, she has always been … my mother is one of there maybe few persons at her age who – for personal conviction – was in favor of abortion. Although believing and being a person with a certain culture, she has been a person who has always made choices. It's not by accident that I have certain convictions. I believe that the maternal education has a lot of influence. My mother is 85 years old and she's one person at her age who had a liberal mind and who proved that, although she's a person who was a housewife throughout her life … she's a woman with lots of capacity and a lot of intelligence, maybe one of the few … that I got to know. And I mean, it's relatively easy to demonstrate certain ideas when you have a profession, when you are independent, when you have already

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[149] "Ho comprato tutto io, tipo le pentole e tutte queste cose qua. Ho comprato tutto io. No, perché comunque non essendo completamente d'accordo non c'è stato questo aiuto."

attained something in your life (…) to have determined convictions, and also to go against those convictions of the husband wasn't easy."[150]

Her father, on the other hand, she described as rather religious. Despite his different moral concepts, he never interfered with his daughter's decisions. Even today, Valentina is still wondering why he never tried to influence her. In the end, he always respected her choices. Similar experiences were related by Sabina (52). When entering cohabitation with a man who had separated and had a little child, her family accepted the decision right away. Sabina underlined that her family always respected her choices too. Her mother, in particular, conveyed independence to her daughter:

"I don't like a person on whom I have to be dependent. I like to have my independence – that's always been my desire. As a teenager even, I studied to have a job in order to maintain myself. I don't want anybody to take care of me in that respect. It's the education I got at home. My mother worked and still works – it's something I saw already when I was a small child and so I wasn't looking for a man who went out to work to make ten thousand things with me at home bringing up the children and cleaning the house. That's not my desire and it has never been."[151]

Since her father came from an older generation, he had certain difficulties understanding his daughter's choices. However, Sabina's mother mediated between daughter and father:

"I didn't have problems, as my mother realized that I was determined and she never made a fuss about my choices. My father was much older, imagine, he was born in 1918, so he's a gentleman of another generation. But my mother managed to explain to him that it was my choice and then my choice was respected."[152]

Alice (31) could rely on maternal support too when it came to cohabitation. When Alice announced her plan to enter cohabitation, her father protested strongly. This was

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[150] "E' una donna molto libera, nonostante sia cresciuta in un'educazione di un certo tipo, è sempre stata…mia madre è una delle forse pochissime persone alla sua età che aveva votato per l'aborto per convinzione sua personale. Pur credendo ed essendo una persona con una certa cultura, è stata una persona che ha sempre scelto. Non a caso io ho certe convinzioni. L'educazione da parte materna credo che influenzi molto. Mia madre ha 85 ed è una delle persone che alla sua età aveva una testa libera e lo ha dimostrato, nonostante poi sia una persona che ha fatto la casalinga tutta la vita… è una donna di grandissime capacità e grande intelligenza, forse una delle più…che io ho conosciuto. Poi voglio dire è relativamente facile dimostrare certe idee quando si ha una professione, quando si è indipendenti, quando si ha ritagliato un pezzo nella vita (…) avere determinate convinzioni e andare contro anche quelle del marito non era una cosa semplicissima."

[151] "A me non piace una persona dalla quale io devo dipendere, mi piace la mia indipendenza, è sempre stato il mio desiderio, fin da ragazza ho studiato per avere un lavoro in modo tale da potermi mantenere da sola, non voglio che nessuno si prenda cura di me da questo punto di vista, è l'educazione che ho ricevuto da casa, mia madre lavorava e lavora ancora, è una cosa che ho sentito fin da piccola e quindi non cercavo l'uomo che andasse a lavorare a fare dieci mila lavori ed io a casa ad allevare i figli e sistemare la casa, non è un mio desiderio non lo è mai stato."

[152] "Non ho avuto problemi, mia mamma aveva capito che io ero determinata e quindi lei non mi ha mai fatto storie per le mie scelte; mio padre che era molto più anziano, figurati che lui è nato nel 1918, quindi un signore di un'altra generazione, ma mia madre è riuscita a fargli capire che era una mia scelta e andava rispettata."

particularly delicate as Alice partly depended economically on her parents. Her father threatened her with cutting all economic support and argued that at the moment she started living with her partner, she should be economically independent. In the end, Alice's mother stepped in and convinced her husband to accept their daughter's choice. He even agreed to continue to support his daughter if necessary. The behavior of Alice's mother is quite interesting as it contradicts the way other mothers in this group behaved: She not only defended her daughter when negotiating with her husband; she actually suggested that her daughter enter a pre-marital cohabitation before deciding to marry:

"Yes, I first talked to my mother, because she's a much more open person. My mother has fewer, let's say, social prejudices. She is more understanding. I first talked to her about it, I told her the situation, and she absolutely agrees with me – better than that, I have to be honest, my mother actually advised me to live with someone before I get married. She told me: 'My daughter, it is not necessary that you marry' – almost preventing me from that. I don't know whether this is because of personal experiences or not, but let's say, she's more content that I start cohabiting."[153]

Alice underlined that her mother had an open mind and was rather tolerant. It is noteworthy that despite being a housewife, she had a higher level of education than her husband. We suppose that her high level of education is one piece of the puzzle that contributed to her open mentality.

Among this group, the mothers of our interviewees had a decisive role: They educated their daughters toward independence and autonomy. Several mothers exemplified this autonomy to their daughters throughout their own life by being employed and hence economically independent. Especially Valentina pointed to the relationship between being employed and representing your own convictions even when they are in contrast to what others believe. Additionally, these mothers supported their daughters emotionally when they decided for an unconventional way of living – also against the father's convictions. In general, women in this group were always supported by their families when there was a need. This applied to both economic and emotional support.

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[153] "Si, ho parlato prima con mia madre perché è una persona molto più aperta, ha meno come dire pregiudizi sociali mia madre. E' più comprensiva. Ne ho parlato prima con lei, le ho raccontato la situazione lei assolutamente d'accordo con me, anzi devo essere sincera che mia madre mi ha proprio consigliato la convivenza prima del matrimonio. Mi ha detto: "Figlia mia non è necessario che ti sposi', quasi prevenuta. Non so se sia per esperienza personale o meno, però lei diciamo che è più contenta se io vado a convivere."

9.2.2.4 Conclusion: Parental Influence in Cagliari

Women in the Cagliari sample used different strategies when entering cohabitation. Women in both the "stringing parents along" and "standing up to parents" groups encountered parental resistance when choosing to live in an informal union. However, both groups of interviewees handled the situation in a different way. Women in the first group chose cohabitation as a pre-marital step. But since their insecure economic situation did not allow for marriage, they postponed the wedding – in some cases for several years. During that time, women "strung parents along." In the end, however, they complied with the wishes of their parents. Among the second group, women chose cohabitation as a long-lasting passage or alternative to marriage. These women were not afraid to struggle with their parents and stood up to them when they rebelled against cohabitation. We assume that the strong protest of parents might also be rooted in the fact that their daughters did not intend to marry (at all or within the next couple of months) when they entered cohabitation. Perhaps parents would have accepted this choice more easily if the union had been aimed at marriage. As regards the third group, we saw that women encountered maternal support when deciding for an informal union. The fathers, on the other hand, opposed cohabitation more or less strongly. Here mothers had a decisive role – not only when transmitting modern values to their daughters, but also as negotiator between daughter and father.

Again, the three factors *parental attitude*s, *strength of family tie*s and *economic and non-economic support* were found to influence the transition to cohabitation (and subsequent marriage) to a strong extent:

As to *traditional vs. innovative attitudes among parents* we identified those parents having a medium or low level of education to oppose strongest. This was true especially for parents of the "stringing parents along" and "standing up to parents" group. Most mothers of these groups were housewives and especially those parents, who had most problems accepting cohabitation, came from small villages throughout the island. On the other side, we observed that parents of the last group accepted cohabitation more easily. These parents tended to show a higher level of post-secondary education, mothers were often employed and families came mostly from Cagliari. It seems actually that parental

characteristics such as education, employment and area of residence influence to a high extent attitudes toward cohabitation.

Secondly, as regards *family relations* we found the following: Among the first group most women reported that their families were very important for them. Several women visited their parents regularly and supported them when needed. Although postponing marriage in opposition to parental desires, women tried to *keep on good terms* with their families. Some women even set aside their decision to enter cohabitation until their parents proposed that step. Thus, parental approval was highly relevant for them. Women in the second group, on the other hand, reported *weak family relations*. For these women, parental opinions were less important. *Strong family ties* were also found among the third group of interviewees described here. Among these women, mothers and daughters had no conflicts and regularly supported each other, including emotionally support.

Last but not least, as to *economic help*, we found that women who stood up to parents were generally economically independent when starting cohabitation. Some had to rely on their partner's income and some needed additional support by parents. In general, parents refused to support the purchase of furniture or housing when the daughter started cohabitation. Among the "stringing parents along" group, in contrast, parents were already supporting their daughters when the later chose cohabitation. However, their help was aimed at marriage, although couples did not always declare their intention to marry soon or even at all. Here, the woman's family tended to provide support for buying furniture, whereas the male's family contributed to housing costs, such as prepayments. Only parents of the last group provided general support without any conditions or expectations regarding the daughter's future living arrangements. Parents helped, for instance, to purchase a flat, although the daughter wanted to live on her own.

9.2.3 Comparing Parental Influence in Bologna and Cagliari

When analyzing the influence of parents on cohabitation in Italy, in both Bologna and Cagliari three factors were highly interwoven with the choice for this modern kind of living arrangement: *parental attitudes toward cohabitation*, *the strength of family ties*, and *economic and non-economic support*.

As regards *parental attitudes*, we found evidence among both samples that the same factors seemed to shape parents' opinions toward cohabitation. Daughters with lower educated parents, including mothers who were housewives and/or had come from rural areas, experienced the strongest parental protest when they entered an informal union. In contrast, interviewees who grew up in the cities of Bologna or Cagliari, women with more highly educated parents, and those with employed mothers faced much fewer (if any) parental difficulties. Moreover, especially for Bologna, we found that women whose mothers had experienced living arrangements other than the traditional were encouraged by their mothers to enter an informal union. These findings are in line with studies that found evidence for the impact of parental education (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina 2007) and living arrangements of the family of origin (Domínguez et al. 2007) on cohabitation in Italy.

As to *family ties*, we observed that the more important the family was for the respondents, the more they accommodated the views and attitudes of their parents. At a certain point, women in both the Bologna "settling the conflict" group and in the Cagliari "stringing parents along" group accommodated their parents' desire for them to be married – these women had strong ties to their families. On the contrary, women in the Bologna "ignoring the conflict" group and women in the Cagliari "standing up to parents" group did not meet their family's expectations – these women had weak relations to their families. It is likely that family was much less important for these women and that they relied on their own attitudes and desires when making choices.

Among both samples, mothers had a decisive role when it came to informal union formation as daughters were used to approaching their mothers when taking important decisions. Mothers who opposed cohabitation tended to discourage their daughters from cohabitation. These mothers tried to convince their adult children to enter marriage as soon as possible. Mothers with positive evaluations of cohabitation, on the other hand, agreed to entry into informal union – some even encouraged their daughters to brave this step. This mechanism seemed to be stronger in Cagliari than in Bologna. In cases where mothers opposed cohabitation and fathers agreed, daughters faced much more difficulty when choosing cohabitation, whereas in cases where mothers agreed and fathers opposed, mothers generally convinced their husbands to accept cohabitation. The strong power of mothers in Sardinia might be explained by the traditionally higher decision-making

autonomy of wives (Oppo 1991, 1992). Bernardi and Oppo (2008) found that in Sardinia "strong ties among kin-related women still represent the principal resources for material and psychological support in daily and occasional circumstances" (Bernardi and Oppo 2008: 197). As a result, mothers and female maternal kin would play a decisive role for the socialization of young women, also with regard to attitudes toward work and family. Research from other geographical areas provides evidence of a strong mother–daughter bond. Studies from the United States, for instance, found that after they leave their parental home, daughters have more intensive relationships with their mothers than do sons (Greene and Boxer 1986). Furthermore, it has been found that mothers' preferences and attitudes have a strong influence on daughters' family formation process, e.g. timing of first birth and number of children – independently of the adult child's own preferences (Barber 2000; Barber and Axinn 1998; Axinn et al. 1994). Axinn and Thornton (1993) assume that daughters are more inclined than sons to see their mothers as role models, and thus behave in accordance with their mothers' opinion.

However, not all of our interviewees held the same attitudes and values as their parents did. In several cases, they nevertheless accommodated toward their parents' wishes for marriage. The question that inevitably emerges is: Why was that the case? Our interviews provide evidence that parents were inclined to influence their adult children's behavior by using techniques of social control – whether they did it intentionally or not.

In this respect, we found that *future economic and non-economic factors* played a stronger role in Bologna, whereas *past and current financial support* was more important in Cagliari. It seems that women in Bologna who finally accommodated their parent's expectations to marry were well aware of the support parents would give after marriage (such as the prepayment of housing property or money for furniture). Additionally, these women knew that they had to rely on non-economic support when giving birth to a child. Bernardi et al. (2007) found that women in Bologna usually combined family and work, whereas in Cagliari women instead would leave the labor market when giving birth to their first child. These findings explain why women in Cagliari referred much less to the importance of parental support for childcare. As regards Cagliari, past and current economic support (even before marriage) played a stronger role. In general, external factors such as housing and the employment situation had a stronger impact on young adults than was the case in Bologna. The lack of adequate and affordable housing as well as lack of job opportunities

strengthened the importance of the family as provider of social security. As a consequence, young adults in Cagliari faced stronger barriers when leaving the parental home.

Leaving home is the first big step to take when intending to live in an informal union. It is not surprising then, that most Cagliari couples had very long-lasting relationships before they entered cohabitation, whereas this was not the case in Bologna. Additionally, parents who might expect their daughters to marry later on tended to support them economically for housing and furniture. We assume that daughters responded to these pre-marital investments in that they complied with parental expectations. In fact, Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) found that, when defining intergenerational relations, not only the *actual* exchange of goods is of importance but also the *potential* of future support. These authors use the term "latent solidarity" to indicate that members of relationships with high levels of affinity hold also a potential for future exchange – even if currently there is no such support. Another factor that might promote entry into marriage is whether parents have the economic opportunity and willingness to finance the wedding of their adult children. Indeed, Barbagli et al. (2003) showed that even nowadays parents generally tend to pay for the wedding menu. Axinn and Barber (1998) supposed that parents, who have certain preferences e.g. many grandchildren, use their money to facilitate their children's marriage. As regards our interviewees, most couples were supported economically when entering marriage. Parents often paid for the wedding dress, the meals for the guests, and the *bomboniere* (small gifts the couple usually give to all the guests as souvenirs).

9.3 The Influence of Friends on Cohabitation and Union Formation

Besides parents and family members, friends and acquaintances usually rank among the most important persons in one's life. In this section, we concentrate on the common ground as well as the differences in living arrangements among interviewees and their friends. We focus moreover on the mutual influence between interviewees and friends when it comes to union formation. We investigate the extent to which young adults exchange the ideas they have on union formation and how they react on a friend's entry into cohabitation and marriage. Whereas, we previously examined the influence of the parents' generation on cohabitation, here we want to answer the question, How far is cohabitation influenced by friends from the same generation?

9.3.1 Bologna: Prevalence of a Positive Evaluation

The qualitative data show that a large number of interviewees in Bologna tended to choose living arrangements that were similar to those of their friends. Interviewees can be assigned to distinct groups, whereby women within any group act in relative accordance with their friends and acquaintances. In this case, one group (i) consisted of women who were (going to be) married and who had a circle of friends who also experienced marriage after cohabitation. In another group (ii), we found cohabiting women with mainly cohabiting friends; this set of interviewees had a lower aspiration toward marriage than the previous group, but they wanted to marry sometime in the future. A third group (iii) comprised women who decided for cohabitation basically as alternative to marriage; these women tended to have friends who were single, cohabiting, married, separated or divorced. Both the interviewees themselves as well as their friends showed rather modern attitudes toward family formation.

Among all three groups we found a high degree of homogeneity as far as type of union formation is concerned. Thus, women acted more of less in accordance with the social environment of friends that surrounded them. As a consequence, these interviewees experienced agreement with the social setting of their age. Interviewees of all three sets mentioned that friends evaluated cohabitation as a "normal" choice. Interestingly, only one woman interviewed talked about female friends who married right away, without experiencing an informal union beforehand; these friends did not criticize cohabitation. Yet a fourth group of women (iv), in contrast to the previous groups, did not act in a way that was consistent with friends' behavior; in this group we found women who decided to cohabit with or without subsequent marriage, and their friends were mainly single. Claudia, aged 28 and cohabiting, said this about her friends:

"I have to be honest – most of them are single or engaged but they don't … they don't live together. Most of them are single, to be honest, especially the women, yes … almost all of my female friends are single."[154]

These interviewees were the first in their circle of friends who entered cohabitation (and marriage). Most interviewees perceived that their friends looked at cohabitation in a

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[154] "Sono più single devo dire la verità o sono fidanzati ma non … non convivono. La maggior parte sono single sinceramente soprattutto le donne, si … le mie amiche donne sono quasi tutte single."

positive way. Claudia talked about the affirmative reaction her friends showed when she and her partner decided for an informal union:

"Almost all of my female friends are very fond of Giulio and they think we make a nice couple, so basically they were happy and they think that it's the right thing to do. And they think that we get on well and you can see that we get on well, and of course also the others see it as though it should continue as living together is forever."[155]

Other women emphasized that friends criticized their entry into cohabitation. Lisa (21) referred to some of her male friends who perceived her decision as a very serious matter, most probably due to her young age:

"My female friends are happy. My male friends a bit less so (…) they said to me "Don't you think it's a rather big decision?"."[156]

Carlotta (26) reported that she concealed cohabitation from her best friends. As these friends usually did not like her partners, she wanted to avoid further discussions:

"Almost all of my female friends, especially my closest female friends, never like my partners so … a lot of them don't know, I've kept it relatively secret, also because I am a bit fed up with all of the gossip. At the end of the day, Bologna is small and I got fed up with it. I want to be left in peace, … to live my life and make my own mistakes if have to, but I don't want to be judged constantly."[157]

In both cases, it seems that the negative evaluation of cohabitation is not primarily caused by the kind of living arrangement per se, but rather by the circumstances – in Lisa's case her rather young age and in Carlotta's her actual choice of partner. However, in the majority of cases, interviewees perceived their friends to see cohabitation in a positive way.

Matilda (35), married and mother of two children, entered marriage at age 30. Among her circle of friends, she too was a precursor; she was the first who decided to marry, while her friends were still cohabiting. When she took the brave step into marriage, some of her friends criticized her choice:

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[155] "Loro sono molto affezionate a Giulio quasi tutte le mie amiche e pensano che facciamo una bella coppia e quindi sono stati fondamentalmente contenti e pensano che sia una cosa giusta, che stiamo molto bene e si vede che stiamo bene e ovviamente anche gli altri vivono questa cosa come se dovessero continuare e la convivenza è sempre."

[156] "Mie amiche sono contente. I miei amici un po' meno (…) mi hanno detto "Ma non ti sembra una scelta pesante?"."

[157] "A quasi tutte le mie amiche non piacciono mai, soprattutto alle mie migliori amiche non piacciono mai i partner e quindi … molte non lo sanno, ho tenuto abbastanza nascosta questa cosa perché mi sono anche un po' stancata di tutte le voci che circolano, alla fine Bologna è piccola e mi sono stancata. Voglio essere lasciata un po' in pace, tranquilla … vivere la mia vita, di sbagliare se devo sbagliare, ma non ho voglia del giudizio costante delle persone."

"Then I saw that a lot of people maybe who criticized me in the beginning, in the end … are now getting married themselves, and perhaps they only said it because they hadn't met the right person."[158]

Benedetta (34), on the other hand, was surrounded by couples who married after a previous cohabitation. She and her partner had not yet entered a formal union and felt the pressure to do so. The continuing inquiries of her friends induced her to deal with this issue:

"Most of our friends are all starting to get married now – those who already lived together. Because we have several friends who lived together and then got married and this sort of, let's say, leads to (…) [They say] "What are you waiting for to get married?" {smiles} and so I felt a bit pressured too, and this actually made me think more about getting married and that it is necessary to get married because it is, well…, a legal issue. And then you also think about the commitment, the commitment you are making … although, even when you live together, you are nonetheless also making a commitment."[159]

In both cases, women were criticized by friends, regardless of whether they were precursors of marriage or latecomers.

Interviewees in Bologna tended to be geared to their circle of friends when considering union formation choices. Yet, interviewees also tried to influence their friends as they made the transition to union formation. Elena (28), for instance, said she had suggested to her best friend that she should leave home and start cohabiting. Soon after, her friend actually chose an informal union:

"My best friend has lived on her own … or rather with her partner for a year, a year and a half. But I put a lot of pressure on her to do it, because in my opinion she also needed to distance herself from her family. So I told her to take this step."[160]

Later on, when Elena got to know that one of her friends intended to marry without having ever cohabited, she tried to persuade him to cohabit beforehand. She argued that one needed to put it to the test before taking such an important step as marriage:

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[158] "Poi ho visto che tante persone che magari mi criticavano prima alla fine … adesso si stanno sposando e forse lo dicevano solo perché non avevano incontrato la persona giusta."

[159] "Gli amici cominciano tutti un po' a sposarsi quelli che convivono già perché abbiam diversi amici che hanno convissuto e poi si son sposati e questo diciamo un po' porta (…) [Dicono] "Cosa aspettate a sposarvi?' {sorride} e allora mi sono sentita anche un po' sotto pressione e infatti questa cosa qui mi ha spinto a riflettere di più sulla decisione del matrimonio e a pensare che bisogna sposarsi perché comunque è una questione diciamo legale …. ecco. E poi si riflette anche sull'impegno, l'impegno che si prende … anche se anche con la convivenza l'impegno si prende in tutti i modi."

[160] "La mia migliore amica vive da sola da … cioè con il suo compagno da un anno, un anno e mezzo. Però io ho insistito molto perché lei lo facesse, perché lei secondo me poi aveva anche bisogno di distaccarsi dalla sua famiglia allora io glielo dicevo di fare questo passo."

"For example, I have a friend who is getting married now and I am his witness. He has been with this girl for ten years, but they have never lived together and I think it is a big mistake, and I told him so … because I think that being together is one thing and living together is another, and making such an important decision, such as marriage, in my opinion, presumes that you have already taken this test, that is, living together and knowing how things work, because I think it's very different from actually just dating each other."[161]

To conclude, the majority of interviewees was surrounded by coeval friends who behaved in the same way as far as union formation is concerned. As a consequence, women perceived their friends to see cohabitation in a positive way. A few women, however, were precursors when entering an informal union; their circle of friends was mostly single individuals. Again, nearly everyone experienced encouraging reactions. Only two women were criticized by their friends – this criticism, though, seemed to be caused by the circumstances of entering the non-marital union. We also found evidence that cohabiting women tried to influence their friends as they decided for union formation; they advised their friends to test their union before actually getting married.

9.3.2 Cagliari: Between Acceptance, Skeptical Criticism and Envy

In Cagliari we found less distinct relations between living arrangements of interviewees and those of their circle of friends than was the case in Bologna. Cohabiting women did not necessarily have friends who passed through the same stages such as cohabitation (and subsequent marriage). However, quite a few interviewees perceived their friends as appreciative of informal union formation. Friends' reactions were described as "contented and happy." Viviana (36), who had been cohabiting for about a year, stated that all of her friends had similar attitudes to hers toward non-marital unions. She was quite sure that they would have behaved in the same way if they had had the opportunities. Yet, parental influence and the lack of secure employment positions induced them to decide against cohabitation:

"Well, they more or less think like we do. A lot of our friends are in the same situation or have found themselves in the same situation. They have been together for a while, but neither of them has a stable job so it is frustrating – they would like to settle down but they can't. Then, when they settle down, some get

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[161] "Ho per esempio un amico adesso che si sposa e io sono la sua testimone di nozze e lui sta insieme a questa ragazza da dieci anni, ma non hanno mai vissuto insieme e per me è un grande errore, io gliel'ho detto … perché credo che comunque stare insieme sia una cosa e vivere insieme un'altra e fare un passo importante come il matrimonio secondo me presuppone che tu abbia già fatto questo test, cioè di vivere insieme e sapere come funzionano le cose perché è molto diverso secondo me rispetto a frequentarsi."

married straightaway because their parents are more…let's say, extremist from this point of view, so they get married straightaway to avoid having a fuss about it ."[162]

The friends and acquaintances of Gabriella (38) reacted in an affirmative way, too. They complimented Gabriella and her partner for having a "trial" prior to the wedding. The couple, however, perceived their union in a different way. In their view, cohabitation was already a serious step and not just a trial:

"Because since we had been together for something like six years, they said to us: 'Oh well, you are doing the right thing because it might be of some use to you before getting married.' They said we were doing the right thing because it was necessary to take this test, but no, it's not like that. It is as if he were my husband for me, it's not a test to see whether we get on or not, whether we argue (…) and we say this to everyone who asks us this question: 'It's not a test, it's actually starting something serious.'"[163]

Other interviewees also reported positive reactions of friends. However, at a certain point in time, the same friends started to dig deeper, pushing for a wedding and challenging the couple's reasons against it. Nonetheless, in Cagliari also we identified a group of interviewees who had friends living in different living arrangements such as a single, cohabitation, marriage, or divorce. Among these circles of friends, cohabitation was seen as a normal behavior and the women were not criticized in any way:

"So, no, there were no reactions or people asking us why we weren't getting married. Also because, as I told you, our friends are people who … well, some are married, some are separated, and some live together. Basically they are very different and nobody worries about it or asks us about it."[164]

"In any case, we are surrounded by people who have the same lifestyle as us (…) There is not even any criticism for certain choices. They have known us for many years and they know what we are like, how we live and how we see things."[165]

Other interviewees passed through the different stages of family formation simultaneously with their friends. Nadia (40), for instance, entered marriage and parenthood rather late.

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[162] "Mah più o meno la pensano come noi. Abbiamo molti amici che si trovano nella stessa situazione o che si sono trovati comunque. Stanno insieme da un po' però nessuno dei due ha un lavoro fisso perciò è una frustrazione, vorrebbero sistemarsi ma non possono. Poi una volta che si sono sistemati qualcuno passa direttamente al matrimonio perché i genitori sono più…diciamo integralisti da questo punto di vista per cui per non avere storie passano subito al matrimonio."

[163] "Perché siccome siamo fidanzati da un po' tipo sei anni, ci dicevano: "Eh beh fate bene perché prima di affrontare il matrimonio vi può servire', ci davano ragione perché bisogna fare una prova e invece no, non è così. Per me è come se fosse mio marito, non è una prova per vedere se andiamo d'accordo, se litighiamo (…) e lo diciamo a tutte le persone che ci fanno questa domanda non è una prova, è proprio incominciare a fare una cosa seria."

[164] "Quindi non ci sono state reazioni o qualcuno che ci chiedeva come mai non vi sposate, no. Anche perché, come ti dicevo, frequentiamo persone che … insomma chi è sposato, chi è separato, chi convive. Insomma sono molto varie e nessuno si pone il problema o ci chiede."

[165] "Siamo circondati da persona che comunque hanno lo stesso modo di vivere nostro (…) Non esiste neanche la forma critica nei confronti di determinate scelte. Ci conoscono da tanti anni e si sa come siamo fatti, come viviamo, come vediamo le cose."

She was in her late thirties when she took these brave steps. Most of her friends behaved in the same way:

"More or less all of my friends got married at the same time as me. We all went through the same phases. We all got pregnant at the same time, as though we had planned it."[166]

Given the fact, that generally few friends had experienced an informal union themselves, interviewees were often precursors with regard to entry into cohabitation. In some cases, friends appreciated the idea of cohabitation so much that they followed this trail themselves. Chiara (39) reported that one of her friends admired the couple's courageous decision for cohabitation. Later she entered cohabitation herself:

"Maria moved in to Alberto's house after we had moved here! In the beginning, we spoke to her about it, and she said to me: "You were, I'm not saying brave, but you have taken a big step!" she saw us as doing something quite brave, do you see what I mean? And then she did the same thing too {laughs}."[167]

Other women said the same:

"They sort of copied me, because in a way I was the first, I was the youngest, 22 years old, they did it afterwards."[168]

Besides acceptance and imitation, several women encountered skepticism when they chose to move in with their partner. Katia (27), for instance, was confronted by her coeval friends who perceived her as too young for entering an informal union. It seems that there are certain age norms that impact the transition to cohabitation. Katia stated that even at age 26, young adults in Italy are still seen very much as children:

"There was no reaction … maybe more so, let's say, for my friends who are closer to my age, or younger, who still see it a bit like this because (…) basically in Italy you are still very much a child at the age of 26. Now people get married and do everything much later, so I am, in fact, quite unusual, I am very young to live together and get married, etc. etc. People generally get married much later, they have children much later, they get a job much later etc. etc. Everything is all done much later, so I am a bit further ahead compared to people the same age as me, and some of them were quite shocked by my decision."[169]

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[166] "Più o meno tutti i miei amici si sono sposati nel mio stesso periodo. Abbiamo seguito tutti le stesse tappe. Siamo rimaste incinte tutte nello stesso periodo. Sembrava ci fossimo messi d'accordo."

[167] "Maria si è trasferita a casa di Alberto, dopo che noi ci siamo trasferiti qui! All'inizio con lei noi ne parlavamo, e lei mi diceva: "Siete stati, non dico coraggiosi, ma avete fatto un bel passo!' la vedeva come una cosa un po' coraggiosa da parte nostra, capito? E poi anche lei ha fatto lo stesso {ride}."

[168] "Dopo la mia, c'è stata una sorta di imitazione, perché io sono stata un po' il precursore, sono stata la più giovane, 22 anni, loro l'hanno fatto successivamente."

[169] "Non c'è stata una reazione … magari più diciamo per i miei amici, quelli più vicini alla mia età, più piccoli che la vedono ancora un po' così perché ancora (…) in Italia insomma a 26 anni sei ancora molto bambino. Ormai ci si sposa e si fa tutto molto più avanti, quindi in realtà io sono un po' fuori dal comune, sono una ragazza giovane per convivere, per sposarmi, ecc. ecc. In genere ci si sposa molto più avanti, si fanno figli

Angela (23) met resistance, too. When she decided to leave her parental home, Angela was already the mother of a small son. Whereas her partner had an employment position at that time, Angela was still looking for a job. The couple's friends referred mainly to the economic difficulties when judging cohabitation:

"They were all afraid. All of them, from the very first to the very last, said to us: "But how will you manage? You can't afford it now. You'll have to go without this, you'll have to go without that …' initially, whereas now they all envy us. But in the beginning … because in any case now young people are afraid of doing everything."[170]

However, after this initial criticism, Angela's friends started to envy the couple. Another interviewee reported that primarily her friends, who were engaged but still living at their parental home, were jealous:

"Envious, because a lot of my female friends haven't got the courage to do it because their parents don't want them to."[171]

Both, the skepticisms as well as jealousy hinted at the fact that cohabitation is not yet established in Cagliari. Interviewees referred to the strong barriers young adults encounter when intending to live together with their partner. These barriers are apparently that huge that friends, who were not successful as far as entry into cohabitation is concerned, reacted with envy.

In summary, most interviewees in Cagliari experienced acceptance of cohabitation by friends – although often these friends were not cohabiting themselves. Despite this positive evaluation, a group of women encountered both critical resistance and jealousy. Once the informal union worked out, most of these friends envied the couple for their "courageous" choice.

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molto più avanti, si lavora più avanti ecc. ecc. E' tutto molto ritardato, quindi per i miei coetanei sono un po' più avanti rispetto ai loro ritmi, quindi alcuni erano un po' stupiti per la mia scelta."
[170] "Tutti spaventati. Tutti dal primo all'ultimo, ci dicevano: "Ma come fate? Ma adesso non ce la fate con i soldi. Dovete rinunciare a fare questo, dovete rinunciare a fare altro …' inizialmente, invece adesso ci invidiano tutti. Però inizialmente…perché adesso comunque i ragazzi hanno molta paura di fare tutto."
[171] "Invidiosi, perché molte mie amiche non hanno il coraggio di farlo perché i genitori non vogliono."

9.3.3 Comparing the Influence of Friends on Cohabitation and Union Formation in Bologna and Cagliari

In this section, we focused on the mutual influence between interviewees and friends on union formation. Women in Bologna were surrounded by circles of friends who behaved in the same way when it came to union formation. Here we observed a high degree of homogeneity; interviewees acted in accordance with friends and acquaintances. As a consequence, friends reacted with agreement on cohabitation. Interviewees in Cagliari, in contrast, were surrounded to a much lower extent by friends who passed through an informal union. In quite a few cases, friends were hampered in taking the decision for cohabitation by missing economic security and by parental influence. Thus, although friends stayed in different living arrangements (such as living with their parents or entering directly into marriage), most of them seemed to appreciate cohabitation and reacted with content and happiness to the interviewee's choice. However, even though cohabitation was perceived in a positive way, interviewees reported that some friends tended to ask about marriage after a while. In Bologna, only one woman reported about such behavior. From the reaction of friends, it can be assumed that the generation of young adults in Cagliari tends to see cohabitation as a step that leads to marriage rather than an alternative to it. In both regional contexts, women talked about friends who followed their trail and entered cohabitation later on – more or less inspired by the interviewees' examples. In doing so, friends in Cagliari admired the "courageous" endeavor of the forerunners. Yet, there where also critical voices: Friends were skeptical toward cohabitation. Once the informal union had worked out successfully, interviewees in Cagliari perceived their friends to be envious.

In an earlier study, Nazio and Blossfeld (2003) addressed the question of whether cohabitation diffusion occurs through peer group adoption rather than pre-cohort adoption. The authors proved that in East and West Germany, an area where cohabitation is already more or less diffused, this is the case. In Italy, by contrast, where cohabitation is much less diffused, the authors found no evidence that the country follows the same pattern. Nazio and Blossfeld reason that in Italy a selective group of adults decides for an informal union: adults, who are not religious, who have left the educational system and are employed, who live mainly in the North, and who grew up in an urban context. According to the authors, this very specific group of people does not serve as appropriate models for

their peers in other groups. As a consequence, the diffusion process is slowed down (Nazio and Blossfeld 2003).

Up to a certain extent, we can confirm these assumptions: Our qualitative data provide evidence that still today cohabitation occurs in a selective group of people: Although not having been sampled for education, almost all interviewees, both in Bologna and Cagliari, held high and very high educational degrees and worked full-time. Whereas interviewees in Bologna decided for cohabitation in a context of like-minded friendships, women in Cagliari were often forerunners as far as cohabitation was concerned. In this sense, interviewees in Bologna represent a less selective group than interviewees in Cagliari. Diffusion might, consequently, occur to a stronger extent via peer group adoption in the former than might be the case in the later.

However, with our data we were unable to analyze to what extent cohabitation diffusion occurs among lower educated strata of population, though it can be assumed that informal unions spread there much slower. In addition, evidence suggests that higher educated adults in Cagliari are much more in favor of cohabitation than actual behavior would suggest. Despite the fact that in Cagliari we found a high appreciation of marriage, interviewees emphasized that their friends would have preferred to experience cohabitation as well. Nonetheless, due to economic uncertainty and parental influence, a high proportion of friends decided against cohabitation and in favor of direct marriage. Thus, in both regional contexts we observed a high degree of appreciation of cohabitation among higher educated groups of individuals, and we found that young adults among this group tended to imitate friends' behavior and/or influence friends and acquaintances to choose cohabitation as well.

At the same time, however, in both cities interviewees spoke about mutual influence regarding marriage too. Especially interviewees who perceived their union as a prelude to marriage or as a trial were inspired by friends who made the transition to marriage. The same seemed to be true for friends who observed such behavior among our interviewees.

9.4 The Role of Religion and the Local Culture

The strong position that the Catholic Church has held – and still holds – in Italy has shaped the country in many ways. From the postwar period until the breakdown of the old political regime in 1992, only Christian Democrat governments ruled the country. Because of this, Catholic views dominated political life and even influenced legislation such as divorce or abortion. Still today, the Catholic imprint has major implications for the way people reason and behave in many situations in life, especially as far as family formation is concerned. Studies confirm, for instance, that Catholics are less inclined to enter a non-marital relationship than non-Catholics (Angeli et al. 1999; Castiglioni 1999). In this respect, we are particularly interested in analyzing the effect of religion when couples in Italy are about to decide on an informal relationship. Accordingly, the following section focuses on the way religion influences young adults' transition to cohabitation and marriage in a context with rather low levels of Catholic affiliation, namely Bologna, and in a context where religion is still influential, namely Cagliari.

9.4.1 Bologna: Secularization and Critical Examination

It is not surprising that the majority of women among the Bologna sample declared themselves not to be religious. As much today as in the past, the city is known for its socialistic orientations and its undenominational imprint. Out of all the interviewed women, seventeen stated they were not Catholic; all the others indicated they were of the faith. However, only one woman attended church services regularly, and none of the Catholics were churchgoers:

"We are religious, but not practicing. We're all like that … a bit lazy."[172]

"In any case, we have both been christened and taken Holy Communion, and well, we have received all of the sacraments, but, well, … we are not practicing."[173]

In general, these women said they were "out of tune with church." They reported about their difficult relation with church rules and dogmas. Matilda (35) emphasized that on

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[172] "Siamo religiosi, ma non praticanti. Siamo tutti così … un po' pigri."
[173] "Siamo comunque tutti e due stati Battezzati, Comunicati e insomma tutti i sacramenti li abbiamo fatti però si insomma…praticanti no."

certain issues she had different attitudes to those of the church. Yet, she believed in God and turned to him in everyday life:

"Rather than religion I would speak of faith in the sense that … I am not particularly practicing, I don't often go to Church, I am also a little skeptical about the Church. Not of all the Church but if we are speaking at high levels I do have some doubts, but I am a believer … I do believe in God, I firmly believe in a higher power and I find myself thinking of God in times of need. At times like this I pray a lot, and I think, I also feel it helps me, I have felt helped during my life."[174]

Marcella (29) reported how she started questioning her religion. Having followed church rules and sacraments from the moment she was a child, her interest in existential questions rose little by little. Especially after having experienced the death of loved ones, Marcella put the church under scrutiny:

"Then there have been too many deaths … all these deaths have really made me question the words of all of the men of the Church (…) when I entered a phase that was clearly a little more intelligent, they were unable to give me answers in the face of certain real, existential questions, and they only offered me dogmas."[175]

Thus, although eleven women indicated they were Catholic, the majority of them challenged the Catholic Church critically and no longer followed church rules. Taking that into account, it is not surprising that most women – in particular those who were not religious – perceived no conflict between their decision to live in an informal union and the rules of the Catholic Church:

"When I went into a living arrangement, I was already no longer interested in the Catholic religion. I know that for the Catholic religion, I mean I know that the Catholic religion is against it but… it wasn't a problem for me because I don't feel Catholic, basically I am not interested."[176]

"It's a type of problem that I personally don't experience."[177]

Yet, some women mentioned Catholic friends and colleagues who felt this conflict. These people believed in the "sacrament of marriage" and frowned upon cohabitation. Recurrently, they addressed the interviewees and expressed their opposing attitudes:

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[174] "Più che di religione parlerei di fede nel senso che … io non sono molto praticante, non vado spesso in Chiesa, ho un po' anche di diffidenza nei confronti della Chiesa. Non di tutta la Chiesa però se parliamo ad alti livelli ho qualche dubbio, però credo … credo in Dio, credo fermamente in una forza che sia al di sopra di noi e mi ritrovo a pensare a lui nei momenti di sconforto. In quei momenti prego molto, ci penso e mi sento anche aiutata, mi sono sentita anche aiutata nel corso della vita."

[175] "Poi i troppi lutti…veramente troppi mi hanno portato a dubitare realmente delle parole prima di tutto degli uomini di Chiesa (…) quando sono entrata in una fase un po' più chiaramente intelligente di fronte a certe domande reali, esistenziali non mi sapevano rispondere ma mi portavano solo dei dogmi."

[176] "Quando io sono andata a convivere già la religione Cattolica non mi interessava più. So che per la religione Cattolica, cioè che la religione Cattolica è contraria a questo ma … non mi ha provocato conflitto perché non mi sento Cattolica, insomma non mi interessa."

[177] "È un tipo di conflitto che io personalmente non vivo."

"My colleague finds it difficult to accept living together. I have discussed it with her several times because it is something she finds totally incomprehensible."[178]

Other interviewees avoided such debates by concealing cohabitation from certain people:

"I certainly can't talk openly about it with my old school teachers or tell them that I live with someone, because they would be disappointed, it's like living in sin."[179]

Nonetheless, the religiously motivated objections of friends and colleagues were of no or minor importance for interviewees. Women generally tried to avoid discussion of this kind. However, the interview data revealed that Catholicism did have an unexpected impact on cohabitation in Bologna. Both, religious and non-religious women perceived marriage per se as a religious act. As a consequence, several non-religious interviewees abstained not only from a Catholic marriage ceremony, but also from a civil one. They did not even consider having a wedding at the registry office:

"We have decided not to get married, but to carry on living together because we are not interested in religion and a religious wedding."[180]

Simona (42) described the way marriage is seen in Italian society. She emphasized that marriage has a meaning that goes beyond institutional aspects – it is loaded with a whole range of religious perceptions. In her opinion, undenominational people are affected by these views, too.

"In my opinion we are greatly influenced, even if we are not practicing, we are influenced a bit by a culture in which marriage is also felt greatly as a religious act. Especially here in Italy … whether we are practicing Catholics or not, or not even Catholics, we are nonetheless influenced by this religious culture."[181]

This pattern is interesting as the religiously loaded meaning of marriage led to a decrease of weddings among non-religious people in the sample. We assume that a more neutral perception of marriage would have led these people to consider a civil wedding. This way

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[178] "La mia collega fa fatica ad accettare la convivenza. Tante volte è capitato di discutere con lei su questa cosa perché per lei è assolutamente una cosa inconcepibile."

[179] "Non posso sicuramente parlare apertamente con le mie ex insegnanti di scuola raccontando che convivo perché per loro è una delusione come vivere nel peccato."

[180] "Noi abbiamo deciso di non sposarci, quindi di mantenere questo rapporto di convivenza perché non siamo interessati ad un discorso di tipo religioso quindi di matrimonio religioso."

[181] "Secondo me risentiamo molto, anche se non siamo praticanti, risentiamo un po' di una cultura nella quale il matrimonio viene sentito molto anche come atto religioso ecco. Cioè in definitiva noi in Italia … che siamo cattolici praticanti o non praticanti o nemmeno cattolici come appartenenza, però di questa cultura religiosa risentiamo comunque."

religion impacts the development of marriage in a negative manner. As Simona, also Carla (36) pointed to the specific local culture that prevails in Italy and influences both religious and non-religious:

"Neither of our own two families is practicing, but we both grew up here, in Italy, so everything is pervaded by the Catholic culture. Everyone's attitudes are very, very related to this basic culture, and its presence can still very much be felt. So I believe that we have been brought up with the Catholic culture even if our families are not practicing and have never imposed any religion on us."[182]

We actually found indications of this specific local culture: The fact that almost all couples – independently of their belief – opted for an enduring union when entering cohabitation instead of deciding for several shorter relationships provides some evidence of a Catholic moral concept.

To sum up, interviewees in Bologna tended to be critical toward the Catholic Church. The majority of women were not religious; those who stated they were Catholic seldom attended church. Hardly any of the women perceived a conflict between church rules and the own decision for cohabitation. Thus, religion had little direct influence on informal unions. However, as Italian culture tends to be interfused with Catholic ideas, women were affected by these moral concepts in everyday life and also when choosing their current living arrangement.

9.4.2 Cagliari: Striking a Balance between Catholicism and Own Beliefs

The overall majority of interviewees among the Cagliari sample were raised in the Catholic tradition. They were baptized, attended church services regularly as well as Catholic kindergartens or schools, took confirmation, and so forth. During childhood, several women had regular contact with nuns, monks, or priests – within family or school:

"When I was young I had an extremely religious upbringing because everyone is christened, everybody is confirmed, everyone does catechism … also at school there was a course of religion given by Christian, Catholic teachers. So we have a Christian Catholic foundation, and I was brought up with this, also because one of my uncles is a parish priest, so in any case I live in a fairly religious family environment."[183]

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[182] "Nessuna delle nostre due famiglie di origine è praticante però noi siamo cresciuti entrambi qui, in Italia, quindi la cultura cattolica pervade tutto. Tutti i comportamenti delle persone sono molto, molto connessi a questa cultura di fondo che è ancora molto, molto presente. Quindi io credo che noi siamo stati educati secondo la cultura cattolica anche se le nostre famiglie non sono praticanti e non ci hanno mai imposto nessun tipo di religione."

[183] "Da piccola ho avuto un'educazione molto religiosa perché comunque tutti fanno il Battesimo, tutti fanno la Cresima, tutti fanno Catechismo … anche a scuola c'è un corso di Religione però fatta comunque da professori Cristiani Cattolici. Quindi comunque c'è un'impostazione Cristiana Cattolica, quindi sono cresciuta

Astonishingly, despite being brought up in the Catholic tradition and being surrounded by Catholic values and moral concepts, only a minority of women declared themselves as religious. Out of all 28 interviewees, only six stated they were Catholic. Most women distanced themselves from church during youth or young adulthood:

"I had a Catholic upbringing, but then, at a certain point in my life, as a result of my own personal reasons and experience I stopped believing."[184]

"I did everything until confirmation, but at a certain point I realized that it did nothing for me. I am also quite angry with the Church for the way it has behaved, with the Church as an institution … so I keep myself at a distance."[185]

However, even though stating they were not religious, quite a few women had an ambiguous relationship with Catholicism. They "took some moral concepts of the church, others not," they created their "own religion" by absorbing certain values and rejecting others:

"I say this: religion, but my own way. In the sense that I make the rules, in other words I don't go to mass on Saturdays and Sundays. During the day I find myself thinking, wanting this relationship with Jesus."[186]

"I have my own special relationship, in the sense that I am a believer but I am unable to practice as the institution would like me to. I have my beliefs and principles, which are more or less the same as the Catholic ones."[187]

To a certain extent, these women believed in God, they believed that "God exists and that he's able to see into people and to see whether they are good or bad." Nonetheless, these women declared themselves neither as believing nor as religious: they struck a balance between their Catholic surroundings and their inner notions. Consequently, only a minority of non-religious interviewees in Cagliari were truly atheistic.

Among those who perceived themselves as Catholic, in contrast, only one woman was a regular churchgoer. The other interviewees stated they were Catholic, but seldom

con questo anche perché ho uno zio parroco quindi comunque in famiglia si sente molto questa aria religiosa."
[184] "Io ho avuto una educazione Cattolica però poi ad una certa età per dei ragionamenti miei e comunque il mio vissuto sono arrivata a non credere."
[185] "Ho fatto tutto l'iter fino alla Cresima, però ad un certo punto ho capito che non mi dava niente. Tra l'altro sono anche abbastanza in collera con la Chiesa per i comportamenti che ha avuto, con la Chiesa come Istituzione … quindi mi tengo distaccata."
[186] "Io dico così: una religione a modo mio. Nel senso che le regole me le sono fatte io cioè non vado a messa il sabato e la domenica. Mi capita durante la giornata di pensare, di voler questo collegamento con Gesù."
[187] "Ho tutto un rapporto mio nel senso che sono credente però non riesco a praticare come vorrebbe l'Istituzione. Ho delle mie convinzioni, dei miei principi che bene o male coincidono con quelli Cattolici."

practicing. The main reasons they gave for not attending church services were that "it would take time from other things, such as work" or that they preferred to "spend time with family members instead" or simply a lack of time as at weekends they are usually busy with cleaning up and doing some shopping.

Given the high orientation toward Catholic ideals among both religious and non-religious women, it is not surprising that several interviewees perceived a conflict between their decision for cohabitation and Catholic sacraments. They were aware of their "failure" and "guilt":

"I only feel a little guilty toward Jesus, because it is not right for the Christian religion … first you should deal with the sacrament."[188]

Other women recognized this conflict and tried, however, to justify their choice by pointing out that after all they behaved in a positive way:

"For my religion, living together is quite a bad sin, but I don't have a problem with this because I don't think I'm doing a bad thing, but a good thing and with a person I love, we love each other, and in any case we are trying to do the right thing. And I don't see why I should be burnt at the stake for this."[189]

One interviewee, who could not afford a wedding right away, actually defended her choice for pre-marital cohabitation by arguing that "everybody blends in a bit." The interviews provide evidence that women also considered – among other things – the conflict between Catholic dogma and individual behavior, when deciding for a subsequent marriage. However, religion was not a major reason for getting married. One woman stressed that her belief "gave an additional prompt."

As in Bologna, interviewees in Cagliari referred to the specific local culture that surrounds them in their daily life. Yet, women on the island emphasized this point to a higher extent. They argued that "religion is important from a cultural point of view, as it impacts the decisions of people and nations." Further, they stressed that religion cannot be screened out in Italy – it is simply "part of everybody's life." Mariagrazia (40) complained about the power the Catholic Church has in Italy:

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[188] "Io mi sento soltanto un po' in colpa con Gesù perché per la religione cristiana non è bene … bisognerebbe affrontare prima il sacramento."
[189] "Il fatto di convivere per la mia religione è un peccato anche abbastanza grave, ma io non lo vivo così perché penso che non sto facendo una cosa cattiva, ma una cosa buona ed è una persona a cui voglio bene, ci vogliamo bene e cerchiamo di comportarci al meglio comunque. Per cui non vedo perché dovrei essere messa al rogo per questo."

"Our politics and our culture are influenced by the power of the Church, and in my opinion this is wrong because I would like to live in a laic state. All decisions in Italy pass through the Vatican, and this is something we have to face every day."[190]

In the same breath, however, Mariagrazia made a clear distinction between the Catholic Church, which she criticized, and the Catholic belief, which she approved:

"If religion were strictly the words of the Gospel, I would be religious, because I believe that the Gospel sets out the guidelines of life, which are just and true. The fact is that the Church is everything but the words of the Gospel, and this is absolutely appalling to me."[191]

In conclusion: In Cagliari religion played an important role. Though few women declared themselves to be Catholic, the majority of women believed in Catholic values and ethics. Interviewees consistently stressed that they were surrounded by a specific local culture, which impacts all people – independently of religious or non-religious affiliation. Women actually grew up with the local moral concepts. It is not surprising then that these concepts also mattered in every day life. Women did perceive a conflict between their choice for cohabitation and local moral concepts. Despite the fact that this conflict was not the driving force when it came to formal union formation, it often gave an additional impetus.

9.4.3 Comparing the Role of Religion and Its Influence in Bologna and Cagliari

Recent data on religious affiliation of Italian adults provide evidence that in 2000 about 80.8% of young adults aged 15-34 declared themselves to be Catholic. Further, about 74.2% of this age group believed that "God exists and plays a part in human actions." However, despite this strong religious attachment, merely 14.6% of young adults confirmed that they attended church services every week. Most stated that they never go to church (33.3%) or do so less than four times a year (25.6%) (Rostan 2002). This mismatch between religious affiliation and the practice of church services is evident in our qualitative data too. We further observed major differences between both regional settings. When analyzing women's declaration of religious affiliation, the data reveal that more women were Catholic in Bologna than in Cagliari. This result is rather surprising as the South and

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[190] "La nostra politica, la nostra cultura è condizionata dal potere della Chiesa e questa per me è una cosa gravissima perché io vorrei vivere in uno Stato laico. Tutte le decisioni in Italia passano per il Vaticano e questa è una cosa che noi ogni giorno dobbiamo fronteggiare."

[191] "Se la Religione fossero strettamente le parole del Vangelo io sarei una donna religiosa perché reputo che il Vangelo dia delle linee di vita che sono giuste e che sono vere. Sta, di fatto, è che la Chiesa è tutta fuorché le parole del Vangelo e quindi questa cosa per me è una grande schifezza."

the islands of Italy are known for their stronger turn to Catholicism. However, the investigation of the interview data shows large discrepancies in the way religiosity was perceived in both regional contexts. Religious women in Bologna tended to have difficult relations to church rules and dogma. They questioned their religion critically and almost all Catholic interviewees did not practice their beliefs. In Cagliari, by contrast, women who declared themselves not to be Catholic turned out to have an ambiguous relationship to church. They tended to transfigure the Catholic religion by absorbing certain values and moral concepts while disregarding others. Hence, just a minority of non-religious women in Cagliari were indeed atheistic. It emerged that – generally speaking – non-catholic women in Cagliari were more religious than Catholic women in Bologna. Given these strong ambiguities, this result actually gives reason to reconsider the validity of survey questions on religiosity in Italy. The ideas and perceptions connected to one's own belief are obviously so vague in Italy that they do not promote valid results when put into one "yes-or-no" question.

Further, earlier studies confirmed that women with a religious affiliation tended to have a more positive attitude toward marriage than toward cohabitation. This observation is actually based on the fact that the morality of Roman Catholic families does not allow for pre-marital cohabitation as it usually implies pre-marital sex (Angeli et al. 1999; Castiglioni 1999). Based on these assumptions, one might in fact suggest that especially religious women see a conflict between their choice for cohabitation and their Catholic affiliation. Indeed, in view of the strong orientation toward Catholic values, our data provides evidence that mainly women in Cagliari perceived such a conflict. Women stated that religion gave an additional impetus to transform their relationship into a legal union. This way, Catholicism had a direct influence on union formation in Cagliari. In Bologna, by contrast, women did not identify such a conflict. Hence, they were not affected by such considerations when choosing their current living arrangement. Interviewees in Bologna were rather influenced in their choices in another way. Several of them understood marriage per se as essential religious act. As a consequence, non-religious women abstained not only from a church wedding, but also from a civil marriage.

In both cities, women emphasized to be surrounded by a specific local culture. Though, interviewees in Cagliari stated this more often. Women were raised in the Catholic tradition, were baptized and attended church services regularly when they were young.

Independently, whether women were distanced from church or not, all were affected by Catholic morals and ethics. This is proved, for instance, by the fact that almost all interviewees in both regional contexts decided for an enduring relationship when entering cohabitation instead of one or several shorter ones. In this respect, women were guided by the Catholic moral concept. Thus, Catholicism tended to have an indirect effect on union formation, both in Bologna and in Cagliari.

9.5 Gender Relations and Their Manifestation among Cohabiting and Married Couples

Consistently, scholars underline the unequal situation of men and women in Italy, a situation that can be ascribed to the prevailing welfare system. Strongly shaped by familialistic orientations, the Italian welfare state assigns major responsibilities for individuals to the family and considers women as main instrument of social intervention. This becomes manifest, for instance, in the lack of family services and the inadequate possibilities to reconcile work and family life. As a consequence, Italian women are constrained to abandon their occupational career when assuming responsibility for children. Men, by contrast, are encouraged to pursue their professional agenda (Saraceno 1994; Meyers et al. 1999; Trifiletti 1999; Bussemarker and van Kersbergen 1999). These gender differences have major implications for union formation behavior in the country. As women are much better protected within marriage than within cohabitation when giving birth to a child, we assume women to decide on a wedding as soon as they plan for or expect offspring (see also Chapter 2 for an elaboration of this argumentation). We further argue that this applies especially to those women who see absolutely no possibility to continue their employment career or who opt voluntarily for interrupting their job when they become mothers. In contrast to that, we suppose that mothers with a high aspiration toward their professional advancement are less inclined to decide on a wedding for social security reasons.

However, before drawing conclusions on the impact of gender relations on union formation behavior, we shall analyze gender equalities and inequalities, and their manifestation in couples' daily life. Therefore we focus on the following three dimensions: *housework, financial, and employment arrangements* among couples in both regional contexts. We conclude with a discussion and highlight the impact of gender (in)equality in the respective dimension on union formation behavior.

9.5.1 Bologna: Striving for Equal Rights and Duties

Analyzing the distribution of housework among interviewees, we found that couples among the Bologna sample practiced both reasonably equal and rather unequal arrangements of domestic work. Women, who perceived cohabitation as a trial or alternative to marriage – i.e. women with rather modern attitudes and values – tended to involve their partners more into domestic work than women, who saw their union as pre-marital step. The former group of interviewees emphasized to a much higher extent that the *division of housework* was relatively *balanced* – this was even true if children were involved. Though each of the partners had preferences as far as domestic work was concerned, men were usually engaged in different kinds of household chores: they cooked, washed the dishes, cleaned up, wiped, did the shopping and so forth. Generally, women seldom had problems in motivating their partner to participate in domestic tasks. Several women assumed that their partner's positive attitude toward chores was due to the experience of living alone prior to cohabitation. These partners were already used to contributing to household tasks. Yet, whenever partners tried to refuse domestic help, women spared no effort to claim for an appropriate contribution. Marina (40), cohabiting and childless, stated the following:

"It's better to have a few more arguments now both doing things because if it's to avoid an argument you'll end up with all of the work on your shoulders. I'm sure it's worth a few more arguments now or a few more jobs not done properly. The important thing is that he also learns to do a bit of everything."[192]

Thus, women with rather modern attitudes toward family not only gave an extensive account of *symmetrical division of domestic duties* within the union, but felt also up to resists against traditional role models.

Quite a different nature in the division of household tasks was reported mainly by those women who perceived their informal union as a step that leads to marriage – i.e. women with less modern attitudes and values than the former group. Here, women were usually responsible for the majority of housework duties: They washed the dishes, cleaned up the whole flat, did the laundry and shopping, and looked for everything else. In general, couples among this group talked about *gender-based division of housework*. In the main, men

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[192] "È meglio una discussione in più se esiste la partecipazione di entrambi nel far le cose perché se per evitare la discussione poi vai a finire che ti ritrovi tutto il lavoro sulle tue spalle. Sono sicura che merita qualche discussione in più o qualche lavoro non fatto bene in più. L'importante è che anche lui impari a fare un po' tutte le cose."

were responsible for the car or the flat's electronic equipment. The burden of domestic duties rose of course as soon as children were born: In addition to their occupation and housework, women then took care of their offspring. Some interviewees actually suffered from an unequal distribution of tasks, as in the case of Cristina (36). Being married and mother of a small child, Cristina was responsible for her job, almost all domestic tasks, and child rearing:

"I find it difficult to manage our life, our daily life in this way (…) I am very taken up with my role as a mother, also because Vincenzo helps me, but not that much, so I do 90% of looking after our daughter and basically it is really hard work every day, both emotionally and physically."[193]

The most welcome solution that interviewees of both groups appreciated with regard to housework was the hiring of a *cleaning lady*. About one-third of women among the Bologna sample did so. Astonishingly, not only women with children decided for a cleaner, but also childless (cohabiting and married) couples. The demand ranged from two hours a week up to three entire afternoons. In particular, cohabiting women, who attached great importance to their professional career, claimed the need of a cleaning lady as a precondition for moving in together. Claudia (28), for instance, childless and cohabiting for about one year, stated the following:

"It was a "conditio sine qua non" in order for me to live with him because both of us work too hard to be able to go back home and have to clean. Also, to get on well as a couple, having the house tidy and not always having to think about the house, I think it's hard to be happy if you also argue about the slightest thing."[194]

As we see, a great part of the women among the Bologna sample were *opposed (strongly) against a gendered division of domestic duties* within the union.

As to *financial arrangements*, there are different ways cohabiting and married couples may organize financial issues: Couples might opt for separate household finances by contributing equally to living costs such as rent, food, and bills. Other couples might decide on a joint family economy by pooling money in a common bank account. These

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[193] "Faccio fatica a gestire la nostra vita, la nostra quotidianità in questo modo (…) io sono molto presa da questo ruolo di madre anche perché Vincenzo mi aiuta, ma non più di tanto, quindi il 90% dell'accudimento di nostra figlia ricade su di me ed è proprio una fatica fisica, emotiva quotidiana insomma."

[194] "Era una conditio sine qua non per me per vivere con lui perché entrambi abbiamo una vita troppo faticosa come orari per poter tornare a casa e dover pulire, anche per star bene in una coppia aver la casa comunque in ordine non dover stare sempre a pensare alla casa secondo me diventa faticoso essere felice se si litiga anche per le piccole cose."

arrangements, however, might change as the couple passes through different stages within the union.

In Bologna, interviewees talked in general about three different kinds of financial arrangements. A few women decided for a joint household budget; several interviewees chose a mixture between a separated and joint economy; and an equally large group opted for separated household budgets. Among those interviewees who decided for a *joint economy*, we found both married as well as cohabiting women – several of them had already given birth. Whereas some couples shared finances right from the start of cohabitation, others chose to do so after childbirth. Many more interviewees decided for a *mixture between a joint and separated household economy*. These women were cohabiting and married, while several of the married couples had already children.

The majority of women among these both groups put emphasis on the fact that their partner had a higher income than themselves. In such cases, partners would often contribute more to the household budget than women did. This accounted for both married and cohabiting couples. Yet, in these cases, relationships were generally characterized by a long duration. And some of these women also reported a special *(gendered) division of expenditures*: Whereas men took the main responsibilities of spending the fixed costs such as rent/bank loan for the flat and bills for electricity, gas and water, women were responsible for food, telephone, clothes for the child(ren), the babysitter, and so forth. However, the spending women took care of were often less "structured" than those of men and therefore not seldom perceived as less important.

In addition to the two described patterns, we identified a third kind of financial arrangement. A large group of interviewees in Bologna chose a *straight separated household economy*. Not all, but the vast majority of these couples were cohabiting. Two women were mothers, one of them cohabiting and the other married. Claudia (28), who was cited previously, reported about separate budgets too. Although she and her partner searched for a new flat when entering cohabitation, Claudia decided to purchase the flat on her own. The same applied to all costs that concerned this flat; she insisted on paying renovation costs as well as furniture on her own. Once living in that flat, her partner remitted her a monthly amount of about 750 euro, which he earned by renting his own flat. Claudia took this sum partially as a rent and partially to pay bills and food. In her view, it would not be

fair to ask her partner to contribute directly to the flat costs as one day the couple might separate:

"Everything that concerns this house is only my expense and … in the end with the fact that he gives me that money every month in the end we go halves, but not on the house and objects, do you see what I mean? Only on the things that concern the house, because this is something that is mine and one day, if I were to leave him or if he were to leave me it rightfully remains mine. I don't think it is fair that he should contribute."[195]

Furthermore, we found merely among informal unions those couples, where men and women earned almost the same amount of money or where women earned even more than their partners and contributed a higher sum to the household budget.

Among the Bologna sample, two women faced a particular situation with regard to financial arrangements. Both women were cohabiting and childless. They stressed that they had no agreements with their partner about economic issues: Rita (48) actually financed reconstruction and renovation works when moving into her partner's birthplace, which he and his sister inherited after the death of his parents. However, since the couple was not married and made no special arrangements about finances, Rita worried about her future in that house:

"The only thing is that very often … but it's something that I think … the fact that we are not married and so there is nothing official and if something terrible were to happen, let's say, if he were to die for example, that house is his and I wouldn't have any right to stay in that house because apart from anything else it belongs to him and his sister and this is something, which I find difficult (…) it is the thought of not being able to carry on living in this house where we live together, because I feel that this house is mine and I am very happy here. This is something that frightens me a bit."[196]

Recurrently she tried to address this problem, however, without success:

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[195] "Tutto quello che concerne questa casa è solo spesa mia e … alla fine con il fatto che lui mi dà quei soldi al mese facciamo alla fine a metà, però non sugli oggetti e sulla casa, capito? Sulle cose che riguardano proprio la casa, perché questa è una cosa mia e un domani se io dovessi lasciarlo o se lui dovesse lasciare me giustamente rimane a me, non credo sia giusto che contribuisca."

[196] "L'unica cosa è che io tante volte … questa è una cosa a cui io penso però … il fatto che appunto non ci sia un matrimonio e quindi non ci sia niente di formalizzato e se per caso dovesse succedere qualcosa di tragico diciamo e dovesse mancare lui ad esempio quella casa è sua e io non avrei nessun diritto di rimanere in quella casa perché oltretutto è sua e di sua sorella e questa è una cosa che mi fa star male (…) è l'idea di non potere continuare a stare in questa casa dove stiamo insieme perché è una casa che sento mia, in cui sto molto bene. Questa è una cosa che mi spaventa un po'."

"It is a subject he finds difficult to face up to. I don't know why … perhaps it's a subject that obviously makes you think of tragic things, and he always tends to avoid these conversations. He always tends to put them off. I have tried several times, but he just doesn't want to know."[197]

In short, in contrast to married women, cohabiting interviewees in Bologna chose strictly separate bank accounts more often. Further, they tended to earn on average similar incomes as their partner or even higher ones. Nonetheless, due to missing formalities, cohabiting women were much more exposed to an insecure ownership structure than women, who were getting married.

As a third dimension, we looked at *labor market arrangements* among couples. In spite of high and very high educational degrees, at the initial stage of their employment career, interviewees in Bologna generally faced difficulties in finding an adequate job position. Nonetheless, later on, about half of the interviewed women found more or less secure positions in the public sphere. Other women, who worked as self-employed or in the private sector, had less job security. As to the employment career, we found no differences between women who cohabited and those who decided for marriage later on. Both experienced *periods of job precariousness* and several of them held secure job positions in the public sector.

We observed rather that there was a distinction that ran between women who decided to have a child and those who were (still) childless. Once cohabiting and married women became mothers, they faced *major difficulties in combining work and family life*. In all cases, women took the main responsibility for rearing the child. Often they opted to work part-time. In doing so, women in the public sector faced much less difficulty in reducing working hours than interviewees who were employed in a private enterprise. Susanna (40), for instance, is married and mother of two small children. After her birth, she made a request to work part-time. Although her private sector employer accepted her reduction of working hours for the time being, Susanna feared she was constrained to return to a normal working week soon:

"At the moment I have a part-time job (…) and I hope that they let me keep these hours because otherwise I'll have to look for another job. While they are so young, I'll need to continue part-time, now I'm working 30 hours part-time and that's good for me. (…) Unfortunately, they've never given anyone indefinite part-time

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[197] "Lui è un argomento che fa fatica ad affrontare intanto perché non so … forse un argomento che fa venire comunque un pensiero di cose tragiche chiaramente e lui tende sempre a non affrontare questi discorsi, tende sempre a rimandare. Ci ho provato diverse volte, ma non c'è verso."

where I work, they've given it me for the time being, but I don't think they're going to continue it and this is a problem for me."[198]

Other women talked about difficulties in finding proper childcare: Emanuela (35), who is married, wanted to return to work after maternity leave. However, she found no place at the nursery and no adequate babysitter. In the end, Emanuela was compelled to reduce her weekly working hours until she could find a place for her child.

Women's difficulties in combining family and employment career were also perceived by women who had not yet decided for a child. When considering childbirth, these women worried about their future professional careers. Often they felt uncertain about the occupational options they would have after childbirth – to an increasing degree, this applied to interviewees who were self-employed. In order to ensure their own occupational progress, women needed to count on their partner's economic support for a home help and a babysitter.

Other interviewees actually complained that a reduction of working hours is always accompanied by a *professional downgrading and de-skilling*. Having invested many years and financial means into their education, women bewailed this downgrading. Matilda (35), married and mother of two small children, reported:

"Basically … I don't have a part-time job. Actually, it's a problem, in the sense that my job is nice, I like it, but it is a long way from Bologna (…) I don't know if I will be able to go back there and I think that I'll want to find a job here in Bologna that is part-time and close. Of course, I'll have to give up all of my professional and career plans because whereas now I do quite a rewarding job, it won't be easy to do what I want with a part time job, I mean I'll have to adapt. Part-time jobs are a bit more second-rate, such as a secretary, a clerk but … those sorts of jobs. Now times have changed."[199]

Hence, interviewees in Bologna were conscious – and actually experienced themselves – of the extent to which children impacted their professional career. Whereas some women suffered the *lack of adequate childcare* and reduced their weekly working hours, others

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[198] "Io per adesso ho un part time (…) e spero che mi mantengano questo orario qui perché se no mi dovrò cercare qualche altro lavoro. Finche sono così piccoli, avrei bisogno di continuare a fare un part time, adesso sto facendo un part time di 30 ore e così mi va molto bene. (…) Purtroppo lì dove lavoro il part time non lo hanno mai dato a nessuna indeterminato, per adesso si me lo hanno dato ma non credo che me lo continueranno e questo mi crea dei problemi."

[199] "Ecco … non ho il part time. Infatti è un problema nel senso che il mio lavoro è bello, mi piace però è lontano da Bologna (…) non so se riuscirò a tornare lì e penso che vorrò trovare un lavoro qua a Bologna vicino e part time. E' chiaro che dovrò rinunciare a tutto il mio percorso lavorativo e professionale perché mentre adesso facevo un lavoro abbastanza gratificante e quello che io volevo fare con un part time non sarà facile cioè dovrò adattarmi. I lavori part time sono lavori un pochino più scadenti cioè segretaria, impiegata però … questi lavori qua e quindi ormai è cambiata un'epoca."

preferred to *work part-time*, but had, however, few opportunities to do so. They changed their employment position and did less skilled jobs than beforehand. The interviews give strong evidence that children increased the occupational and consequently economic insecurity of women. Men's professional careers, in contrast, were not affected by having a child. Both cohabiting and married women experienced downgrading and less earning capacity as soon as they decided for offspring. As long as they were supported by their partners, married and unmarried mothers faced in principle similar risks. However, once separated, unmarried mothers were not entitled to alimonies for themselves, but only for their child(ren). Given the professional downgrading, the loss of income as well as inadequate social protection, it is not surprising then that cohabiting women tended to opt for marriage as soon as they expect their first child.

9.5.2 Cagliari: Persistence of Gender-Based Rights and Duties

The majority of interviewees among the Cagliari sample experienced an *unequal division of household tasks* within the union. Interestingly, with very few exceptions, this accounted for both women with modern attitudes and values and those with more traditional ones. Nonetheless, hardly any woman had any disagreement with her partner about getting more support. Generally, women were more or less content with the current situation or made the best of it. Actually, women experienced the *gender-based division of domestic tasks* already in their family of origin. Patrizia (39), cohabiting and childless, remembered for instance the following:

"I was brought up by a mother who puts her husband first and so she has to satisfy all of her husband's needs, shall we say. So my father never washed a sock or prepared food and my mother brought me up with this way of thinking."[200]

Although Patrizia underlined that her partner gave her a hand, she was responsible for most of the housework too. The fact that he held off actually telling her what to get done in the household and when, testified – in Patrizia's view – to some kind of *respect* for her domestic work. Given this respect, she asked no further help:

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[200] "Io sono stata educata da una mamma che vede al primo posto il marito e quindi tutte le esigenze che ha il marito lei le deve soddisfare, diciamo così. Per cui, mio padre non si è mai lavato un calzino, non si è mai preparato da mangiare e mia madre mi ha educato con questo punto di vista."

"I don't do it if I don't want to. It's not as if then he says: Oh, she hasn't ironed that shirt. There is mutual respect and from this point of view I don't think we have any problems."[201]

Interestingly, it was not the absence of support in chores that made it a struggle for women, but the absence of respect for their unpaid housework. Angela (23), cohabiting and mother of a small child, underlined this fact:

"I don't expect him to do anything in the house. He works, I am at home because I'm not working and so I do it quite willingly, but I do at least ask him not to spoil what I've just done. If I've just washed the floor and he walks all over it with his muddy feet … that sort of thing. If I've just cleaned the bathroom and tidied everything up and he has a shower and makes a mess and gets everything wet. At least show some respect for what I do. Only this, I don't expect him to help because he goes to work and I am at home. A little respect."[202]

Once women perceived this respect, they came to terms with the situation. Frequently, women justified their partner's lower participation in household tasks by referring to his role as a breadwinner, as did also Angela. Whereas women took up the main responsibility for domestic duties, men, in contrast, restricted their household tasks in general on cooking, doing the shopping, and on simple cleaning activities. Several interviewees, actually, preferred taking care of the housework completely themselves, as they were much more "efficient, rapid, and organized" than their partners. Giuliana (31), married and childless, stated for instance:

"Let's say I'm a bit of a perfectionist, so I'd rather do everything (…) it's a question of roles, women do the housework."[203]

Actually, several women emphasized that they enjoyed taking care of household duties. They described these tasks as pleasant and stressed that they liked, for example, preparing good food for their family. Other women underlined the fact that they used to have more time at their disposal than their partner. Consequently they perceived it as a fair solution to take up the main responsibility for duties within the household.

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[201] "Se non ho voglia non lo faccio. Non è che poi lui mi dica: Ah, non mi ha stirato quella camicia. C'è un comune rispetto reciproco e da questo punto di vista penso non ci siano problemi di nessun tipo."

[202] "Io non pretendo che lui faccia qualcosa a casa. Lui lavora, io sono a casa perchè non sto lavorando e quindi lo faccio io tranquillamente, però io chiedo almeno di non rovinare quello che ho appena fatto. Se ho appena lavato in terra e lui passa con i piedi sporchi di fango … è quello. Se io ho appena lavato il bagno e tutto riordinato e lui si fa la doccia e butta tutto e bagna. Almeno di rispettare quello che faccio io. Solo questo, non di collaborare anche lui perché comunque lui va a lavorare e io sto a casa. Un po' di rispetto."

[203] "Diciamo che sono un po' precisino, per cui preferisco fare tutto io (…) è una questione di ruolo, la donna fa i mestieri di casa."

Despite the general prevalence of a gendered division of domestic tasks among the Cagliari sample, we found also a small number of cases where women stood up for more support within the household. Although admitting that their partners were less prone to do domestic tasks, these women preferred to have "imperfectly cleaned flats" rather than doing everything themselves. Marinella (33), cohabiting and childless, attached importance to the fact that her partner was not used to helping with any domestic task when he moved into her flat. Nonetheless, Marinella tried to involve him as much as possible:

"When he moved in, he realized that he had to do some things by himself and take care of some things because by nature, and also because I think he is old enough and should know how to do some things … Basically I'm not very helpful. So we more or less share the jobs. Of course he's not as good at cleaning as me, so I let him do the easier things, but let's say we more or less share things."[204]

As we found in Bologna, women in Cagliari mentioned more often a higher level of support from their partners when they were in other living arrangements prior to cohabitation, such as living in student flats or on their own. However, as those types of living arrangements were less available in Cagliari than in Bologna, a lower number of women profited from their partner's previous experiences.

About one-third of interviewees in Cagliari stated that they used a *cleaning lady*. Interestingly we found only married and cohabiting women with children as well as childless married interviewees among the group of women who opted for this solution. Given the lower earning capacities of couples in Sardinia, we assume that couples tended to choose external support only when they had a certain level of financial means. As in Cagliari, marriage might be seen as a proxy of economic security, it is not surprising that especially married couples could afford for a cleaning lady. Couples with a higher need of household support, thus, couples with children, opted for external support as well – independent of the kind of union they lived in. Cleaning ladies usually helped once or twice a week.

As to *economic arrangements* among couples, interviewees in Cagliari handled financial issues similarly to those in Bologna, i.e. using a joint budget, separate finances, or relying on a mixture of both. However, the prevalence of these possible arrangements differed to a strong extent from the case in Bologna. The largest number of interviewees *shared financial*

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[204] "Quando si è trasferito ha capito che certe cose doveva un po' farsele da solo e occuparsene lui anche perché io sia per carattere che anche perché ritengo che lui sia grande e debba saper fare determinate cose non … non sono molto servizievole ecco. Quindi un po' ci dividiamo i compiti. Lui ovviamente è meno bravo di me nelle pulizie, quindi gli lascio fare le cose più facili, ma diciamo che più o meno ce le dividiamo."

means or reverted to a *mixture between joint and separated household economy*. Merely a few couples in Cagliari decided for a strict separation of economic resources.

Women who opted for a joint household budget were cohabiting or married. Some of them had a child already. Generally, interviewees decided for this kind of financial arrangement right at the start of cohabitation, after the purchase of a common flat or after marriage. Some women emphasized that the division of income was a natural step. Other women attached importance to the fact that pooling earnings together is important as one wants to start a family. Giuliana (31), married and childless, said:

"It wasn't nice having two separate accounts. The financial aspect is important for a couple, so we agreed that if we want a real family we also have to share the account."[205]

As regards women who used a mixture of joint and separate household budgeting, we found that most of them were living in cohabitation. In addition, a considerable number of these women had one or more children. Letizia (40), cohabiting and mother of a child, reported for instance that she and her partner had personal bank accounts. However, both Letizia as well as her partner also had access to the other's account:

"We each have our own account but for organizational reasons because … to be honest, my account is also in his name. It is a joint account. He has his own account for work, but … well in this we don't have a clear division in the sense that I can draw on his account and take money. And he can draw on mine. It's all very flexible, in fact sometimes it causes a bit of confusion (…) we have never had a clear division of accounts, money or what have you."[206]

Actually, we found that couples who relied on a mixture between common and separate accounts, used to have a *strong tendency to assume responsibility* for their partners if those were in situations of economic shortage. It seems in fact that couples in Cagliari accepted the economic responsibility for their partner to a higher extent than was the case in Bologna. We assume that the strong instability of the Sardinian employment market accelerated the partner's readiness to stand by each other – also financially – in times of need. Moreover, a considerable number of women had a *common deposit account* with their partner that was used to put money aside for the couple's future flat. In some cases, couples had used this kind of

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[205] "Non era bello avere due conti separati, il fattore economico resta importante in una coppia, quindi abbiamo concordato che se vogliamo una vera famiglia dobbiamo condividere anche il conto."
[206] "Ognuno ha un proprio conto ma per questioni organizzative perché … in realtà anche il mio conto è a nome di lui, è un conto contestato. Lui ha un suo conto per una questione lavorativa, però … ecco in questo non abbiamo una netta divisione nel senso che io posso attingere dal suo conto, prendere i soldi e lui può attingere dal mio. E' veramente flessibile la cosa tanto che a volte porta un po' di confusione (…) non abbiamo mai avuto una netta divisione di conti, di soldi o quanto altro."

account already before starting to live together. Tiziana (40), cohabiting and childless, and her partner had the intention to purchase a flat. So they had started already to pool their money together:

"Every now and then, we pay something into this account and we don't touch the money. It's been put aside. Savings shall we say (…) Mainly because sooner or later we will need it. We intend to look for a house and buy a house, so we will need it for the furniture or something."[207]

As we observed already in Bologna, women in Cagliari also talked about *gender-based expenditures*. With regard to housing, this pattern was stronger. For instance, women reported frequently that their partner took care of the purchase of the couple's flat, whereas women furnished the flat. Antonietta (36), married and mother, had separate property with her husband. Whereas her partner paid the costs for the flat, which he purchased prior to the wedding, Antonietta took care of food and all costs that were connected to the child, including those during pregnancy and for the birth. Though, in Antonietta's view, this division of expenses was fair, an objective inspection revealed that in case of separation, her husband would benefit from these arrangements: As his expenses focused mainly on the loan for the *property* he purchased prior to the wedding – and which consequently would remain in his possession after a possible separation, Antonietta concentrated her expenditures on the *family's day-to-day living*. As long as the couple stays married, these arrangements might be indeed perceived as fair by the couple. However, in case of separation or divorce, Antonietta would meet disadvantages.

In Cagliari, only a few couples opted for a strict separation of household budgets. Apart from one exception, these women were living in cohabitation. None of the interviewees had children at the time of the interview. Generally, the women enjoyed having separate spending money, as according to their statements, this arrangement gave them the freedom to meet personal needs, such as expensive hobbies or the necessity to support family members.

Further, in contrast to Bologna, only very few interviewees in Cagliari reported unsettled economic arrangements. Most couples discussed these issues and found individual solutions regarding how to pay certain expenditures and how to deal with property.

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[207] "Qualcosa ogni tanto la mettiamo in questo conto e non si toccano questi. Sono messi da parte. Risparmi diciamo (…) Principalmente perché prima o poi serviranno. Abbiamo intenzione di cercare casa, di comprare casa perciò serviranno per i mobili, qualcosa."

As a third dimension of gender relations, we focused on *labor market arrangements* among couples. In Cagliari, interviewees as well as their partners suffered job precariousness, unemployment, and underpay. This accounted not only for the initial stage of labor market entry, but affected almost the entire occupational career. As we saw previously, marriage-oriented couples among the Cagliari sample decided for a wedding only after having reached a certain level of economic stability. Consequently married women were on average older and tended to have a somewhat more secure occupational position than women who cohabited. However, when decided for a child, both married and unmarried women faced difficulties combining family and professional life. Employed women, for example, found themselves in trouble finding proper childcare. *Insufficient daycare facilities* for children constrained them to postpone re-entering the labor market. Other interviewees were forced to search for cost-intensive alternative solutions.

Again, self-employed women were in a particularly bad position. Since they were not entitled to maternity benefits, self-employed and freelancers were compelled to make the best of their partner's economic support or to combine work and family.

Even more difficult was the situation for women who had no secure employment position when they became mothers. These interviewees encountered huge problems keeping their current position or finding a new one. Antonietta (36), for instance, had a temporary employment position in a public enterprise, which was usually extended every two years. Before giving birth to a child, she wanted to be sure not to lose her contract. Antonietta emphasized the importance of demonstrating one's abilities and competences before becoming a mother, so that "one's qualities are already valuated"[208]. However, irrespective of the difficult labor market situation in Cagliari, women desired combining work and family in a way that allowed them to bring up their children on their own. Mariagrazia (40), cohabiting and mother of two children, was self-employed. Despite foregone income, she gave up working full-time. This way she was able to take care of her offspring:

"And I think that when you both work, you have little time for the family, and you have to use one of the two salaries for a baby sitter, cleaning the house, buying processed food because you don't have time to cook, the children … Basically, I'd rather have more financial restrictions and spend my money on the basics rather

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[208] "Una volta che rimani incinta devi sapere che le tue qualità devono essere state già valutate."

than have a higher income and then throw the money away here and there and I can take care of my own things and my children. I have time for them, you see."[209]

Also Marinella (33), cohabiting and (still) childless, planned to subordinate her professional career. She intended to reduce her weekly working hours as soon as she had offspring. Marinella emphasized: "If I have a baby, I will raise it myself, otherwise I could [just] take care of my nephew."[210]

In short, women in Cagliari faced extraordinarily strong difficulties finding a proper employment position that fitted their professional education and provided adequate income and job security. This endeavor became even more difficult as soon as the women became mothers. Anyway, due to expensive childcare (if available) or to a reduction of working hours, having a child resulted in a reduction of economic means that women had at their disposal. This reduction, however, was only feasible as long as their partner contributed financially. In light of these observations, it is understandable that mothers and mothers-to-be opted for marriage – which promised a higher level of economic security in case of separation – instead of cohabitation.

9.5.3 Comparing Gender Relations in Bologna and Cagliari

In order to investigate gender relations among couples and their impact on cohabitation among the regional settings of Bologna and Cagliari, we focused on three dimensions, namely *housework, economic, and labor market arrangements* among interviewees and their partners.

The analysis of housework arrangements among both regional settings revealed different pattern in Bologna and Cagliari. Whereas in the North a high number of (rather modern) women sought for an *equal distribution* of domestic duties, most interviewees in Sardinia accepted a *gender-based division* of housework. The data gave evidence that women in Bologna attached importance to the partner's involvement into household tasks, be it by performing duties traditionally performed by women (such as cleaning up) or be it by

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[209] "Penso che poi quando tutti e due lavorano c'e' poco tempo per la famiglia e uno dei due stipendi lo devi destinare alla baby sitter, alla pulizia della casa, compri cibi confezionati perché non hai tempo per cucinarli, le bambine … insomma, preferisco avere più restrizioni economiche e spendere per l'essenziale piuttosto che avere più entrate e poi buttare via i soldi da una parte all'altra e intanto io mi seguo le mie cose, le mie bambine. Ho tempo per loro, ecco."

[210] "… comunque se il figlio lo faccio me lo voglio allevare io, quindi … altrimenti mi tengo il nipotino."

claiming for a cleaning lady as precondition for cohabitation. In contrast, interviewees in Cagliari struggled less with their partners about the division of tasks within the household. They generally accepted their main responsibility for domestic work and were content when their partners demonstrated respect for these efforts. It is in fact striking that women with rather modern attitudes toward family formation – thus, women who perceived their union as an alternative to marriage – sought less for gender equality in household tasks in Cagliari than was the case in Bologna. Actually, previous studies on domestic arrangements of Italians support the observed differences by region of residence. Sartori (2002) used the data of the 2000 IARD survey – a survey that focused on behaviors and attitudes of young adults in Italy – to show different types of household arrangements among couples. She showed that the traditional model of gender segregation, where the woman stays at home and takes care of the housework while her partner is the only breadwinner, is most widespread in the South. The highest participation of male partners in household chores was found in the North.[211]

Further, our qualitative data gives evidence for the impact of *previous living experiences* and of *gender roles within the family of origin* on men's willingness to participate in chores. In both regional contexts – but especially in Bologna – women experienced more support in domestic tasks if their partner had lived on his own or in a student flat before entering cohabitation. Men, in contrast, who stayed with their family of origin until union formation, were least disposed to help. South and Spitze (1994) report this correlation as well. In addition, interviewees in Cagliari emphasized recurrently that they found the gender-based division of tasks, which they practice now themselves, also in their family of origin. This is actually in line with findings by Cunningham (2001). In his study on the United States, he found that the extent to which fathers participate in stereotypically female tasks when their sons are relatively young impacts the sons' participation in household duties when they becomes adults.

We also found that although a group of women in Bologna and in Cagliari had rather modern attitudes toward union and family formation, both groups showed different behaviors with respect to housework distribution. The fact that in Bologna, women were surrounded to a much higher extent by "modern" attitudes and behaviors than was the case in Cagliari might explain these differences. A study by Fuwa (2004) found that

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[211] Rizzi and colleagues (2008) found a correlation between the number of hours Italian women work inside and outside the household and their desire for another child.

individual-level factors have a stronger effect on the division of household tasks for women who live in countries with more gender equality than in countries with less equality between genders. The same might be true for regions with different levels of gender equality within one country.

As a second dimension, we investigated financial arrangements. Our analyses revealed that in Bologna and Cagliari different patterns of economic behavior prevailed. Couples in Bologna preferred *separate household budgets* to a much greater extent than couples in Cagliari. In the South, in contrast, couples showed a stronger *tendency to pool money* in a common bank account and to compensate expenditures of the other partner. Thus, the extent to which married and unmarried couples entered into a *commitment* seems to be much larger in Cagliari compared to Bologna. We assume that the unstable labor market situation in Sardinia and resulting economic shortages were responsible for the stronger financial involvement of partners. Furthermore, couples in Cagliari were inclined in time to open a common savings account in order to put money aside for a future purchase of a flat. This *early pooling of earnings* provides additional evidence for the fact that relationships in Cagliari were often entered with the intention of forming an enduring union.

However, with respect to financial arrangements, couples in both regional contexts showed commonalities. Couples in each city who had a joint household economy as well as those having a mix of joint and separate household budgets were either cohabiting or married. However, interviewees who opted for strictly separate financial arrangements were generally living in an informal union. Women in this group also had children less often than those who shared income at least partially. Previous research found that the decision on individual or joint management of finances depends to a large extent on the expectations couples have for their common future (Allmendinger et al. 2001). Treas (1993) argues that factors such as the likely continuity of the relationship and specific investments (e.g. for children) influence the way couples deal with money. Our data show that married couples and those with children, i.e. couples who have already invested considerably into their union, opted mainly for a joint or semi-joint household budget, whereas cohabiters chose to share financial means more strictly. Ludwig-Mayerhofer (2000) as well as Treas and Widmer (2000) find similar evidence. They show that couples, who experience cohabitation as well as those who cohabited in the past were more inclined to have an individual management of finances than couples without this experience.

One major question, however, is whether the separate or common use of earnings reflects or rather impacts gender (in)equalities among couples. Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Allmendinger (2003) point to the fact that money has the potential to convey and reinforce gender inequalities within unions. On the other hand, the authors are aware that women's income might accelerate gender equity. They argue that it is not money per se which leads to gender equity or inequity, but the kind of existing gender and relationship concepts within groups of people or societies. According to the authors, two axes impact the way couples organize financial issues: (1) country-specific arrangements of giving and taking of economic means (individually geared, as in Sweden or the United States, compared with household-related, as in Italy and Germany); and (2) the kind of social security a country grants in case of illness, unemployment, or old age, for example – are rights for social benefits preemptive for all individuals or do people have to take care of these benefits on their own? In both respects, Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Allmendinger (2003) derive several assumptions. In their point of view, the head of the household has more power to enforce his economic interests in countries where policies of giving and taking are geared toward the household as compared to states with individual geared policies. Further, the authors assume that individual planning for future social security is less important in countries where social rights are preemptive. Countries which do not care for these social rights, in contrast, ask individuals for a higher degree of personal planning. In these countries, financial planning is supposed to cover a broad span of time. Thus, Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Allmendinger argue that the context in which people live impacts to a certain extent on the way couples organize financial issues. Using their approach, Italy can be characterized as a country with household geared policies and non-preemptive social rights. Hence, economic arrangements should be marked by a powerful head of the household as well as long-term planning of financial investments into social security such as housing property.

Actually, on the latter point, we identified several such cases – particularly in Sardinia. Couples started early to take into consideration and to realize the purchase of common housing property. As to the power of the household's head, our data give no clear evidence. Though we observed several cases of *gendered expenditures* among couples in both regional settings, several women reported equal spending as well. However, we have to take into account that informal unions are not affected by marriage-based policies of giving and taking. Consequently, the head of the household has less of the power that Ludwig-

Mayerhofer and Allmendinger discuss. Nonetheless, especially married women with children as well as women with long lasting relationships reported gendered expenditures: Whereas male partners paid for "structured" expenses, such as the rent or the loan for the housing, and costs for gas, electricity and water, women were responsible for the family's food, clothes for the kids, the babysitter, telephone bills, and so forth. Nyman (2002, 1999) found evidence for the same phenomenon in Sweden. In her qualitative study, she refers to female expenses on family consumption as "gray zone expenditures." The different spheres of spending resulted, according to Nyman (2002), in inequalities among genders. With reference to Spain, the same is argued by Diaz Martinez et al. (2004), who come to the conclusion that the contributions men make are generally overvalued. The share of spending women are responsible for, in contrast, tends to be appreciated less. Actually, in our study we found the same mechanism among those women, who reported about gendered expenditures.

As a third dimension, we focused on labor market arrangements among couples. Previous research on gender relations in Italy underlined the unfavorable situation of women in the country: The *lack of adequate childcare* for children aged 0-3 as well as the *strong interdependencies within the family*, constrain women to reduce working hours or to abstain even completely from the labor market once taking care of children (Saraceno 1994; Meyers et al. 1999; Trifiletti 1999; Bussemarker and van Kersbergen 1999). Thus, women with childcare responsibilities tend to be better protected against economic shortages (e.g. in case of separation) when married rather than cohabiting. Therefore, we argued that mothers and mothers-to-be are particularly inclined to enter marriage.

Our findings give support for this assumption. We found evidence for the *one-sided occupational restrictions* women incurred when becoming parent. Neither in Bologna, nor in Cagliari did male partners consider applying for paternity leave or reduced working hours. Almost universally, women took the main responsibility for rearing the couple's offspring – this happened irrespective of the fact, whether women cohabited or were married. In both regional contexts, interviewees faced more or less strong difficulties finding proper childcare facilities. Often they opted for hiring cost-intensive alternatives, such as a babysitter. Nonetheless, women met a *problem reconciling work and family life*. Especially self-employed and freelancers, who constitute about 15% of interviewees in each of our city samples, suffered the absence of maternity benefits. This constrained them to restart

working soon after childbirth or to be economically dependent on their partner. Fewest problems faced those women who lived in Bologna and were occupied in the public sector: They enjoyed relative employment security and generous working time regulations. In contrast, interviewees among the Bologna sample, who worked in a private enterprise, feared usually the loss of their position, as employers rarely agreed on part time schedules. For these women the reduction of working hours was often accompanied by a change of employment and by *occupational downgrading*. The situation was even worse for women in Cagliari. They faced difficulties finding an adequate professional position both, before and after childbirth. Especially when they became mothers, women in Cagliari had trouble meeting the requirements of a weak employment market, which is littered with highly qualified and flexible job-seekers. Thus, in both cities, not only mothers, but also mothers-to-be, perceived problems of work–life reconciliation.

Both these perceptions as well as actual experiences render the decision for marriage plausible. Once women decided to have children, they were constrained either to reduce their working hours and lose income or to invest additional financial means into childcare services. In both cases, women depended on their partner, since economically such an endeavor is not feasible as a single mother in Italy. Being married guaranteed mothers to compensate their loss of earnings once the union comes to an end. And in fact, several of our interviewees referred to these drawbacks and opted for marriage when becoming a parent (see also Section 8.4 on the impact of perceived legal regulations on cohabitation and marriage).

9.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the influence of informal institutions on non-marital union formation in Italy. In particular, we analyzed the extent to which factors such as the family, friends, the local Catholic culture, and prevailing gender relations impact couples when facing the choice for cohabitation and marriage. Table 9.2 summarizes these influences in Bologna and Cagliari.

We started our analyses by examining if and how *parents* intervene in young adults' decisions for marital and non-marital relationships. Since the results of our quantitative analysis contradict previous research on the stronger impact of the father relative to the

mother, we were particularly interested in investigating the way *mothers and fathers* interact with their adult daughters when the latter are about to enter cohabitation. Our findings show that parental opinions toward informal unions were largely shaped by individual characteristics of the respective parent, basically by the level of education, occupation, area of residence, and previous experiences regarding traditional and alternative living arrangements. Parents holding a high educational level, employed, coming from an urban context, and having experienced alternative living arrangements themselves were found to have the most favorable opinions toward cohabitation. In sharp contrast to that, we identified the least favorable attitudes toward non-marital relationships among parents holding a low level of education, having no job (in the case of mothers, that is being a housewife), living in rural areas, and having directly entered a marriage.

We further discovered that adult daughters referred mainly to their mothers when talking and negotiating union formation decisions. Depending on whether the latter had rather opposing or supporting attitudes toward cohabitation, adult daughters were advised to enter or not a non-marital union. However, whether, in the end, young adults accommodated toward the wishes of their parents was mainly down to two crucial factors: the *strength of family ties* and the *amount of support* (both economically and non-economically) given in the past, at the time of the interview and assumed to be given in the future. In both regional settings, young adults were much more inclined to meet parental expectations when they had a rather close relationship to their parents and when they were supported generously or expected such support to come in the future. We actually found that the latter point was of particular importance in the Cagliari context where unemployment is high and young adults are strongly confronted with financial insecurity. This way, formal factors, such as the labor market situation, reinforce the power of informal factors.

The interviews provide further ample evidence that the majority of parents in both Bologna and Cagliari had rather negative attitudes toward cohabitation – though this accounted to a stronger extent to Cagliari than to Bologna. Given the mechanism of parental influence identified among the interviews, we assume that a stronger readiness of parents to support their adult children when deciding for cohabitation would accelerate the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy to a considerable extent. However, it is rather unlikely that parental attitudes that have developed over a long period of time and were recurrently strengthened by the society as a whole, will change in the short run.

Table 9.2: Summary of influence of informal institutions on cohabitation

	Bologna	**Cagliari**
Role of family ties	***Parental attitudes toward cohabitation*** *Women with lower educated parents, including mothers who were housewives and/or had come from rural areas, experienced the strongest parental protest when they entered an informal union. In contrast, interviewees who grew up in the cities of Bologna or Cagliari, women with more highly educated parents and those with employed mothers faced much fewer (if any) difficulties with parents.* *Especially in Bologna, women whose mothers experienced living arrangements other than the traditional were encouraged by their mothers to enter an informal union.*	
	Family ties *The more important the family was for the respondents, the more they accommodated toward the views and attitudes of their parents, both in Bologna and in Cagliari.* *Among both samples,* **mothers had a decisive role** *when it came to informal union formation as daughters were used to approaching their mothers when taking important decisions. Mothers who opposed cohabitation tended to discourage their daughter from cohabitation. These mothers tried to convince their adult children to enter marriage as soon as possible. Mothers with positive evaluations of cohabitation, on the other side, agreed to entry into informal union. This mechanism seems to be stronger in Cagliari than in Bologna.*	
	Impact of economic and non-economic support *Future economic and non-economic factors played a stronger role in Bologna.*	*Past and current financial support was more important in Cagliari.*
Influence of friends	*Interviewees decided for cohabitation in a context of* **likeminded friendships***: Friends were often cohabiting too and/or evaluated cohabitation in a positive way.*	*Among their circle of friends, interviewees were generally* **forerunners** *as far as cohabitation was concerned. In most cases, friends appreciated cohabitation and were content and happy with the interviewee's choice for an informal union. However, some friends reacted with criticism and envy.*
Role of religion	*Religious women tended to have difficult relations to church rules and dogmas. They questioned their religion critically and almost all Catholic interviewees did not practice their beliefs.* *Women did not perceive a conflict between cohabitation and their Catholic believe, but were rather influenced in another way: As they understood*	*Women who declared themselves not to be Catholic turned out to have an ambiguous relation to church. They tended to transfigure the Catholic religion by absorbing certain values and moral concepts while disregarding others. Hence, just a minority of non-religious women were indeed atheistic.* *Women perceived a conflict between cohabitation and their Catholic believe.*

	Bologna	Cagliari
	marriage per se as essential religious act, non-religious women abstained not only from a church wedding, but also from a civil marriage.	*They stated that religion gave an additional impetus to transform their relationship into a legal union. This way, Catholicism had a direct influence on union formation in Cagliari.*
	*In both cities, women emphasized they were surrounded by a specific **local culture**: Women were raised in the Catholic tradition, were baptized and attended church services regularly when young. Independently, whether women distanced from church or not, all were affected by Catholic morals and ethics. This had an effect on union formation also.*	
Gender approach	*Women sought an **equal distribution** of domestic duties.*	*Most interviewees accepted a **gender-based division** of housework.*
	*The majority of couples preferred **separate household budgets**.*	*Couples showed a strong tendency to pool money in a **common bank account** and to compensate also expenditures of the other partner.*
		*Further, couples were inclined to open in time a **common savings account** in order **to put money aside** for a future purchase of a flat.*
	*Women incurred **one-sided occupational restrictions** when becoming parents. Almost universally, women took the main responsibility for rearing the couple's offspring. Given the fact that interviewees faced more or less strong difficulties finding proper childcare facilities, they met a **problem reconciling work and family life**.*	

Besides the influence of earlier cohorts on cohabitation in Italy, we examined the impact of individuals coming from the same generation as our interviewees, that is the influence of *friends and acquaintances*. Here we identified several differences between both regional contexts: Whereas women in Bologna were largely surrounded by friends having the same experiences as far as union and family formation is concerned, in Cagliari this was much less the case. Though, in the latter, interviewees reported that most friends admired the "courageous" decision for cohabitation, few were able to follow similarly. A minority of friends even reacted with skepticism and envy. However, in both cities, interviewees reported a high degree of appreciation of cohabitation among their circle of friends and – at least in Bologna – this appreciation transformed into an imitation of informal union formation. Although we observed this kind of peer group adoption in Bologna, one needs to reflect carefully about this effect. Given that the greater majority of our interviewees

held high and very high educational degrees and used to work full-time, we took a rather selective group of adults under consideration. This group did not necessarily have an effect on adults with different characteristics e.g. lower levels of education, as those are even less prone to have an employment position that allows for a cost-intensive choice such as cohabitation. Further, these adults might show different value orientations. In this respect, Nazio and Blossfeld (2003) might be right when assuming that in Italy the process of peer group adoption is slowed down by the selectivity of the forerunners. Nonetheless, the more these highly educated and employed adults decide on cohabitation, the more it is likely that their behavior will affect also individuals belonging to other groups of the society.

As a third informal institution, we considered the role of *religion* and the *local culture*. The interview material provided evidence for the strong orientation toward Catholic values and moral concepts in Bologna and Cagliari. Yet, only women living in Cagliari perceived a conflict between their decision for cohabitation and Catholic views. This perception actually shaped their union formation behavior in that they named this conflict as one of several reasons for entering marriage. In Bologna, by contrast, Catholic values had a different effect. Recurrently, women emphasized that they abstained from entering marriage through any kind of wedding (church or civil) as the wedding per se was perceived as a quintessentially religious act. This way or the other, Catholicism and the prevalence of Catholic values had direct consequences for union formation in both regional contexts. Even interviewees who were not religious at all emphasized that they were surrounded by a local culture that continuously defends Catholic morals and ethics. As, according to these morals and ethics, cohabitation is a living arrangement not to be chosen, Catholicism as well as the local culture hamper the spread of informal unions in Italy.

Lastly, we focused on *gender relations* and their impact on informal union formation. In Chapter 2, we argued that in the Italian welfare state women rather than men tend to be disadvantaged. Given that the welfare state makes few attempts to disburden women from their childcare responsibilities, the latter are often constrained to leave their employment when becoming mothers. Based on this, we assumed women to favor marriage over cohabitation once they decide on or actually have children, as in this situation only marriage allows for a higher level of social security.

In order to test this hypothesis, we examined gender relations among our interviewees by analyzing the *housework, financial, and employment arrangements* within the couple. As to housework and financial arrangements we found sharp differences between Bologna and Cagliari. Whereas women in Bologna tended to strive for an equal distribution of domestic duties and tended to separate income and spending consequently, women in Cagliari accepted a gender-based division of household tasks and were inclined to pool their earnings with their partner. However, despite these obvious regional differences in gender relations, as to employment arrangements, women in both settings reported similar experiences. Both mothers and mothers-to-be perceived serious problems in reconciling work and family life, and several of them underlined the advantages of being married once they had a child. It actually seems that the structural conditions with regard to childcare services and the resulting discrimination of women impacts employment arrangements among both settings regardless of the actual prevailing gender role ideals – that is rather emancipated in Bologna and still unbalanced in Cagliari. Thus, again we found that formal institutions (here regulations of the welfare state) impact informal institutions, namely gender arrangements. We assume that, especially in Bologna, mothers were less inclined to choose marriage for social security reasons if structural conditions would allow them to combine motherhood either with employment, or with a certain level of social security e.g. through welfare state assistance.

Analyzing the impact of informal institutions on cohabitation in Italy, our interview material revealed the negative influence of several factors on the diffusion of informal unions in the country. However, whereas factors such as religion and the local culture have such a negative effect per se, other factors are reinforced through formal institutions. The power of parents, for instance, is strengthened through the unfavorable situation of young adults on the Italian labor market. Further, despite rather emancipated gender role attitudes among our interviewees in Bologna, structural conditions pushed them to decide on traditional employment and/or living arrangements. We wonder to what extent the effect of these factors changes once the structural conditions change. Here we refer in particular to a relaxation of the labor market situation for young adults as well as government attempts to facilitate a reconciliation of work and family life for women.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

Over the last two or three decades, cohabitation has started to spread through most European countries. In the Mediterranean area and particularly in Italy, however, informal unions have gained little importance; only recently have studies found indications of cohabitation diffusion in these countries. The major aim of our study was to present an extensive explanation for the so far hesitant spread of informal union in Italy. We therefore focused on two research objectives. The first objective was directed toward measuring the impact of several *individual and background factors* on the transition to cohabitation. The second objective referred to the *underlying perceptions, norms, and motivations* influencing individual *decision-making* in favor of cohabitation. We addressed primarily the impact of *cultural ideas*, *institutional conditions,* and *economic constraints* on informal union formation. In order to achieve insights into both research objectives, we employed a mixed-method design, that is, using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Analyzing the phenomenon of informal unions in Italy has also shed light on the question as to whether or not Italy has actually followed the path toward a *second demographic transition.* So far, there is inconsistent evidence for that assumption. Whereas Italy is recording extraordinarily low levels of fertility, we observe only a scant diversification of alternative living arrangements. In addition, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, marriage is keeping its central place as the preferred way of life. Based on these observations, in Chapter 3, we formulated the following questions:

> *Are the prevailing formal and informal institutions the main cause of the so far hesitant spread of cohabiting unions? Or might a different meaning attached to cohabitation and marriage be responsible for this pace too?*

In the former case, a change in formal and informal institutions (e.g. a relaxation of the labor market or the development of a positive evaluation of cohabitation in society) would probably lead to an increase of non-marital unions. In this situation, Italy would indeed follow the path toward a second demographic transition. In the latter case, however,

marriage would remain the most important kind of union in the country even though conditions favorable to informal unions might improve. We shall discuss our findings in light of this ongoing debate in the concluding section of this chapter.

This chapter is structured as follows: In Section 10.2 we present the main results from the quantitative part of the study and in Section 10.3 we focus on the qualitative research findings. Section 10.4 is devoted to the integration of findings coming from both methodological approaches. We conclude with a final discussion and look ahead to the prospect of future research in Section 10.5.

10.2 Substantial Quantitative Research Findings

The starting point of the quantitative investigation in this study was the assumption that women with certain individual and background characteristics have a higher risk of entering a non-marital union than women without these attributes. Our hypotheses were mainly based on earlier studies and research findings. In the main, we investigated two assumptions. As to *individual characteristics*, we hypothesized that women with a high level of education and those having already completed school or university, have higher risks of forming an informal relationship than women with low levels of education and women still enrolled in an educational institution (with reference to Rossi 2003; Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Angeli et al. 1999; De Sandre et al. 1997; Billari et al. 2000; Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002). Second, as regards *background characteristics*, we assumed that fathers with higher cultural resources, that is, a high level of education would accept their adult daughter's decision to cohabit more readily than fathers with a lower level of education. Hence, women with relatively highly educated fathers would have a higher risk of entering into cohabitation than women with fathers who were less highly educated (with reference to Rosina and Fraboni 2004).

Using data from the two waves of the *Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane* of 1997 and 1999, we employed techniques of event history analysis to investigate the transition to cohabitation and direct marriage among women born between 1940 and 1974. As a *general finding,* our study revealed that Italian women who are relatively secularized, that is, women from more recent birth cohorts, women who have grown up in relatively modern contexts such as those found in northern and central Italy, and women with little or no Roman

Catholic Church affiliation tend to enter cohabitation more often than do other women. Further, we provided evidence that women in their thirties are more likely to form a non-marital relationship than women in their twenties, as is common in most other European countries. Hardly any support was found for the impact of employment status on cohabitation; though women who are active in the labor market showed somewhat a higher risk of entering an informal union than inactive women, these figures were not significant.

As to our main assumptions, we arrived at the conclusion that, firstly, the effect of *women's own educational level* on cohabitation is not so clear-cut, as it strongly interrelates with another factor: the educational level of parents. Excluding that factor from our model, highly educated women have indeed the highest risk of experiencing the transition to cohabitation. As regards the impact of *educational attendance*, our data support the previous hypothesis: Being enrolled in an educational institution reduces the risk of deciding to cohabit, whereas women with completed education have a higher chance of living together with their partner.

Secondly, we analyzed the impact of *parental education* on the transition to cohabitation. In contrast to findings from previous studies, e.g. Rosina and Fraboni (2004), our investigation points to the important role of maternal education in the process of entering into an informal union. Compared to paternal education, the mother's level of education proved to be more important. In particular, the analysis shows that whenever both parents have the same level of education, the risks increase with the level of education. Whenever the father is more highly educated than the mother, the daughter's risk of forming a non-marital relationship is lower. The opposite holds true when the mother is more highly educated than the father. Interestingly, the same factors that accelerate entry into cohabitation hamper the direct transition into marriage: Our study provides evidence that the risk of entering marriage directly is significantly lower for women with two highly educated parents or a mother with a higher level of education than the father. From these findings, we assume that the education of the mother becomes highly important when a daughter decides on a living arrangement.

The *mechanism* behind these results may work in two ways. On the one hand, mothers with high levels of education might show more *open minded attitudes* than mothers with a lower educational degree. This way they might raise their daughters in a more *emancipated context*,

which might have impact on daughters' decisions between traditional and modern living arrangements. On the other side, it seems possible that mothers with higher educational levels than their husbands have more *power to exert influence* on their partners in order to *support their daughters* when they are about to decide on an unconventional relationship such as cohabitation.

However, despite these first insights into the interrelationship among several individual and background factors on women's transition to cohabitation, we still lack an *understanding of the underlying mechanism* that guides our findings. The quantitative results allow us to make certain guesses about this mechanism, but offer no explanation. Consequently, to analyze how mothers and fathers interact with their daughters when the latter are inclined to consider cohabitation, we employed a qualitative research design. Among other factors, we focused on the parental influence on cohabitation.

10.3 Substantial Qualitative Research Findings

In our qualitative study, we investigated the influence of several formal and informal institutions on the so far hesitant spread of non-marital unions in the North and the South of Italy. Whereas *formal institutions* refer to those institutions that are generally created and arranged by agents such as the law, political systems, or the economy, *informal institutions* do not rely on an external authority's monitoring, such as social norms or conventions (Voss 2001). As to formal institutions, we focused on the influence of the labor market, the housing market, and the perception of legal regulations on cohabitation. Informal institutions referred to the influence of parents, friends, the Catholic culture, and gender roles on non-marital union formation. The analysis of our qualitative data revealed the different influences these factors had on the diffusion of cohabitation in each regional context.

Compared to Cagliari, in *Bologna* we found relatively favorable surrounding conditions for the spread of informal unions. Young adults generally faced few problems finding employment, though most jobs were unstable and fixed-term. However, the availability of these jobs allowed at least for a certain level of economic security. This *relative financial security* made it possible for them to afford the costs related to cohabitation, e.g. regular expenditures for housing, gas, electricity, food, and so on. At the same time, the young

adults were *relatively flexible* as far as housing was concerned. Quite often, they could choose to live in housing provided by the family or turn to one of the numerous flats available for rent – even though even renting or purchasing a flat was quite expensive in Bologna. Parental attitudes and reactions to cohabitation were also rather favorable. Most parents supported their adult children's decision for cohabitation and continued to provide *economic and non-economic help*. Given the fact that most cohabiters were surrounded by like-minded friends, they experienced a high degree of *encouragement* from them. So, generally, none of the factors cited so far effectively hindered the spread of cohabitation among our interviewees. The same was true for the impact of religion. As most cohabiters were not religious, they did not experience any conflict between the Catholic culture and their decision for cohabitation.

Our analysis did reveal, however, that in Bologna two factors influenced cohabitation in a negative way: gender roles and the perception of legal regulations. As to gender roles, we found the following effect: Since women faced huge *problems combining work and family life* – especially those employed in private enterprises – they perceived marriage as the more attractive choice once they had a child. We assume, therefore, that both a legal framework that promotes the reconciliation of work and family life as well as a stronger integration of men in childcare responsibilities would increase the attractiveness of cohabitation while reducing that of marriage.

As to the second negative factor, namely the perception of legal regulations, our findings point to the perceived drawbacks of cohabitation. In Bologna, women saw *legal disadvantages* of living together, especially when giving birth to a child and when considering future consequences such as inheritance regulations or pensions. Given this perception, several women considered marriage as more attractive than cohabitation. For some women, this was reason enough to get married (see Figure 10.1 for a summary of institutional influence on cohabitation in Bologna).

We further observed that women in Bologna tended to see cohabitation, by no means exclusively as a pre-marital step, but rather as an *alternative to marriage*. In addition, most interviewees had experienced living alone or sharing a flat with other students before braving the step of living with the partner. Most women underlined the importance of *gaining experience* before cohabitation. On the basis of these findings, therefore, we draw the

conclusion that, in Bologna, cohabitation was mainly perceived as *a choice*, which was positively evaluated – not only by cohabiters themselves, but also by several of their family members, friends, and acquaintances.

Figure 10.1: Influence of formal and informal institutions on cohabitation in Bologna
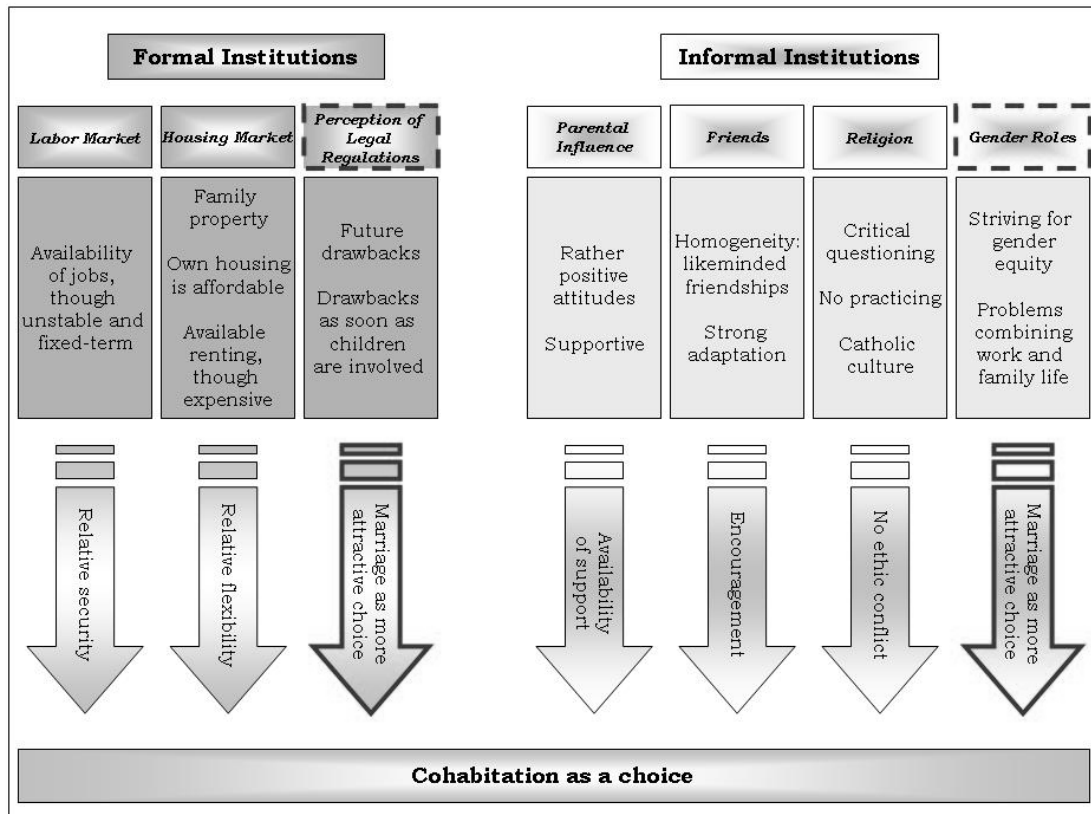
Note: Extra bold borders indicate those factors that hamper the diffusion of cohabitation in the given regional context.

Quite different are the findings in *Cagliari*, where unfavorable environmental conditions for the diffusion of cohabitation prevailed. The Sardinian labor market, which is characterized by unemployment, predominance of precarious or underpaid jobs, made it difficult for adults to afford living away from their family of origin. Without the security of regular income, young adults were *unable to meet the costs of living*. The housing market situation hindered entry into cohabitation additionally; Cagliari offered only limited opportunities for renting, and both *renting and purchasing a flat was hardly affordable* for adults facing economic insecurity. Further, most interviewees aspired to home ownership, which – in a situation of limited earning capacities – tended to delay entering into an informal union. In contrast to Bologna, the greater majority of parents in Cagliari tended to see cohabitation in a negative way. These *parents opposed cohabitation* and withdrew from economic and non-economic

support. Some other parents, however, continued to assist financially but expected marriage to follow after a while. Thus, *economic help was conditional* on young adults' behavior.

As regards the influence of friends on cohabitation, the analysis provided evidence that our interviewees tended to be *precursors* as far as living with the partner was concerned. Though several friends had similar attitudes on cohabitation, the women were often compelled to abandon their desire for living in an informal union; either they lacked the financial means necessary for cohabitation or felt unable to convince their parents of this living arrangement. Whereas some friends reacted with *admiration* on interviewees' entry into a non-marital union, others demonstrated *envy* or *skepticism*. In addition, several interviewees felt uncomfortable with their choice for cohabitation as they perceived a *conflict* between that choice and the *moral concepts of the Roman Catholic Church*. As in Bologna, women in Cagliari faced *difficulties reconciling the responsibility for children with the demands of the labor market*. In such situations, they felt economically better protected within marriage than within cohabitation. The same was true for the perception of legal regulations. In addition to those legal disadvantages cited by interviewees in Bologna, the Cagliari women emphasized especially the *immediate implications* of cohabitation, such as the loss of family allowances (see also Figure 10.2).

Interestingly, in Cagliari, a number of *formal and informal institutions influenced each other in a mutual way*. In doing so, several factors gained in importance. Parental influence, for instance, was strongly reinforced by the weak labor market and scarce housing opportunities. As young adults suffered a high level of labor market insecurity and could not count on state support, they were constrained to rely on their parents. However, parents' role as the only providers of social security gave them power to interfere in their adult children's lives. Another example of added impact was the perception of legal regulations. As we have seen, women in Cagliari referred particularly to the immediate legal drawbacks of cohabitation as compared to marriage. In sum, we assume that the overall difficult economic situation in Cagliari sensitized women tor the high amount of social security involved in a marriage.

As opposed to their counterparts in Bologna, most women in Cagliari perceived their union as a *pre-marital step*. Usually, couples lived together through different stages in life (such as university, entry into the labor market, and so on) before they were able to afford

the costs connected with cohabitation and, later, the costs related to marriage. Thus, although women in Cagliari showed a similar behavior to those in Bologna, they had quite different attitudes toward union formation. Women talked about their desire to get married but the lack of economic means for realizing that choice (e.g. the cost of a usually high-priced wedding or their own housing). Given these findings, we argue that cohabitation in Cagliari presents itself rather as an economic *constraint* than as a choice. Though temporarily accepted, this constraint was widely seen as negative within the social environment of our interviewees.

Figure 10.2: Influence of formal and informal institutions on cohabitation in Cagliari
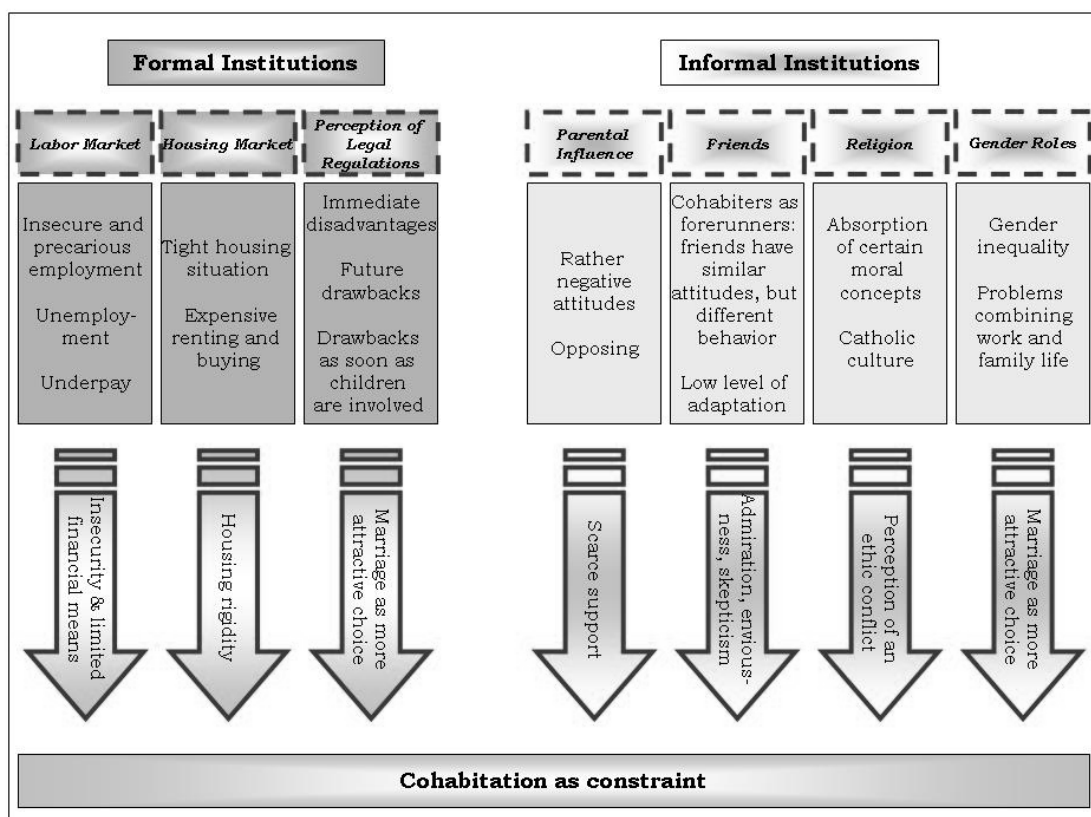
Note: Extra bold borders indicate those factors that hamper the diffusion of cohabitation in the given regional context.

Despite several differences between both regional settings, we found similarities too. A first similarity regards the *mechanism of parental influence* on cohabitation. In both contexts we found that secularized mothers – that is those showing higher levels of education, employed, living in urban areas, and having experienced alternative living arrangements themselves (especially in Bologna) – tended to support their daughter's choice for cohabitation. In contrast, mothers with low educational levels, housewives, living in rural areas, and having entered marriage directly were less appreciative of cohabitation.

Furthermore, our data provided evidence that young adults' willingness to comply with parental wishes (e.g. for or against cohabitation) depended to a large extent on the strength of family ties and the amount of support given in the past, at the moment, and expected for the future. We shall discuss these findings in more detail – also in light of the quantitative research results – in the following section.

Figure 10.3: Interplay of formal and informal institutions and their impact on cohabitation in Bologna and Cagliari (based on research findings)
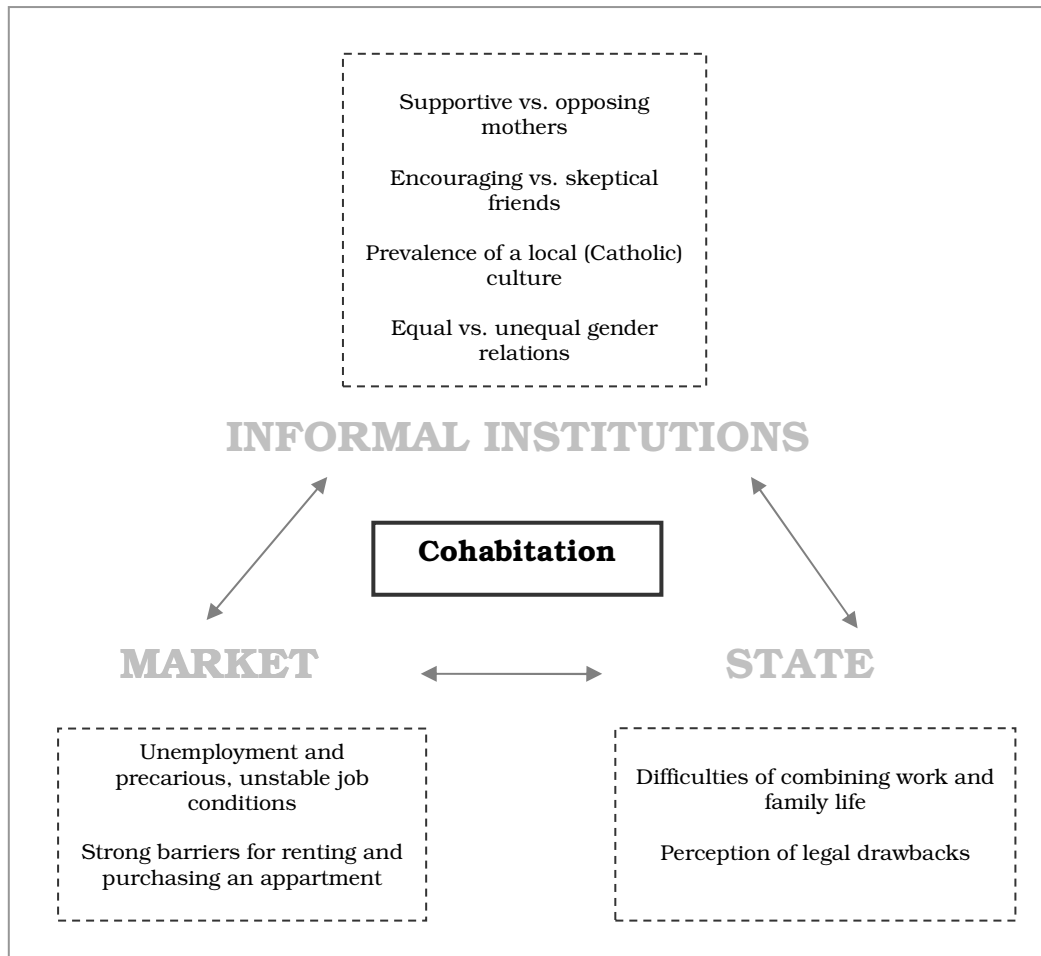
Another similarity regards the *prevalence of a specific local culture* in both Bologna and Cagliari: both Catholic as well as nonreligious women highlighted the extensive dominance of religious moral concepts in the whole of the Italian society. It is likely that these moral concepts continue to influence union and family formation patterns all over the country. Evidence for that assumption is found in the fact that almost all interviewees in both cities entered cohabitation with the intention to form a lifelong relationship. The possible end of a union was seldom taken into account. Thus, the moral concept to stay together throughout life – though it was primarily aimed at marriage – found its way into

cohabitation too. See Figure 10.3 for a schematic overview of factors impacting the transition to cohabitation in both Bologna and Cagliari.

In the following section, we focus on the integration of our quantitative and qualitative research findings.

10.4 Integrating the Quantitative and Qualitative Research Findings

As we have seen from the previous summaries of findings, the quantitative and qualitative research approaches offered rather different kinds of insights into the phenomenon of interest. Whereas the former provided evidence of the relative risks individuals with certain characteristics face as far as entry into cohabitation is concerned, the latter offered explanations for individual behavior. The aim of this section is to shed light on the relationship between findings coming from both approaches.

First of all, we focus on the fact that Italian women tend to *enter cohabitation* at a relatively *late point in life*. Here we concentrate on the reasons for that behavior. Our event history analysis revealed that women face the highest chance of entering a non-marital union after age 30. In comparison to most other European countries, this is rather late. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews we aimed at fathoming the reasons behind this delayed transition.

In the main, two factors proved to be responsible for that pattern: the particularly tight situation in the Italian labor market as well as the difficult housing conditions. Especially in Cagliari – and to a lesser extent in Bologna – young adults suffered from *unemployment and precarious, unstable job conditions*. Since our interviewees perceived having at least one stable job between the couple as a precondition for making the transition toward cohabitation, they tended to postpone informal union formation until they were successful in entering the labor market. This finding is actually in line with two other results from the survey analysis: There we found that both having left the educational system and being active in the labor market accelerate entry into cohabitation. Thus, *occupational success* and timing of cohabitation appear to be interrelated processes. Previous research assumed in fact the same correlation between employment and cohabitation (Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002; Billari et al. 2000; Grillo and Pinelli 1999).

The second factor responsible for the delayed transition toward an informal union turned out to be the housing market. This was particularly true for Cagliari, where young adults faced *strong barriers to renting and purchasing a flat*. Especially Cagliari interviewees talked about the time-consuming search for adequate and affordable housing and the resulting postponement of entering into the union. We thus observe how the ***market*** fails in providing an environment that allows young adults to act with economic independence in order to realize crucial life events such as entering into a union.

Since the Italian market fails in doing so, it is the ***family*** that is constrained to perform this function. However, as we have seen, parents are not always willing to support their adult children's choice for living in an informal union. The quantitative findings point in particular to the relationship between parental education and a women's chance to enter into cohabitation: Women with a highly educated mother as well as those having a mother with a higher level of education compared to the father showed the highest risk of experiencing a non-marital relationship. We offered two tentative explanations for these findings: First, it might be possible that mothers with higher levels of education raise their daughters in a relatively emancipated context. This way, daughters might be more inclined to choose a modern living arrangement rather than a traditional one. Second, mothers with higher levels of education than their husbands might have more power to support their daughters when they are about to decide against a conventional union than is the case for mothers with lower levels of education relative to their husbands. However, our quantitative findings do not allow for a profound analysis of the underlying mechanism. We, therefore, focus on the question of how the qualitative results contribute to the understanding of the quantitative findings.

First of all, our qualitative data revealed that *mothers played a decisive role* when it comes to cohabitation. In the main, interviewees referred to their mothers and rarely to their fathers. Further, our analysis provided evidence that mothers with higher levels of education tended to be those mothers who were most secularized. Most of them were employed, lived in urban areas (i.e. Bologna or Cagliari), and had experienced alternative living arrangements themselves. These mothers had favorable attitudes toward cohabitation and supported their daughter's choice for living together without being married. In some cases, mothers even proposed cohabitation instead of marriage. Mothers with low educational

degrees, in contrast, showed different attitudes and behavior. These mothers tended to be housewives, to live in rural areas, and to have entered marriage directly. They usually opposed cohabitation and were less or not at all willing to support their daughters. Our investigation showed that the way mothers perceived and reacted on cohabitation was crucial for women who intended to form an informal union. *Supportive mothers had a positive influence on entry into cohabitation, whereas opposing mothers hampered the transition to living with the partner.* The extent to which daughters were prone to accommodate toward their mothers wishes depended to a huge extent on the *strength of ties between mother and daughter* and on the *economic and non-economic means the family provided.*

In Bologna, we found that most mothers evaluated cohabitation rather positively. These mothers tended to raise their daughters in quite emancipated contexts. Daughters experienced, for instance, an equal distribution of rights within the parental relationship, or even parental separation. For daughters coming from these families, cohabitation was a normal choice which did not require any justification.

Quite different was the situation in Cagliari. Interviewees seldom referred to such an emancipated environment within their family of origin. As most mothers opposed cohabitation, they were rarely willing to support their daughter's choice. If they did so nevertheless, economic help was often conditional on a wedding to come. Those few mothers who showed relatively favorable attitudes toward living together, held again relatively high levels of education. Nonetheless, they experienced alternative living arrangements to a much lesser extent than was the case among mothers in Bologna. Instead of raising their children in an emancipated context, these mothers employed another "strategy" to enable their daughter's cohabitation: Generally, they exerted influence on their husbands in order to "allow" for living in a non-marital union. In the Cagliari context (and to a certain extent in Bologna as well), parental acceptance of cohabitation was crucial as only this acceptance provided security as far as parental economic and non-economic support was concerned. Without such support, few couples were able to afford the costs related to cohabitation.

The analysis, especially of the Cagliari context, showed to what extent both *the **market** and the **family** impact the diffusion of cohabitation* and how strongly both spheres are interwoven with each other. External circumstances such as housing and employment market reinforce

the power parents have on their children. Not having the opportunity to leave home and earn money led to an increased importance of parental support.

On the basis of our findings at this point, we can evaluate the suitability of the initial theoretical assumptions employed for this study. In the main, all approaches proved to be useful for the consideration of cohabitation in the Italian context (see Table 10.1 for a corresponding summary). However, we were most surprised at the way *strong family ties* in the two regional settings manifested their influence on cohabitation: Contrary to initial presumptions, a considerable group of mothers regarded cohabitation in a positive way. Further, these mothers advised their daughters to decide on cohabitation instead of marriage. Strong ties between mothers and daughters increased the likelihood that daughters accommodated toward their mothers' views.

Table 10.1: Suitability of initial theoretical assumptions

Formal Institutions	*Suitability of assumptions*
Welfare state approach	Our study confirmed that the absence of governmental support in favor of young adults reverted major responsibilities to the family and to the market. Consequently, both the family and market conditions gained in importance when young adults considered life-course choices such as cohabitation.
Labor market approach	Our results supported the assumption that insecure, low-paid, and precarious employment affected the youth, leading to high rates of youth unemployment and high levels of economic insecurity. As a consequence, young couples faced significant barriers to economically independent living, especially in Cagliari.
Housing market	We found that the prevalence of housing property and extraordinarily high rents hindered young adults in finding adequate and affordable housing. Thus, they experienced difficulties entering cohabitation.
Informal Institutions	*Suitability of assumptions*
Gender approach	On the basis of our findings, we confirmed that unequal gender relations in different spheres of life (family, work) induced women to consider marriage as soon as children were involved in a couple's relationship. Cohabitation, thus, lost in attractiveness.
Role of family ties and Religion	We found that, in several cases, young adults accommodated their parents' wishes when making important decisions such as entering into cohabitation. However, not all parents considered cohabitation a negative choice – this was true especially in Bologna. In particular, we found that women were inclined toward their mother's opinion when considering non-marital cohabitation: The stronger the ties between mother and daughter and the more important economic support was, the more daughters accommodated toward their mothers' views. Our results showed that public opinion toward cohabitation was rather negative. Only people from the same generation as our interviewees evaluated cohabitation in a positive way.

10.5 Concluding Discussion and Future Research Perspectives

The observed behavior has serious implications for other demographic events in Italy. The later young adults can afford to start living with their partners, the later they enter cohabitation, marriage, and parenthood. Studies have increasingly pointed to the comparatively high age at first birth among women in Italy (Billari et al. 2000; Bernardi et al. 2007). As regards our qualitative sample – which is not representative – we found that interviewees in Bologna gave first birth on average at age 31.5; interviewees in Cagliari did so at approximately age 34. In addition, several interviewees were not aware of the fact that their "biological clock" restricted fertility. Some women at age 40 still intended to have their first child "somewhere in the future." Especially among the Cagliari sample, we found women who started trying to conceive very late in life. Their attempt resulted in unwanted childlessness. In this respect, the slow and hampered diffusion of cohabitation needs to be considered in relation to the low rates of fertility that have begun to be typical for Italy.

As to the famous debate on Italy being a latecomer to the second demographic transition, we found evidence for the assumption that the country is following its own path toward demographic change rather than pursuing the European pattern. Though it is true that recent data found evidence of an increase of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing (and thus of a diversification of lifestyles), our findings point to a *special kind of cohabitation* that has developed and is still evolving in Italy. In the main, two findings support this assumption.

First, at the beginning of the new millennium in Italy, cohabitation was widely perceived as a pre-marital step or an alternative to marriage. In both cases, it was aimed at an *enduring union* – a future separation was seldom taken into account. As a consequence, individuals living in cohabiting unions behaved much the same as married couples. Whereas, in most European countries, cohabitation is also seen as experimental or a trial with relatively low levels of commitment, our Italian cohabiters tended to accept a commitment similar to that of marriage.

Second, most women in Cagliari chose living together as a pre-marital step and did so *out of constraint* rather than out of choice. In their recent paper, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (2008) argue actually that – in light of increasing rates of non-marital unions – even in southern

Europe, changes in values (e.g. the increasing acceptance of cohabitation) would translate into life choices; from this argument, the authors assume Italy as following the path toward a second demographic transition. Our findings in the current study, however, portray a different picture: The majority of Cagliari interviewees preferred marriage over cohabitation and decided for cohabitation nevertheless. Their precarious labor market situation as well as tight housing hindered direct entry into marriage. Thus, the increase of non-marital unions in Cagliari cannot be interpreted as a sign of that demographic transition, but must be considered with caution.

This leads us back to our initial questions: *Are the prevailing formal and informal institutions the main cause of the so far hesitant spread of cohabiting unions? Or, might a different meaning attached to cohabitation and marriage be responsible for this pace too?* As for Bologna, we found that most interviewees perceived prevailing legal regulations as well as unequal gender roles as main obstacles to entering and/or staying in cohabitation. A change in these institutions (e.g. in terms of a legal revaluation of informal unions or in terms of governmental initiatives to improve the reconciliation of family and work for both mothers and fathers) should therefore lead to an increase of cohabiting couples in that regional context. Quite different was the situation in Cagliari. There, a change in formal and informal institutions would probably have much less effect, given the strong appreciation of marriage.

Given our findings, we argue against Cagliari as being on the way toward the second demographic transition. Rather, the Sardinian pattern – and partially the Bologna pattern too – was characterized by several peculiarities that contribute toward a special kind of demographic change.

This finding in fact questions the validity of the second demographic transition approach for the Italian case. The *Italian deviation* suggests that, with respect to union and family formation, other countries might follow their own path as well. Although the importance of alternative living arrangements increased in most European countries, the kind of *motivation* to enter an informal union, to stay alone, or to marry might vary to a considerable extent among different countries. In some countries or regional contexts, the decision not to marry might be motivated, for instance, by relatively extensive state support for unmarried mothers. This might be true especially in structurally weak areas. Thus, the

consideration of demographic development should not only focus on pure statistics, but also include the *meaning* attached to demographic behavior.

Nonetheless, we assume that although marriage will probably remain the unchallenged first choice of couples' living arrangements in Italy, the importance of informal unions will grow in the *future*. Our findings point to the influence of parental levels of education and mothers' labor market activities in the acceptance of cohabitation. We suppose that the increasing numbers of more highly educated and working mothers will accelerate non-traditional living arrangements such as cohabitation. Nevertheless, this change will probably take some time. We also found indications that realization of cohabitation influenced living arrangements of younger and older siblings, and vice versa. It is not uncommon that a failed marriage of a sibling induces parents to accept cohabitation of other adult children more easily. Thus, we argue also that a horizontal diffusion of cohabitation among one generation is taking place. The first evidence for an increase in the diffusion of cohabitation is already found among younger women living in northern Italy (see, for instance, Gruppo di Coordinamento per la Demografia 2007).

Although our study provides new and essential insights into the phenomenon of cohabitation diffusion in Italy, it also points to the need for *further investigation*. Up to the time of our study, cohabitation tended to be an experience prevailing among highly educated and economically independent individuals. With an increase in its acceptance, though, more parents might be inclined to support their adult children when entering into a non-marital relationship. This will probably have an effect on medium- and lower-educated adults as well and might promote entry into informal living despite being dependent on parental economic support. Accordingly, future studies should, first of all, focus on individuals coming from all strata of education and employment situations. Second, it appears meaningful to pursue the investigation of parental attitudes toward cohabitation. We assume that the proportion of parents accepting non-traditional living arrangements, such as cohabitation, will increase in the future. A study that focuses on the rising acceptance of cohabitation among the generation of parents would certainly contribute to a profound understanding of future union formation patterns in the country.

Our findings further confirm that it is not sufficient to analyze informal union formation in Italy on a national level. The regional perspective reveals strong differences in the way

diffusion of cohabitation is influenced in both contexts of our study. We, therefore, argue for a differentiated analysis of cohabitation that takes regional variations into account. In addition, our investigation provided evidence of the strong influence of the emotional bonds between adult children and their parents on informal union formation. Given this finding, we suggest the incorporation of questions on this topic into future survey questionnaires. The same is true for past, present, and future economic and non-economic support provided by parents.

Future research should also focus on potential changes in the meaning of cohabitation. Our study supported the argument that Italy is witnessing a special kind of cohabitation that is quite different from informal unions in other European countries, given that in most cases cohabitation is aimed at a lifelong union. We wonder to what extent this perception of cohabitation might change in the future and what impact this change might have on the general pattern toward union and family formation in the country. A weakening of the so far prevailing meaning of cohabitation as an enduring union would probably lead to increasing numbers of separations among cohabiters. These kinds of changes and developments would certainly bring new and different perspectives to the traditional picture of family in Italy.

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Appendix A

Table A.1: Exposure statistics of all covariates used in the models

	Exposures in women months	Exposures in percent	Occurrences (Cohabitation)	Occurrences (Cohabitation) in percent	Occurrences (Direct Marriage)	Occurrences (Direct Marriage) in percent
			Model on Cohabitation		**Model on Direct Marriage**	
Cohort						
1940-49	108.452	25,75%	6	7,41%	788	32,35%
1950-59	104.726	24,86%	20	24,69%	795	32,64%
1960-69	141.864	33,68%	46	56,79%	710	29,15%
1970-74	66.198	15,72%	9	11,11%	143	5,87%
Parents' education						
Both low	255.220	60,59%	39	48,15%	1.749	71,80%
Mother's education higher than father's	23.409	5,56%	9	11,11%	95	3,90%
Father's education higher than mother's	70.745	16,79%	7	8,64%	323	13,26%
Both medium	31.680	7,52%	7	8,64%	150	6,16%
Both high	40.186	9,54%	19	23,46%	119	4,89%
Region of residence at age 15						
Northwest	108.169	25,68%	24	29,63%	607	24,92%
Northeast	67.098	15,93%	17	20,99%	378	15,52%
Center	63.781	15,14%	19	23,46%	368	15,11%
South	130.389	30,95%	17	20,99%	770	31,61%
Islands	51.803	12,30%	4	4,94%	313	12,85%
Religion						
Catholic	351.174	83,37%	47	58,02%	2.104	86,37%
Non-Catholic	70.066	16,63%	34	41,98%	332	13,63%
Educational attendance						
Out of education	291.251	69,14%	70	86,41%	2.323	95,36%
In education	129.989	30,86%	11	13,58%	113	4,64%
Education						
No school completion / primary	85.449	20,29%	9	11,11%	700	28,74%
Lower secondary	185.227	43,97%	27	33,33%	773	31,73%
Higher secondary	133.895	31,79%	33	40,74%	797	32,72%
University	16.669	3,96%	12	14,81%	166	6,81%
Employment contract						
Active	170.913	40,57%	49	60,49%	1.328	54,52%
Inactive	250.327	59,43%	32	39,51%	1.108	45,48%
First conception						
No first conception	411.976	97,80%	75	92,59%	2.050	84,15%
First conception	9.264	2,20%	6	7,41%	386	15,85%
Age						
15-20	189.415	44,97%	9	11,11%	325	13,34%
20-25	138.730	32,93%	23	28,39%	1.194	49,01%
25-30	61.208	14,53%	27	33,33%	721	29,60%
30-35	21.925	5,20%	16	19,75%	158	6,49%
35-40	9.962	2,36%	6	7,41%	38	1,56%

Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

Table A.2: Relative risks for the transition to cohabitation of women in Italy (including education (1) of the father (2) of the mother (3) of both parents)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Cohort			
1940-49	1	1	1
1950-59	3.47***	3.52***	3.52***
1960-69	6.41***	6.14***	6.11***
1970-74	3.85**	3.5**	3.45**
Father's education			
Low	1		1
Medium	1,02		0,67
High	1,61		0,61
Missing	0,44		1,52
Mother's education			
Low		1	1
Medium		1,67	2.1**
High		3.00***	4.27***
Missing		0.17*	0.11*
Region of residence at age 15			
Northwest	1,62	1,45	1,48
Northeast	1.86*	1,72	1,72
Center	2.06**	1.9*	1.86*
South	1	1	1
Islands	0,85	0,85	0,86
Religion			
Catholic	1	1	1
Non-Catholic	2.45***	2.44***	2.47***
Educational attendance			
Out of education	1,74	2.05*	1.97*
In education	1	1	1
Education			
No school completion / primary	1	1	1
Lower secondary	0,92	0,87	0,9
Higher secondary	0,63	0,51	0,56
University	0,92	0,63	0,71
Employment contract			
Active	1,09	1,1	1,1
Inactive	1	1	1
First conception			
No first conception	1	1	1
First conception	1,96	2.06*	2.08*
Age			
15-20	0.0000049***	0.0000044***	0.00000459***
20-25	0.0000182***	0.0000165***	0.000017***
25-30	0.0000337***	0.0000309***	0.000032***
30-35	0.0000519***	0.0000485***	0.0000499***
35-40	0.0000541***	0.0000507***	0.0000519***
Log Likelihood	-740,84	-733,76	-732,58

p<0.01*** 0.01< p<0.05** 0.05<p<0.1*

Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

Table A.3: Sequence of nested models presenting the relative risks of the transition to direct marriage as a first relationship for women in Italy

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Cohort								
1940-49	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1950-59	1.09*	1.12**	1.12**	1.13**	1.22***	1.27***	1.28***	1.2***
1960-69	0.62***	0.67***	0.67***	0.67***	0.74***	0.8***	0.79***	0.77***
1970-74	0.28***	0.32***	0.32***	0.33***	0.39***	0.42***	0.42***	0.4***
Parents education								
Both low		1	1	1	1	1	1 (ref.)	1
Mother's education higher than father's		0.66***	0.67***	0.67***	0.78**	0,84	0,84	0.86**
Father's education higher than mother's		0.68***	0.68***	0.68***	0.83***	0.89*	0.89*	0,88
Both medium		0.73***	0.74***	0.74***	0,91	0,99	1	1
Both high		0.44***	0.44***	0.45***	0.65***	0.69***	0.68***	0.72***
Region of residence at age 15								
North West			0,96	0,98	0,94	0,96	1	0,97
North East			0,9	0,91	0.86**	0.87**	0,92	0.8***
Centre			0,97	0,99	1	1,01	1,05	0,95
South			1	1	1 (ref.)	1	1 (ref.)	1
Islands			1,01	1,01	1,04	1,05	1,03	1,04
Religion								
Catholic				1	1	1	1	1
Non-Catholic				0.88**	0,92	0,92	0,92	0.88**
Educational attendance								
Out of education					5.15***	4.9***	5.29***	5.03***
In education					1	1	1	1
Education								
No school completion / primary						1	1	1
Lower secondary						0.87**	0.88**	0,96
Higher secondary						0.76***	0.77***	0,91
University						0,87	0,88	1,12
Employment contract								
Active							0.83***	0.91**
Inactive							1	1
First conception								
No first conception								1
First conception								5.98***
Age								
15-20	1 (2.17)***	1 (2.36)***	1 (2.43)***	1 (2.43)***	1 (0.62)***	1 (0.67)***	1 (0.65)***	1 (0.64)***
20-25	5.24***	5.35***	5.35***	5.36***	4.3***	4.54***	4.66***	4.15***
25-30	7.33***	7.7***	7.7***	7.71***	5.6***	5.95***	6.22***	5.04***
30-35	3.89***	4.07***	4.06***	4.08***	2.82***	3.00***	3.16***	2.17***
35-40	1.52***	1.59***	1.59***	1.6***	1.1***	1.18***	1.24***	0.76***

Log Likelihood	-14149,31	-14084,74	-14083,19	-14081,09	-13870,78	-13861	-13852,19	-13525,49
Probability level		< 0,001	0,544	0,04	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001

p<0.01*** 0.01< p<0.05** 0.05<p<0.1*
Source: ILFI 1997, 1999. Own calculation.

Appendix B

B.1: Interview guideline: cohabiting women

PART A: INTRODUZIONE

Lei convive con il Suo partner. Mi racconti come siete arrivati a questa decisione. Perchè avete deciso per questo modo di vivere?

PART B: CARATTERISTICHE

Mi racconterebbe della Sua vita, della Sua famiglia? Come Lei è cresciuta? Che rapporto ha con la Sua famiglia e con gli amici? Se lavora oppure studia?

Famiglia e gioventù:
Che età ha?
Dove è nata?
In quale regione e in quale luogo è cresciuta?
È cresciuta con entrambi i Suoi genitori?
Ha sorelle o fratelli? Come è il rapporto con loro?
C'erano altre persone nella casa nella quale è cresciuta?
Come è stato il rapporto con la famiglia in passato e come è adesso?
Vi vedete spesso?
Quale grado d'istruzione hanno i Suoi genitori?
Che lavoro fanno adesso e facevano quando Lei era a scuola?

Amici:
Ha tanti amici? Può raccontarmi qualcosa di loro?
Quante volte vi vedete?
Di che cosa parlate?
Da chi va, quando ha dei problemi?

Istruzione:
Lei, che istruzione ha?
Perché ha smesso di studiare? Perché ha deciso di continuare gli studi?
Cosa vuole fare in futuro?

Lavoro e aiuto economico:
Lei lavora? E da quando?
Chi La aiuta economicamente?
Che lavoro fa?
È un lavoro sicuro o no?
È un lavoro a part time o a tempo pieno?
È mai stata disoccupata?
Per quanto tempo?
Chi L'ha aiutata in questo periodo?
E il Suo partner?

Lasciare la famiglia:
Quando ha lasciato la famiglia d'origine? Perchè?
Ha lasciato la famiglia d'origine più di una volta? Perchè?
La famiglia, L'ha aiutata in questo periodo o L'ha ostacolata?
Quale è stato la reazione dei Suoi genitori?
Con chi ha vissuto dopo aver lasciato la famiglia?
Considerando la Sua vita oggi, è stato una buona idea lasciare la famiglia?

Relazioni precedenti:
Ha mai avuto in passato relazioni serie?
È mai stata sposata?
Perché vi siete lasciati?

Figli:
Ha dei figli?
Quanti?
Che età hanno?
Il Suo partner attuale è anche il loro padre?

PART C: LA RELAZIONE ATTUALE

Vorrei sapere come ha deciso per la convivenza? Come si è sviluppata quest'idea?

Come e quando ha conosciuto il Suo partner?
Da quanto siete una coppia?
Quando ha iniziato a convivere?
Il vivere insieme è stato un passo diretto oppure un processo lento?
Lei, come descriverebbe la Sua relazione?
Come organizzate la vostra vita insieme? Ci sono cose che fate sempre insieme, che sono importante per voi?
Quali sono le "tappe" più importante della vostra relazione?
Cosa Le sembra importante all'interno di una relazione?
E il Suo partner, cosa ne pensa?
C'è mai stato un periodo, in cui avete avuto dei conflitti, problemi o preoccupazioni?
In che senso è cambiata la vostra relazione? Questa cosa come ha influenzato il vostro rapporto? Come siete riusciti a superare questo periodo?
Come descriverebbe la relazione fra le vostre famiglie d'origine? Si conoscono o Si visitano?
Per la Sua professione è importante vivere in un certo modo? E per la professione del Suo partner?
È la Sua prima convivenza oppure ha già avuto esperienze di convivenza? Come ha vissuto la fine dalla sua precedente convivenza?

PART D: LA CONVIVENZA

Per Lei, quali sono i vantaggi e gli svantaggi della convivenza e del matrimonio? Quale sono le differenze tra matrimonio e convivenza? Cosa ne pensa il Suo partner?

Quali sono le condizioni per convivere?

Ruoli di genere:
Di solito, come dividete i lavori domestici all'interno della casa? ... Ci sono cose che fa soltanto Lei oppure cose che fa soltanto il Suo partner? Ci sono cose che fate insieme?
Di solito che lavori domestici fa in un giorno normale? E il Suo partner?
Quante ore lavora alla settimana? E il Suo partner?
C'è una differenza tra il Suo modo di vivere e quello dei Suoi genitori o dei genitori del Suo partner?
Come gestite l'economia famigliare?
In che percentuale Lei contribuisce al reddito familiare? E il partner?
La famiglia vi aiuta regolarmente?
Come gestite le spese importanti?
Lei è contenta del modo in cui vi siete organizzati?

Significato:
Che significato ha la convivenza per Lei all'interno della Sua vita? .... È gia l'inizio di una relazione seria, come il matrimonio, oppure è una fase di prime esperienze?
È cambiato per Lei il significato della Sua convivenza nel tempo?
E per il Suo partner?

Situazione legale:
Dal punto di vista legale, ci sono vantaggi o svantaggi che Le sembrano importanti quando si vive in convivenza?

Il futuro:
Come sarebbe la Sua vita se Lei adesso fosse sposata?
Quale è l'età giusta per sposarsi, secondo Lei?
Quali sono le condizioni per il matrimonio?
Vuole sposarsi in futuro? Quando? Cosa ne pensa il Suo partner e i Suoi genitori?
Quando ne avete parlato seriamente per la prima volta? Già prima di convivere?
Come si è sviluppata questa idea?

PART E: I GENITORI

Cosa pensano i Suoi genitori della Sua decisione di convivere? Come è stata la loro reazione? È cambiato qualcosa nella relazione tra i Suoi genitori e Lei?

Cosa pensa Sua madre del Suo modo di vivere? Quale è stata la sua reazione? E Suo padre? E i Suoi suoceri (i genitori del Suo partner)?
Secondo Lei, i Suoi genitori hanno sperato che Lei si sposasse? E i genitori del Suo partner?
È stato difficile parlare con i Suoi genitori della Sua scelta?
Con chi ha parlato prima, con Sua madre o con Suo padre, e perchè?
Dopo la Sua entrata nella convivenza è cambiato qualcosa nelle relazioni familiari?
I genitori hanno mai cercato di influenzarvi nella scelta della convivenza?
La Sua famiglia ha aiutato per l'acquisto della casa o per il pagamento dell'affitto oppure per altre spese importanti? All'inizio del vostro rapporto o anche in seguito?.
Pensa che sarebbe stato diverso se Lei avesse scelto il matrimonio?

PART F: GLI AMICI

Quale è stata la reazione degli amici? C'è una differenza fra il Suo modo di vivere e quello dei Suoi amici? E se si, in che senso è diverso?

Ha amici che convivono? All'interno del circolo dei Suoi amici la convivenza è una esperienza normale oppure convive soltanto Lei?
Con chi ha parlato della convivenza?
Cosa ha detto?
Come è il punto di vista dei Suoi amici sulla convivenza?
Ha anche amici che sono sposati? Lei nota che c'è una differenza fra la Sua relazione e le relazioni degli amici sposati?
Quale è stata la reazione delle altre persone p.E. dei colleghi oppure dei vicini?

PART G: RELIGIONE

Che ruolo ha la religione all'interno della sua vita e all'interno della sua famiglia d'origine? Direbbe che la religione ha influenzato la Sua decisione pro o contro il matrimonio o la convivenza?

Con che frequenza va in chiesa?
C'è un conflitto tra la scelta di convivere e la Sua religione?
Dal punto di vista dei Suoi genitori c'è un conflitto fra il Suo modo di vivere e la loro religione? Come gestisce questa situazione?
Il Suo sacerdote sa della Sua convivenza? Quale è stata la sua reazione?
È importante, per Lei, il matrimonio in chiesa? E il fidanzamento?
Cosa ne pensa la Sua famiglia?

PART H: I FIGLI

A che punto della Sua vita ha intenzione di avere figli? Quali sono le condizioni per avere dei figli? E cosa cambierebbe nella Sua vita?

Cosa ne pensa il Suo partner? E la Sua famiglia e la famiglia del Suo partner?

Secondo Lei, figli nati fuori del matrimonio fanno esperienze diverse dai figli nati all'interno del matrimonio? In che modo?
Quali sono le cose più importanti se ci sono figli nella famiglia?

Per le donne con figli:

Quando è nato/a suo figlio/a quale era la Sua situazione allora? Cosa è cambiato all'interno della Sua vita? E quando ha raccontato che è incinta, quali sono state le reazioni della Sua famiglia e dei Suoi amici?

L'ha aiutata qualcuno? E chi? In che modo?
È mai stato un problema non essere sposata? Perché?
Quali sono le Sue esperienze di vita con i figli?
C'è mai stato un periodo difficile?
Quali sono le cose più importanti se ci sono figli nella famiglia?
Secondo Lei, figli nati fuori del matrimonio fanno esperienze diverse dai figli nati all'interno del matrimonio? In che modo?
Ha mai pensato di sposarsi a causa di Suo figlio?

PART I: LA FAMIGLIA IN GENERALE

Per concludere, mi interesserebbe la Sua opinione sulla famiglia in generale? Per Lei, che cosa è una famiglia? Cosa associa al concetto "famiglia"?

Che significato ha il matrimonio per Lei? È importante o no, e perché? Che ne pensa il Suo partner?
Al giorno d'oggi il matrimonio è considerato una scelta moderna o all'antica? Perché?

Pensa che io abbia dimenticato di chiederLe qualcosa di importante riguardo a questo tema o c'è qualcos'altro che vuole dirmi?

B.2: Interview guideline: married women

PART A: INTRODUZIONE

Si è sposata dopo aver convissuto con il Suo partner. Mi racconti come siete arrivati a questa decisione. Perchè avete deciso per questo modo di vivere?

PART B: CARATTERISTICHE

Mi racconterebbe della Sua vita, della Sua famiglia? Come Lei è cresciuta? Che rapporto ha con la Sua famiglia e con gli amici? Se lavora oppure studia?

Famiglia e gioventù:
Che età ha?
Dove è nata?
In quale regione e in quale luogo è cresciuta?
È cresciuta con entrambi i Suoi genitori?
Ha sorelle o fratelli? Come è il rapporto con loro?
C'erano altre persone nella casa nella quale è cresciuta?
Come è stato il rapporto con la famiglia in passato e come è adesso?
Vi vedete spesso?
Quale grado d'istruzione hanno i Suoi genitori?
Che lavoro fanno adesso e facevano quando Lei era a scuola?

Amici:
Ha tanti amici? Può raccontarmi qualcosa di loro?
Quante volte vi vedete?
Di che cosa parlate?
Da chi va, quando ha dei problemi?

Istruzione:
Lei, che istruzione ha?
Perché ha smesso di studiare? Perché ha deciso di continuare gli studi?
Cosa vuole fare in futuro?

Lavoro e aiuto economico:
Lei lavora? E da quando?
Chi La aiuta economicamente?
Che lavoro fa?
È un lavoro sicuro o no?
È un lavoro a part time o a tempo pieno?
È mai stata disoccupata?
Per quanto tempo?
Chi L'ha aiutata in questo periodo?
E il Suo partner?

Lasciare la famiglia:
Quando ha lasciato la famiglia d'origine? Perchè?
Ha lasciato la famiglia d'origine più di una volta? Perchè?
La famiglia, L'ha aiutata in questo periodo o L'ha ostacolata?
Quale è stato la reazione dei Suoi genitori?
Con chi ha vissuto dopo aver lasciato la famiglia?
Considerando la Sua vita oggi, è stato una buon'idea lasciare la famiglia?

Relazioni precedenti:
Ha mai avuto in passato relazioni serie?
È mai stata sposata?
Perché vi siete lasciati?

Figli:
Ha dei figli?
Quanti?
Che età hanno?
Il Suo partner attuale è anche il loro padre?

PART C: LA RELAZIONE ATTUALE

Vorrei sapere come ha deciso per la convivenza? Come si è sviluppata quest'idea?

Come e quando ha conosciuto il Suo partner?
Da quanto siete una coppia?
Quando ha iniziato a convivere?
Il vivere insieme è stato un passo diretto oppure un processo lento?
Quando e perché avete deciso di sposarvi?
Lei, come describerebbe la Sua relazione?
Come organizzate la vostra vita insieme? Ci sono cose che fate sempre insieme, che sono importante per voi?
Quali sono le "tappe" più importante della vostra relazione?
Cosa Le sembra importante all'interno di una relazione?
E il Suo partner, cosa ne pensa?
Cosa è cambiato con il matrimonio?
C'è mai stato un periodo, in cui avete avuto dei conflitti, problemi o preoccupazioni?
In che senso è cambiata la vostra relazione? Gli eventuali cambiamenti come hanno influenzato il vostro rapporto? Come siete riusciti a superare questo periodo?
Come describerebbe la relazione fra le vostre famiglie d'origine? Si conoscono o Si visitano? Il rapporto è cambiato con il matrimonio?
Per la Sua professione è importante vivere in un certo modo? E per la professione del Suo partner?
Era la Sua prima convivenza oppure aveva già avuto esperienze di convivenza? Come ha vissuto la fine dalla sua precedente convivenza?

PART D: LA CONVIVENZA ED IL MATRIMONIO

Per Lei, quali sono i vantaggi e gli svantaggi della convivenza e del matrimonio? Quale sono le differenze tra matrimonio e convivenza? Cosa ne pensa il Suo partner?

Quali sono le condizioni per convivere?
Quale è l'età giusta per sposarsi, secondo Lei?
Quali sono le condizioni per il matrimonio?
Quando avete parlato del matrimonio seriamente per la prima volta? Già prima di convivere?
Come si è sviluppata questa idea?

Ruoli di genere:
Di solito, come dividete i lavori domestici all'interno della casa? ... Ci sono cose che fa soltanto Lei oppure cose che fa soltanto il Suo partner? Ci sono cose che fate insieme?
Di solito che lavori domestici fa in un giorno normale? E il Suo partner?
È cambiato con il matrimonio?
Quante ore lavora alla settimana? E il Suo partner? Dopo il matrimonio è cambiato il lavoro oppure il numero di ore lavorative alla settimana?
C'è una differenza tra il Suo modo di vivere e quello dei Suoi genitori o dei genitori del Suo partner?
Come gestite l'economia famigliare? Come avete fatto prima del matrimonio?
In che percentuale Lei contribuisce al reddito familiare? E il partner? E quando convivevate?
La famiglia vi aiuta regolarmente? Anche prima del matrimonio?
Come gestite le spese importanti?
Lei è contenta del modo in cui vi siete organizzati?

Significato:
Che significato ha il matrimonio nella Sua vita?
E la precedente convivenza? Era già l'inizio di una relazione seria, come il matrimonio, oppure era una fase di prime esperienze?

È cambiato per Lei il significato della Sua convivenza e poi del Suo matrimonio nel tempo?
E per il Suo partner?

Situazione legale:
Dal punto di vista legale, ci sono vantaggi o svantaggi che Le sembrano importanti quando si vive in convivenza o quando si è sposati?

Dal ounto di vista di oggi, è stato una buona scelta di passare dalla convivenza al matrimonio? Perché?

PART E: I GENITORI

Cosa pensavano i Suoi genitori della Sua decisione di convivere? Come è stata la loro reazione? È cambiato qualcosa nella relazione tra i Suoi genitori e Lei? E cosa hanno detto quando Lei ha deciso di sposarsi?

Cosa pensava Sua madre del Suo modo di vivere? Quale è stata la sua reazione?
E Suo padre?
E i Suoi suoceri (i genitori del Suo partner)?
Secondo Lei, all'inizio i Suoi genitori hanno sperato che Lei si sposasse? E i genitori del Suo partner?
È stato difficile parlare con i Suoi genitori della Sua scelta?
Con chi ha parlato prima, con Sua madre o con Suo padre, e perchè?
Dopo la Sua entrata nella convivenza è cambiato qualcosa nelle relazioni familiari?
I genitori hanno mai cercato di influenzarvi nella scelta della convivenza?
La Sua famiglia ha aiutato per l'acquisto della casa o per il pagamento dell'affitto oppure per altre spese importanti? All'inizio del vostro rapporto o anche in seguito?.
Quale è stata la reazione dei genitori quando ha scelto di sposarsi?
È cambiato qualcosa nei rapporti familiari?

PART F: GLI AMICI

Quale è stata la reazione degli amici alla convivenza, e poi al matrimonio? C'è una differenza fra il Suo modo di vivere e quello dei Suoi amici? E se si, in che senso è diverso?

Ha amici che convivono? All'interno del circolo dei Suoi amici la convivenza è un'esperienza normale oppure convivevate soltanto Lei e Suo partner?
Con chi ha parlato della convivenza? Cosa ha detto?
Come è il punto di vista dei Suoi amici sulla convivenza?
Ha anche amici che sono sposati? Lei nota che c'è una differenza fra la Sua relazione e le relazioni degli amici sposati?
Quale è il punto di vista dei Suoi amici sul matrimonio?
Quale è stata la reazione delle altre persone p.E. dei colleghi oppure dei vicini?

PART G: RELIGIONE

Che ruolo ha la religione all'interno della sua vita e all'interno della sua famiglia d'origine? Direbbe che la religione ha influenzato la Sua decisione pro o contro il matrimonio o la convivenza?

Con che frequenza va in chiesa?
C'era un conflitto tra la scelta di convivere e la Sua religione?
Dal punto di vista dei Suoi genitori c'era un conflitto fra il Suo modo di vivere e la loro religione? Come gestiva questa situazione?
Il Suo sacerdote sapeva della Sua convivenza? Quale è stata la sua reazione?
Che ruolo ha avuto la religione nella Sua scelta di sposarsi?
È importante, per Lei, il matrimonio in chiesa? E il fidanzamento? Cosa ne pensa la Sua famiglia?

PART H: I FIGLI

A che punto della Sua vita ha intenzione di avere figli? Quali sono le condizioni per avere dei figli? E cosa cambierebbe nella Sua vita?

Cosa ne pensa il Suo partner? E la Sua famiglia e la famiglia del Suo partner?
Secondo Lei, figli nati fuori del matrimonio fanno esperienze diverse dai figli nati all'interno del matrimonio? In che modo?
Quali sono le cose più importanti se ci sono figli nella famiglia?
Vuole avere figli in futuro? Quando e quanti?

Per le donne con figli:

Quando è nato/a suo figlio/a quale era la Sua situazione allora? Cosa è cambiato all'interno della Sua vita? E quando ha raccontato che è incinta, quali sono state le reazioni della Sua famiglia e dei Suoi amici?

L'ha aiutata qualcuno? E chi? In che modo?
Lei era già sposata quando è nato Suo figlio?
È mai stato un problema non essere sposata? Perché?
Ha mai pensato di sposarsi a causa di Suo figlio?
Quali sono le Sue esperienze di vita con i figli?
C'è mai stato un periodo difficile?
Quali sono le cose più importanti se ci sono figli nella famiglia?
Secondo Lei, figli nati fuori del matrimonio fanno esperienze diverse dai figli nati all'interno del matrimonio? In che modo?
Vuole avere altri figli in futuro? Quando e quanti?

PART I: LA FAMIGLIA IN GENERALE

Per concludere, mi interesserebbe la Sua opinione sulla famiglia in generale? Per Lei, che cosa è una famiglia? Cosa associa al concetto "famiglia"?

Che significato ha il matrimonio per Lei? È importante o no, e perché? Che ne pensa il Suo partner?
Al giorno d'oggi il matrimonio è considerato una scelta moderna o all'antica? Perché?

Pensa che io abbia dimenticato di chiederLe qualcosa di importante riguardo a questo tema o c'è qualcos'altro che vuole dirmi?

Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit ohne unzulässige Hilfe Dritter und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe; die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken sind als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im Inland noch im Ausland in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form einer Prüfungsbehörde zur Erlangung eines akademischen Grades vorgelegt.

Christin Löffler

Lebenslauf

Persönliche Daten

Geboren am   12. August 1980 in Parchim (geb. Schröder)

Berufstätigkeit

3/2009 – 7/2009   Mitarbeit an dem EU-Forschungsprojekt „Reproductive decision-making in a micro-macro perspective", Max-Planck-Institut für demografische Forschung Rostock (MPIDR)

10/2004 – 3/2009   Doktorandin, Max-Planck-Institut für demografische Forschung Rostock, Thema der Promotion 'Non-Marital Cohabitation in Italy' (Nichteheliche Lebensgemeinschaften in Italien)

Studium und Ausbildung

7/2009   Promotion, Universität Rostock, Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät

11/2003 – 03/2005   International Max Planck Research School for Demography am MPIDR

10/1999 – 09/2004   Magisterstudiengang Soziologie und Italienische Philologie an der Universität Rostock

Thema der Magisterarbeit ‚Familienpolitik und Familienentwicklung in Italien – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Entscheidungsmöglichkeiten und Entscheidungskonsequenzen für Frauen'

07/1999   Abitur, David-Franck-Gymnasium Sternberg

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