

**Doctoral School in Social Sciences
Doctoral Programme in Sociology and Social Research
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**Structural and Cultural Determinants of Fertility and Female Labour
Market Participation in Italy and Europe**

SUMMARY

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Chapter 1 (PhD thesis): Theoretical Framework to Analyse Work-Family Reconciliation

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Long abstract

In this chapter the main structural and cultural arguments concerning the link between fertility and female labour market participation and its evolution will be introduced. The latter will constitute the theoretical foundation of the analyses presented in the subsequent empirical chapters. In the first part of the chapter, a “structural” approach to work-family reconciliation based on the Economic Theory of the Family (ETF) will be presented, connecting women’s educational attainment with rising opportunity costs of childbearing. The focus will be on the ways different welfare regimes, considered as acting exogenously, shape the micro-level consequences of the ETF, thus producing different cross-country outcomes at the macro-level in terms of female labour market participation and fertility rates. In fact, in the last decades those countries which were able to implement a set of social and family policies aimed at fostering the reconciliation of work and family duties have been able to reach higher levels of both female labour market participation and fertility. Joining the arguments of the ETF with the welfare regimes theory allows to derive a set of hypotheses concerning how men’s and women’s educational and economic resources influence the transition to parenthood and female labour market participation around childbirths across different institutional settings.

In the second part of the chapter the cultural explanations of declining fertility and rising female labour market participation will be introduced. These arguments have been suggested by different streams of the literature, but it is mainly referred here to the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) thesis and the analytical distinction between “strong” and “weak” family ties. First of all, the endogeneity of social and family policies with respect to different national family cultures will be discussed. Then, the chapter will shift to the micro-level describing how cultural orientations such as the attitudes toward gender roles, religiosity and post-materialism might help explaining long-term trends in fertility and female labour market participation. It is argued that if “traditional” values are correlated with high marital stability and fertility as well as low female labour market participation and those values have declined across cohorts, the former might well constitute additional explanatory factors to understand the rise of cohabitations, extra-marital births, marital instability and sub-replacement fertility.

In addressing these different streams of the literature, the chapter focuses on the limitations of both structural and cultural arguments, for none of them alone is able to explain recent fertility and female labour market participation trends. It is particularly difficult to understand why exactly those countries where new family forms and female labour market participation, fostered by post materialist values, secularization and modern attitudes toward gender roles, are much more widespread are also those with higher fertility rates. This is certainly to be related to the role of those institutional settings fostering the conciliation of work and family duties and their endogeneity with respect to national cultures. But it will be argued how direct and negative effects of traditional values on fertility rates may also be hypothesized. To understand the mechanisms underlying the latter, the chapter refers to the analytical distinction between strong and weak family ties. There is in fact empirical evidence suggesting that the pattern of latest-late age at leaving home is influenced by family preferences. Another sign of the strength of family ties is the very late diffusion of cohabitation and extra-marital births, which nowadays contribute to a large extent to explain fertility differences between Northern and Southern Europe.

As an example of the need to take into account the interrelations between structural and cultural factors, it will be shown how more culturally and economically advanced regions of Italy and Spain are experiencing, in the last 15 years, a slow but constant trend of increase in fertility rates, mainly driven by extra-marital births, migration flows – i.e. cultural factors – as well as more family-friendly institutional environments.



Chapter 2 (PhD thesis): Fertility and work-family reconciliation in Italy from a “structural” perspective¹

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Long abstract

This chapter will present longitudinal analyses aimed at showing the strong trade-off between work and family faced by Italian women in the light of the familialistic Italian institutional setting, i.e. the lack of public childcare for children aged less than three and flexible labour market arrangements. Adopting the theoretical framework discussed in the first chapter, the analyses will show the gendered micro- and meso-consequences of such an institutional setting as far as the transition to parenthood and female labour market participation around childbirths are concerned. The focus will be not only on gender differences but also on changes across cohorts.

The first part of the chapter will show how the transition to a first child is strongly dependent on men's economic resources and earning potentials both in the fordist and in post-fordist periods. In recent times, however, women's economic role became less in opposition with the transition to parenthood. It is argued that this is mainly due not to changes neither in policies fostering reconciliation of work and family duties nor in the degree of husbands' support in housework, but to the increased financial needs to start a family and women's “decision” to reduce family size.

Indeed, the analysis of female labour market participation showed how the latter increased across cohorts almost completely as an effect of the changed women's composition in terms of educational attainment and to the detriment of fertility rates. Highly educated women with only one child are the only who have been able to increase significantly their level of participation. The latter have also become more likely to leave the labour market at the childbirth and to re-enter, as an effect of higher preferences for combining work and family, so that increasing participation is connected with higher career discontinuity. Moreover, among younger cohorts of women labour market participation has also become independent from husbands' educational and economic resources, confirming the results concerning the transition to motherhood. Although few women really schedule their labour market participation according to childbirth(s), as most women either work before and after a childbirth or never enter the labour market, results suggest the increasing important role of women's own earning potentials as a shield against labour market withdrawals. Those kind of jobs in which the combination of work and family duties is facilitated, e.g. employment in the agricultural or public sectors, are connected with lower risk of withdrawals as well. As the crucial moments for women's participation decisions are the months immediately before and after childbirths, policies like a higher availability of good quality part-time jobs and childcare services are very likely to have a positive effect on Italian female labour market participation rates.

Increased educational attainment fostered women's labour market integration, but this happened at the price of reduced family size, given the lack of institutional and partners' support to conciliate work and family duties. While the findings give clear indications in terms of policies aimed at a de-familialization of the Italian welfare regime, it is also argued how the Italian pattern of low fertility and female labour market participation may not be fully understood without including in the framework values and preferences.

¹ The realisation of this chapter has profited by a five weeks visiting period at the Tilburg University (May-June 2010). I thank Prof. Ruud Luijckx who supervised my work during my stay in the Netherlands. A version of this chapter has been presented at the 2010 EqualSoc Summer School (Trento, 23-27 August) and the 2010 EqualSoc Workshop “Changing Families and Work in Europe” (Trento, 25-26 June).



Chapter 3 (PhD thesis): Between preferences and constraints: geographical mobility and reproductive choices of Italian men²

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Long abstract

In addition to women's increased educational attainment and different institutional settings, as shown in the previous chapter, also changed orientations toward family to achieve full life-satisfaction have been underlined to explain low fertility rates. Since Southern and Northern Italy differ for the institutional and economic setting, cultural orientations regarding the importance of family as well as fertility rates, also for Italy it seems reasonable to suppose that the latter are caused by both "structural" and "cultural" factors.

It is argued that South-to-North migrations could be an interpretative key of geographical differences in the timing and number of childbirths. In fact, migrants are socialized to different familiar behaviours, although they share with Northerners the same institutional and economic setting. First, results from IARD data (2004) are shown confirming how Southern Italian young people hold negative attitudes toward cohabitation, traditional gender attitudes and higher fertility intentions compared with their Northern counterparts and these differences can be explained, to some extent, by their own and parental levels of religiosity.

ILFI data are then used applying event history models to Italian men's transition to parenthood. Results show that Southern migrants, even the 1.5 generation, are much faster than Northerners as far as the transition to marriage is concerned. Once controlling for marital status, North-South differences in the transition to the first child are largely explained by different levels and patterns of female labour market participation, while preferences could have a crucial impact in the transition to the second child, where migrants and Southerners are equally much faster than Northerners. These results contribute to both the literature about the determinants of fertility and the long-term consequences of migrations. More precisely, results show that if there is empirical evidence of decline in traditional values, such as religiosity and traditional attitudes toward the gender roles, the latter may be an additional explanation for the declining fertility rates. Moreover, the analyses contribute to the literature on the effects of migrations on individuals' life-cycles, supporting an integrated theory combining the main alternative mechanisms suggested in the literature.

The chapter concludes noticing how results are more ambiguous when it comes to understanding the recent Southern pattern of low fertility as well as female labour market participation, similarly to the international comparison between Italy and Northern European countries. Indeed, in recent years Southern Italian regions showed lower fertility rates than their Northern counterparts. While that is certainly connected to the better economic environment and rising family policies in Northern regions, especially public childcare for children aged 0-2, it is argued that at least part of the difference is consistent with the persistence of traditional values in Southern regions. As mentioned in the first chapter, not only Northern regions are the ones with higher cohabitation and extra-marital childbirths, but Southern Italian youth has also the European record for the latest age at leaving home, which is determined by both economic and normative pressures.

² A version of this chapter has been published (in co-authorship with Nazareno Panichella) in the *European Sociological Review* (2011, doi: 10.1093/esr/jcr068). I thank the participants to the *FamIne* seminar held at the University of Trento (December 2, 2010), especially Paolo Barbieri, Carlo Barone, Stefani Scherer and Cristiano Vezzoni, as well as Gabriele Ballarino and Ferruccio Biolcati Rinaldi for their interest in this work. The paper has been presented at the NORFACE and CReAM joint conference (London, April 6-9, 2011) and at the University of Turin and Milan joint Summer School (Turin, September 13-17, 2010).



Chapter 4 (PhD thesis): A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of the Role of Values and Preferences on Family Behaviours in Europe³

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Long abstract

The aim of this chapter is to understand to what extent values have had important consequences in terms of family behaviours in Europe, especially as far as the rise in female labour market participation and the concomitant drop in fertility rates of the last decades are concerned. Data from three waves of the European Values Study (1990, 2000 and 2008) have been used and the issue of measurement invariance coped with by means of structural equation modeling. It is shown that most of the selected countries experienced a decrease in religiosity and traditional attitudes toward the gender roles and the latter, together with post-materialist values, are significant predictors of many demographic outcomes at the individual level.

Among the value measures, religiosity comes out to be the most important predictor of female labour market participation, new family forms such as cohabitation and marital disruptions and fertility, while gender attitudes only influence female labour market participation and post-materialism the probability of experiencing new family forms, net of the effects of structural variables (e.g., individuals' educational attainment). The correlation between religiosity and fertility has been found to be particularly robust and, in order to support a "causal" interpretation of the religiosity effects, instrumental variable regressions, based on adherence to theological dogmas, and an epidemiological approach have been implemented. The rationale behind the instrumental variable exercise is that religiosity may influence behaviours mainly through a reinforcement of norms by the institutionalized religious community and the strengthening of family ties, rather than through a direct influence of churches' teachings. As far as migrants' are concerned, first generation migrants, as well as second generation in the case of South-America and MENA migrants, in the selected European countries largely hold more "traditional" values and have higher fertility, although finding a native partner has a strong influence on subsequent fertility behaviours.

The decline of traditional values across cohorts and the robust correlation between the former and family behaviours support the idea that ideational shifts, as posited by Inglehart and the Second Demographic Transition, may have had a role in determining recent labour market and demographic trends. However, results also show substantial cross-country differences in values and micro-level correlations between values and behaviours, with more "traditional" countries being the ones with lower female labour market participation and fertility rates and where values matter the most at the micro-level, thus generating an interesting macro-micro paradox. A first interpretation of such a paradox relies on the role of institutional factors, typical of more "modern" and secular countries, fostering a better, and more equal, reconciliation of work and family duties. However, also an additional argument based on the distinction between "strong" and "weak" family ties is discussed. Countries characterized by strong family ties indeed hinder both the mentioned ideational shifts and the diffusion of cohabitations, extra-marital births and an early exit from parental home, thus contributing to low fertility. Some of the presented results may support the latter interpretation: a) there is a large overlap between the cross-country distribution of traditional values and the strength of family ties as reported in the demographic literature; b) the strongest behavioural consequences of religiosity and gender attitudes in Catholic countries is consistent with the idea that the strengthening of family ties may be more relevant than beliefs themselves; c) religiosity has strong and negative effects on new family forms in Central and Southern European countries. The chapter concludes that a systematic theoretical integration of the economic, institutional and cultural dimensions, may be very useful for a better understanding of the European patterns of work and family equilibria.

³ A version of this chapter has been presented at the *FamIne* Conference "Changing Work-Family Equilibria in Trento" (co-authors Ruud Luijkx and Stefani Scherer), 13-14 October, and at the 2012 ECSR/EqualSOC Conference in Stockholm, September 24-26. It will also be submitted for publication in an international journal soon.



Chapter 5 (PhD thesis): Institutional and Cultural Change Toward the Dual-Earner Model: A Comparison of Italy and the Netherlands

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Long abstract

In this chapter a theoretical framework to analyse the patterns of fertility and work-family reconciliation in Italy and the Netherlands which takes into account both the institutional and cultural aspects outlined in previous chapters is presented. It is shown how both countries were characterised, until the first half of the '80s, by a familialistic welfare state based on the male-breadwinner norm and relatively high levels of fertility and low levels of female labour market participation. In the previous chapters of the thesis micro-level consequences of such a fordist setting in the Italian case have been shown and it has been argued how the persistency of the familism in the institutional setting and the traditional family values help to explain trends and patterns of female labour market participation and its fertility consequences in the post-fordist period as well.

This chapter presents a theoretical discussion about the different way the Netherlands reacted to the fordist crisis compared with Italy. In fact, the Netherlands have been able to reform their system of labour market and family policies and to foster female employment as well as fertility. Great emphasis is put on the coevolution of preferences, institutions and behaviours, i.e. on the close interrelation between the structural and cultural dimensions both at the micro- and the macro-level. First of all, it is shown how the process of political reform strongly relied on some sociopolitical conditions which allowed to produce universalistic concerns: Dutch policy makers, trade unions and employers renounced to maximize their short-term utility in order to achieve a new institutional setting which has been able to guarantee high labour market flexibility and women's labour market integration. Moreover, it is discussed how the latter outcomes can not be seen as the result of a mere process of institutional engineering, especially as far as the fertility consequences are concerned. In fact, the lack of family policies, at least in terms of public provisions of childcare, constitutes a persistent feature of both the Italian and Dutch institutional settings. The Dutch way toward work-family reconciliation has been the partially unexpected result of the huge part-time inclusion of women in the labour market and gender equality in the domestic sphere, self-reinforcing processes which have been fostered by a wave of cultural change toward more liberal and secular values which started prior to the process of political reform.

By means of the same EVS data and methods already used in the previous chapter, the chapter shows how the Netherlands and Italy differ in terms of religiosity and gender attitudes and how the former experienced a huge decline in traditional values during the '90s, concomitantly with the rise of female labour market participation and fertility. Micro-level analyses confirm how values are strongly correlated with micro-level behaviours and particularly in Italy, where both men's and women's traditional gender attitudes are found to be important obstacles to female labour market participation. Then, at the macro-level, it is confirmed that the persistently traditional gender attitudes may help explaining the high number of Italian women being out of the labour market. However, as part-time employment has shown to be much less structured by values, the limited availability of more flexible labour market arrangements is certainly detrimental to Italian women's labour market participation. At the same time, fertility differences between full-time Dutch and Italian women are null, while the former have much higher fertility if employed part-time or housewives and the differences between the two countries become even larger once considering the heterogeneity in values. Therefore, as argued in the previous chapter, cross-country differences in fertility may be less straightforwardly explained by both the institutional and cultural settings alone.

In the light of the results shown, in the concluding section of the chapter it is discussed to what extent the Dutch solution for work-family reconciliation, based on (men's and women's) part-time employment and a higher flexibility of options for childcare, may constitute an interesting alternative to the socialdemocratic one in order to achieve higher gender equality.



Bio-note: Raffaele Guetto is PhD candidate in Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento, Italy. He obtained an MA (with distinction) in Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca in 2007, where he worked as research assistant for quantitative methods. His main research interests, on which he has published two articles on the *European Sociological Review*, include structural and cultural determinants of fertility and female labour market participation, welfare and labour market studies. He is member of the EQUALSOC Network of Excellence and since 2010 he is involved in the FamIne project (7th FP, ERC-StG 2010, www.unitn.it/famine).

