

A dirty look from the neighbors. Does living in a religious neighborhood prevent cohabitation?

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to provide insights into how religion influences the family formation process. In particular, we analyze the impact of a neighborhood context religiosity on an individual decision to enter cohabitation. We use the data on two European societies where secularization and individualization have not yet reached momentum: Italy and Poland. We combine the empirical evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding on the mechanisms of how the neighborhood may affect the individual decisions on union formation. By means of quantitative multilevel analyses we test how strong these mechanisms are in the general population.

The qualitative analysis identified several different mechanisms of how religiosity of the respondents' surrounding may influence their decision to marry instead of cohabiting related, among others to a lack of social recognition for cohabiting couples and with ostracism in the neighborhood. The quantitative outcomes confirmed that individuals living in social environment where people are very religious tend to make life choices consistent with the norms and beliefs supported by the dominating religion, even if they are not very religious themselves. However, after controlling for these territorial characteristics, the role of neighborhood-specific religiosity weakened in the magnitude in Poland and lost its statistical power in Italy. This may indicate that social norms and traditions that are shaped by religion, rather than religious dogmas themselves, have a direct effect on the observed union formation behaviors.

1. Motivation

Most religions promote beliefs that are important for the family formation process: the beliefs on the sanctity of marriage or on amorality of extramarital intimate relationships. It is therefore not surprising that, the relationship between religiosity and family formation behavior has attracted a lot of attention in demographic research within the last couple of decades. If cohabitation is believed to mean living in a sin, such non-traditional family formation decision would involve remarkable psychological costs for religious people (Lehrer 2004). Religiosity may have not only a direct impact on individual-level behavior by promoting specific norms or rules, but also through broader values or principles whose effect on family formation is indirect (Golscheider 1971, McQuillan 2004). Indeed, the studies recurrently find that individual religiosity affects the timing, quantum and the union context of fertility (Adsera 2006; Berghammer 2009, 2012; Frejka and Westoff 2008; Lehrer 1996a, 1996b), as well as the type, quality and duration of partnerships (Berghammer 2012; Eggebeen and Dew 2009; Lehrer 2004; Teachman 2002; Marks 2005; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993). However, when we examine the role of religion in the family formation process, we should consider religiosity not only at individual but also at the neighborhood level (Golscheider 2006).¹

Individual beliefs and internalized norms on how the family life should be organized are shaped by the social context. The social context is important for people's family formation decisions throughout their whole life-course: their individual beliefs may be strengthened and encouraged or inhibited by the neighborhood they live in. In particular, individuals living in religious neighborhoods are likely to be embedded in very specific types of social networks which maintain behavior that is consistent with the prescription of the dominating religion (Smith 2003). The neighborhood-level religiosity may interact with individual religiosity or moderate its effect. The lack of social acceptance for non-marital cohabitation and punitive sanctions for it, imposed in the given neighborhood, may restrict the individual decisions regarding family formation even of not religious people. This effect might be particularly important in neighborhoods characterized by strong social ties and interdependencies between community members (e.g. rural neighborhoods).

There is a large literature providing evidence that social interactions at the neighborhood level do affect family formation behavior (Gault-Sherman and Draper 2012; Keim et al. 2012). However, very few studies consider social interactions which are a product of religious participation. The impact of neighborhood-level religiosity has been analyzed for explaining a decision for abortion (e.g. Adamczyk 2008). Barber (2004) has provided evidence on how the neighborhood context shapes the attitudes toward partnerships, but in this study the social context of neighborhoods is operationalized through variables that correspond to the concept of modernization rather than religiosity. Besides, Barber (2004) focuses on the attitudes rather than on actual partnership behavior. Gault-Sherman and Draper (2012) have examined the impact of neighborhood-level religiosity on cohabitation, but they have used regional rates of cohabitation rather than detailed

¹ Whenever we use one of the following terms: 'neighborhood' or 'community', we mean a social environment, in which an individual lives due to his or her place of the residence. Accordingly, whenever we refer to 'neighborhood-level religiosity' or 'contextual religiosity', we mean the religiosity of people who live in the neighborhood (i.e. in the same residential area) of the given individual.

information of individual-level decisions. The same applies to the study of spatial patterns of religiosity and family formation by Sobotka and Adiguzel (2003) as well as Valkonen et al. (2008). Analyzing aggregate regional data may capture spurious correlations because region-specific religiosity and family formation behavior may result from the same common causes, related to the socioeconomic profiles of region-specific populations. Indeed, some empirical studies using micro-level data reveal that the association between religion and demographic behavior diminishes considerably after controlling for socio-economic characteristics (see Agadjanian 2001 for a review of such studies).

We have identified no studies that would analyze the role of neighborhood-level religiosity for individual-level decisions regarding union formation. This paper aims at filling this gap. We analyze the impact of a religiosity of people living in the given neighborhood on an individual decision to enter cohabitation, and disentangle the neighborhood effects from the effect of an individual religiosity. We combine the empirical evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding on the mechanisms of how the local context, and particularly the religiosity in the given neighborhood, may affect the individual decisions on union formation. By means of quantitative analyses we can test how strong these mechanisms are in the general population.

We use the data on two countries that represent key, but so far unexplored, case studies for our research motivation: Italy and Poland. In both these countries marriage is a dominant living arrangement. A diffusion of cohabitation has been rather slow, although on the rise among the younger generations (Matysiak 2009; Gabrielli & Hoem 2010), and non-marital living together is chosen mainly as a temporary living arrangement. Moreover, both these countries are regarded as extremely religious - secularization and individualization have not yet reached momentum in these societies. Importantly, unlike in other European societies, Poland and Italy are relatively homogenous in terms of religious affiliation, with dominating role of the Roman Catholic Church. According to data from ISSP 2008, about 98% of Poles and 95% of Italians were raised in the Catholic religion compared with an average of about 45% in other European countries. In both countries, the Roman Catholic Church implements a policy that plays an important role for the social life of people living in specific neighborhoods. It organizes events and ceremonies that include not only the Sunday service, but also plenty other holy days, festivals, and celebrations that mark the important times of the year, and which draw the community together (McQuillan 2004). The birth, marriage, and death of any member of the local community are celebrated or commemorated by public rituals administered by the representatives of the Church. People are expected to take part these celebrations, their participation is actually necessary for acceptance within the community. The local clergy maintains registers of people who were born in their region, participation in religious events and ceremonies is subject to scrutiny by the clergy and it is recorded in these registers. The effects of this "monitoring" may be felt by individuals in their everyday lives, since the local clergy is in a position to publicly praise them or to undermine their positions in the local community. In this context, we can expect that the social attitudes towards family formation patterns are strongly related to the Catholic dogma and the neighborhood is particularly important for protecting marriage and discouraging cohabitation. In such context, even the least religious individuals might enter cohabitation reluctantly, fearing social sanctions.

2. Data and methods

Qualitative analysis

An importance of complementing quantitative findings with insights from the qualitative research have been recurrently emphasized in the literature – also in the studies on family formation and cohabitation (Hantrais 2005, Smock 2000). We use qualitative data collected in the recent project “Childbearing Within Cohabitation” coordinated by Brienna Perelli-Harris at University of Southampton. We analyze the data obtained in the focus group interviews (FGIs), which were conducted in February-April 2012 in Italy and in March 2012 in Poland. Recruitment of the respondents and organization of the focus group interviews were supported by the research agency (ARC Poland, University of Florence Academic Spin—Off Valmon Italy) and the groups took place at their premises. In Poland, the recruitment was conducted by the employees of the research agency. They used the agency data base and then a snow-ball method. In Italy, the recruitment strategy has been conducted by the research agency via distribution of brochures and advertisements in cinemas, universities, sport clubs, shopping malls, and so on.

The research agency recruited the respondents, according to the following criteria: 25-40 of age, divided into groups by gender and education attainment. The lower level of education included: primary, vocational, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary educational attainment. The higher level of education included: women and men who received a bachelor’s or a master’s degree as well as those with a post-tertiary qualification. In total, eight FGIs were conducted in each country: two with women of low-medium education (Fem, Low edu), two with women with some tertiary education (Fem, High edu), and two with men of low-medium education (Male, Low edu) and two with men with tertiary degree (Male, High edu). Altogether 69 respondents participated in the study in Poland and 58 in Italy.

The interview guideline included numerous questions on why people cohabit or marry. Importantly, a role of religion was explicitly mentioned in the questions. The qualitative analysis aims at exploring mechanism in which religiosity at the neighborhood level might be important for individual decision to cohabit. In particular, we investigate:

- (1) How the topic of religiosity was discussed in relation to cohabitation? Were the respondents referring to individual- or neighborhood-level religiosity? What kind of social context did they refer to? Did they make reference at the country, region, or rather very local neighborhood?
- (2) Did the respondents recognize and describe any mechanisms of how their social environment encourages or discourages individual decisions to cohabit? Were they aware of these mechanisms? Did they mention any sanctions imposed at the neighborhood level which might be attributed to religion?
- (3) Did the respondents mention any characteristics of the context that might be important for promoting Catholic dogma? E.g. did they refer to any differences between regions in the country, between rural and urban settlements, and so forth.

Quantitative analysis

In the quantitative part of our paper, we draw on the 2009 Italian Multipurpose Household Survey “Family and Social Subjects” (FSS) and the 2011 Polish Generation and Gender Survey (GGS). These two surveys were conducted in both countries by means of face-to-face interviews in nationally representative samples. The questionnaires of both surveys took into account the guidelines formulated by the international committee that set up the whole Generation and Gender Program (Vikat et al., 2007)². They provide very detailed information on union formation and childbearing processes and at the same time they are also a valuable source of data on the social background. We restrict the samples to youngest people born in cohorts from 1975-1989 because most variables on individual and neighborhood-level religiosity are cross-sectional. Following standard practice (e.g., Berghammer 2012) by limiting the study to selected cohorts we avoid a problem of having a religiosity measured years after a decision to cohabit was made.

We focus on the probability of non-marital cohabitation as a first union. We model the probability of choosing such an informal partnership as opposed to formal marriage by means of a multilevel logit model. Multilevel modeling gives an opportunity to make a proper test of the impact of contextual factors operating at the neighborhood-level on individual choices while controlling for socio-demographic characteristics of individuals living in specific neighborhoods. For example, this approach has been so far applied to examine the impact of religious contextual norms on abortion decisions (Adamczyk 2008) or on adolescent delinquency (Regnerus 2003). In this study, we employ multilevel models in order to test if the neighborhood-level religiosity affects the individual-level decisions on union formation. In particular, given the relevance of the regional dimension, standard errors of the estimates were adjusted for the possible intra-group correlations at the regional level.

The key control variable is the measure of individual-level religiosity. GGS questionnaire includes a question about the frequency of attending religious services in Church. We distinguish people who attend it at least once a week, because in Roman Catholic Church it is required to attend a mass at least once, on Sunday. In FSS 2009 this information was however missing, whereas it was present in the previous round of the survey (FSS 2003). Using a statistical procedure (Abadie et al. 2004) we attributed religion attachment by matching individuals interviewed in 2009 with individuals interviewed in 2003 depending on their main socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, age, education, employment status, marital status and region).

Additionally, we control for a range of characteristics of respondents that may affect choosing cohabitation as the form of first union. We include basic demographic characteristics such as age at partnership formation, gender and education attainment. Furthermore, we expect that people from most recent cohorts, who were raised in better educated (and hence more liberal and open-minded) families are more likely to choose cohabitation rather than marriage as the form of their first union (Di Giulio and Rosina, 2007; Rosina and Fraboni, 2004). Therefore, we control for the cohort in which individuals were born and education attainment of families in which individuals were raised. Additionally, we control for parental divorce, because previous studies have shown that the experience of parental divorce may deter marriage and encourage less binding living arrangements

² The Italian “variant” of the GGS was conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics in 2003. The 2009 survey is a replication of that previous survey with a more detailed collection of employment and education histories.

(Kiernan, 1992; Thornton, 1991). Additionally, in a separate specification of our models, we control for regional differences in propensity for cohabitation that may be related to the local culture. Some of the dimensions of this culture, such as attachment to tradition, celebrations and meetings with family and friends, may be actually correlated with religiosity. Moreover, some of the regional customs or traditions may be partly promoted or maintained by the local church. Thus, in this second model specification we included the place of residence (urban vs. rural area) and an indicator for the macro-area or residence. Specifically, in Italy the distinction between southern and northern part of Italy is very relevant (Dalla Zuanna and Righi 1999; Kertzer et al. 2008; Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013). In Poland, the regional differences may be observed if we compare eastern and western regions (Eberhardt 2011; Kolasa-Nowak 2011).

Our key explanatory variable is the contextual variable on religiosity in neighborhoods where respondents live (among adult inhabitants in the place of residence). In Italy, we calculated a corresponding indicator in relatively small areas given by the combination of the region of residence (i.e., the Nuts-1 level) with the size of the municipality within the regions. Namely, regions are split into: metropolitan area, suburbs of metropolitan area, municipality with less than 2,000 inhab., municipality with 2,001-10,000 inhab., municipality with 10,001-50,000 inhab., municipality with more than 50,000 inhab. For Italy, this results in a total number of 126 areas for which the incidence of neighborhood-level religiosity is computed. We followed a similar procedure for Polish regions to create 72 neighborhood areas.

3. Results from qualitative analyses

In this section, we present first explorative insights from the qualitative analyses. We explored the content of the Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) to see what kind of references are made when the respondents discuss the role of religion for their decision to cohabit or marry. In the narrative material, we found that they referred to both, individual level religiosity as well as to the contextual influences. These kinds of references were found in Italy and in Poland, in discussions with men and women of different educational level.

At the individual level, the interviewees made a clear link between own religiosity and a higher propensity to marry. As one of the Polish respondents put it, *“for strongly believing people, it’s a natural order of things, that you do get married”* (PL-1, Male, Low edu). This was virtually echoed in the Italian interviews, e.g. *“I’m a religious person, so it is normal for me to get married instead of cohabiting”* (IT-1, Fem, High edu).

The references at the social, contextual level were also present. The respondents in both Italy and Poland recognized that their countries are Catholic and religious and they referred to the Catholic culture and tradition of their countries when they discussed cohabitation and marriage. They unanimously acknowledged that in their opinion the Catholic religion is the main reason for which the cohabitation does not spread faster and marriage remains central in, respectively, Italy and Poland.

For our research, however, it is crucial that the qualitative study allows us to depict how Catholic culture is important for people's choices between cohabitation and marriage, other than by shaping their individual religiosity.

First of all, in both analyzed contexts, the respondents recurrently discussed the role of "the others", "other people" or "neighbors" for an individual choice between cohabitation and marriage. For instance, from the Italian FGIs, we learn that a cohabiting couple is not recognized "by the others" in the same way a married couple is. According to the respondents, "they are not 100% a couple for the others" (IT-8, Male, Low edu). Another respondent (IT-7, Fem, High edu) said, "when you cohabit you do not have the same role in society as you would have married." In another interview, the respondent explicitly said that marriage is strongly encouraged by the society,

"Many people get married just because the society is asking them to do it; otherwise their relationship would not be well perceived by the others." (IT-4, Male, high edu)

This pressure from "others" is evident in the Polish FGIs, too. Interestingly, in the Polish context we could hear some respondents referred more precisely to their neighbors as those, who exert some pressure on them, like in the following discussion,

"- People around me find my wedding more important than I do;
- Instead of minding their own business they think of me, this is the most important thing for them;
- People are always interested in what they neighbors do, instead of minding their own business."
(PL-4, Male, High edu)

Moreover, in the Polish context, the direct pressure from the neighbors was perceived as much more intense when childbearing in cohabitation was concerned. The following argument was brought up in literally all Polish FGIs,

"If I was pregnant, I would do anything to get married. Even for this simple reason: a child goes to school and will be pointed at that he or she doesn't have a daddy. Meaning: a mum is not married..."
(PL-7, Fem, High edu)

That clearly shows how "neighbors' talking" or "pointing fingers" impact an individual decision to marry. Even if people were able to withstand this kind of pressure, they do not want their (future) child to suffer.

In all the above quotes on the impact of neighbors or "the others" religion is not explicitly mentioned. However, the discussion on social pressure was always held in reference to the Catholic tradition and culture of the countries. Moreover, in both countries a pressure stemming directly from the Church or the religion was also discussed. The Italian respondents referred to this kind of pressure at a more general, abstract level. In the interviews, they discussed how "marrying becomes something expected because of the culture, because of the religion" (IT-7, Male, Low edu).

Similar voices were heard in the FGIs conducted in Poland, too. As one respondent put it, "tradition says that you have to have a Church wedding above all" (PL-2, Fem, Low edu). But additionally, in the Polish case respondents reported some more tangible pressure from the Church, exerted directly by the priests. The respondents mentioned that priests might "point their fingers" at unmarried people

at the Church or they would not visit one's home after Christmas³. Moreover, once again, the most feared sanctions from the priests were related to having a child in cohabitation. The Polish respondents quite unanimously recognized that one of the key reasons why people marry is because they want to baptize their (future) children. They describe numerous examples of how Catholic priests refused to baptize a child born out of wedlock. This seems to be a very important mechanism, in which the Church protects the sanctity of marriage.

In the final step, we analyzed whether the respondents noticed any differences in how religious environment may influence people's choices in different settings. Importantly, the key difference between Italy and Poland is revealed here. In Poland, the respondents recurrently and unanimously say that religiosity and mechanisms of social control have greater impact on decision to marry in rural areas. They say that in small villages the role of religion is particularly strong and local society impacts individual choices with greater power. *"In a small village [...] everyone points a finger at you"* (PL-5, Male, Hi edu) or *"a priest can say at the Church that this person has been living with a girl for three years and they are not married yet"* (PL-6, Male, Hi edu) and people fear such stigmatization. In respondents' opinion, the pressure is weaker in the big cities because of the greater anonymity. People do not know each other well, they are not aware of their neighbors' living arrangements. As one respondent put it, *"in bigger cities, one is more anonymous, people are not watching you that closely"* (PL-2, Fem, Low edu).

Interestingly, such comments were absent in the Italian FGIs. Instead, the respondents constantly referred to South-North division, saying that a role of religion is more powerful in the southern regions of the country, because South is simply more religious and more attached to the traditional values. In the narrations, we find the statements similar to the following one,

"Religious fundamentalism is particularly strong in Southern Italian regions, both among lower and higher educated people. I come from the South, and I know!" (IT-5, Fem, Low edu)

The above difference between Italy and Poland complements the previous findings. In Poland, the pressure seems more tangible: it is exerted by precise people (e.g. neighbors or priests) in very concrete situations. Consequently, anonymity of a big city offers some protection against these influences. In Italy, the respondents spoke about the pressure in a more abstract way. For them, it was more about a general perception in society, about what religion and tradition impose. If this is experienced this way, anonymity of a big city will not change people's sense of a moral obligation to marry.

To sum up, in the qualitative part of our study we found that the respondents recognize the role of both, individual- and neighborhood-level religiosity on a personal choice between cohabitation and marriage. We were able to identify several different mechanisms of how religiosity of the respondents' surrounding may influence their decision to marry instead of cohabiting. The interviewees were concerned with a lack of social recognition for cohabiting couples and with a possible stigmatization from "the others" or "the neighbors". They were also worried about the actual sanctions imposed by Catholic priests, who – in fact – might be important social actors in the

³ It is a custom in Poland that priests are visiting homes around the Christmas time, to bless the households, and to pray and talk with people at their own homes.

religious societies. A great variety of sanctions are also imposed at the family level, by parents or grandparents, but describing these mechanism goes beyond the scope of this paper and we are leaving the familial influence for future studies.

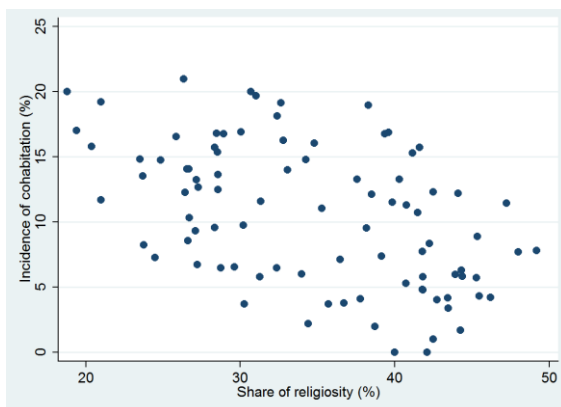
In the quantitative part we will be able to examine, to what extent the neighborhood-level religiosity may actually influence people's choices between cohabitation and marriage. In addition, the quantitative analysis aims to test the role of the key territorial differences as emerged during the FGIs; namely, we verify the importance of the urban-rural dichotomy for Poland and the North-to-South gradient for Italy in shaping contextual influences of religiosity on union formation practices.

4. Results from quantitative analyses

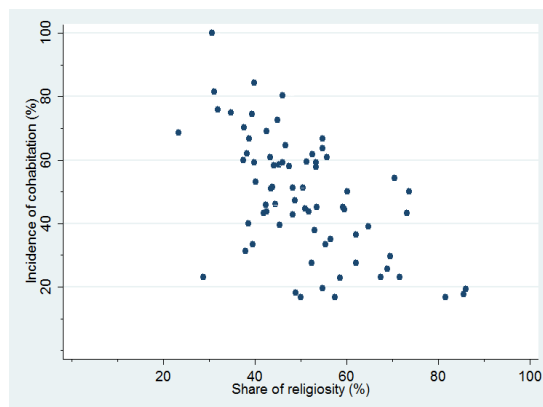
We expect that both in Italy and in Poland, the social environment in which people live does have a potent influence on the individual-level union choices. We expect that people who live in religious communities are less likely to cohabit and tend to marry directly, even if they are not very religious themselves. Figure 1 illustrates the degree of association between the share of religiosity (% of people going to Church at least once a week) and the incidence of cohabitation (%) by area of residence in Italy and Poland. At a first descriptive glance, the presence of a certain degree of association seems to appear.

Figure 1. Scatter plot of share of religiosity (% of people going to Church at least once a week) and incidence of cohabitation (%) by area of residence^a in Italy and Poland.

a) ITALY.



b) POLAND.



^a municipality size combined with region of residence.

In Table 1 the outcomes of the estimated multilevel models are reported both for Italy and Poland. Note that we present two model specifications: in model 1, along several covariates, we introduce contextual-level religiosity and, in model 2, we also introduce territorial fixed effects controls for the urban vs. rural area of residence and the macro-region of residence.

The results from the multilevel models confirm that in both countries people born in the youngest cohorts have higher propensity to choose cohabitation rather than marriage. Note that the pattern is

insignificant in Italy, however. This confirms the results from previous studies on trends in diffusion of cohabitation in Poland and Italy (Matysiak and Mynarska 2010; Gabrielli and Hoem 2010; Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013). We also note that the age at which the partnership has been formed affects the choice of union type. Individuals, who form partnership later in life, tend to marry directly rather than cohabit. Regarding the effect of other socio-demographic variables, women have lower propensity to choose informal unions than men. As compared to the reference group of tertiary educated, the highest propensity to enter informal unions can be observed among people who still participate in education. Regarding those, who completed education, we can note a negative educational gradient in propensity for informal union arrangements in Poland, while a positive educational gradient is observed in Italy. Polish individuals, who attained only primary, vocational or secondary education, are more likely to choose cohabitation than the tertiary educated. This finding goes in line with the conclusions of Matysiak (2009) and Mynarska and Matysiak (2010) about the educational gradient of diffusion of nonstandard family arrangements in Poland. On the contrary, in Italy, a positive gradient is observed. This corroborates recent findings by Gabrielli and Vignoli (2013), who suggest that in recent years a leveling-off in educational differentials, or even a change in the gradient of education from positive to negative, may come into play in Italy.

We find also an interesting effect of social background. Individuals, who were raised in better educated - and hence more liberal and open-minded - families are more likely to choose cohabitation rather than marriage as the form of their first union. This finding is also consistent with previous research on the propensity for cohabitation in Poland and Italy (Baranowska-Rataj and Pirani 2012, Di Giulio and Rosina, 2007; Rosina and Fraboni, 2004). Moreover, in line with previous studies on the impact of parental background on the children's life course choices (Kiernan, 1992; Thornton, 1991), we find that parental divorce discourages from marriage and increases propensity to choose cohabitation in the first union.

Individual religiosity, as measured by the frequency of attending religious services, is associated with choosing marriage rather than cohabitation in the first union. This finding has been also well grounded in the literature on the influence of individual-level religiosity on partnership choices (Berghammer 2012; Eggebeen and Dew 2009; Lehrer 2004; Teachman 2002; Marks 2005; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993). However, even after controlling for individual religiosity, we note a clear impact of the religiosity of people who live in the same neighborhood. In regions where a high proportion of "neighbors" attend church regularly, the propensity to enter cohabitation rather than marriage is significantly lower than in less religious areas (cp. Table 1, model 1). This confirms our key hypothesis that individuals living in social environment where people are very religious tend to make life choices consistent with the norms and beliefs supported by the dominating religion.

Furthermore, we investigated to what extent the impact of region-specific differences in propensity for cohabitation may be related to the local culture. We assumed that in many Polish and Italian regions, especially in the small villages and in regions that are located in eastern part of Poland or in the South of Italy, the local culture may be strongly interrelated with religion, affecting individual life choices in a similar way. Indeed, we can observe that individuals living in Polish rural areas and in regions located in the eastern part of Poland as well as those living in southern part of Italy are less likely to cohabit. This corroborates the findings from the qualitative part of our research. Interestingly, we can note that after controlling for the region-specific fixed effects, the role of neighborhood-specific religiosity becomes statistically insignificant in Italy and weakens in its

magnitude in Poland. This may indicate that the role of local culture may be more important for individual union formation patterns than the role of religion *per se*. It should be stressed, that the key dimensions of this culture, such as the attachment to tradition, celebrations and meetings with family and friends, are actually strongly correlated with religiosity in both countries. However, it seems that social norms and traditions – shaped by religion – have a more important impact on the union formation practices than religious dogmas as such.

Table 1. The impact of religiosity on cohabitation – the results from multilevel models.

	POLAND				ITALY				
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		
	coef.	se	coef.	se	coef.	se	coef.	se	
Year of birth (ref. 1975-1979)									
1980-1984	0.71***	0.10	0.70***	0.10	0,25	0,11	0.23*	0,11	
1985-1989	0.95***	0.13	0.95***	0.13	0,33	0,23	0.29	0,25	
Age at 1st partnership formation (ref. 15-19)									
20-24	-0.27*	0.14	-0.28**	0.14	-0.58***	0,21	-0.62***	0,23	
25-29	-0.34**	0.17	-0.35**	0.17	-0.81***	0,22	-0.85***	0,24	
30-34	-0.10	0.25	-0.11	0.25	-1.01***	0,28	-0.99***	0,29	
Gender (ref. men)									
Women	-0.20**	0.09	-0.20**	0.09	-0.63***	0,10	-0.64***	0,10	
Highest level of education at 1st partnership (ref. tertiary)									
Secondary	0.57***	0.16	0.56***	0.16	-0.31	0,20	-0.26	0,19	
Vocational	0.36**	0.15	0.35**	0.15	-0.019	0,14	-0.08	0,14	
Primary	0.39**	0.18	0.39**	0.18	-0.58***	0,22	-0.49**	0,20	
In education	0.75***	0.24	0.79***	0.24	0.55**	0,25	0.57**	0,26	
Parental education (ref. at least one tertiary educated parent)									
No parent with tertiary education	-0.18	0.13	-0.17	0.13	-0.28	0,22	-0.18	0,21	
Parents' divorce when the child was aged 15 (ref. no divorce)									
Parental divorce till child's age 15	0.23	0.16	0.23	0.16	0.73***	0,14	0.65***	0,13	
Frequency of attending church (ref. less than weekly)									
Attending the church weekly or more often	-1.01***	0.09	-1.00***	0.09	-0.33***	0,09	-0.27***	0,09	
Contextual religiosity (ref. low share)									
medium share	-0.64***	0.21	-0.40**	0.19	-0,036	0,21	0.11	0,25	
high share	-1.17***	0.26	-0.63**	0.26	-0.68**	0,32	0.04	0,37	
Place of residence (ref. urban)									
rural			-0.66***	0.18			0,06	0,17	
Regional division of residence (ref. PL: West, IT: North and Centre)									
PL: East; IT: South and Islands			-0.53***	0.20			-1.16***	0,34	
Constant	0.60**	0.29	0.61**	0.2	1.31**	0,45	1.29**	0,51	
Log likelihood	-1726.47		-1718.41		-1602,28		-1547,9		
N	2921		2921		2576		2576		

*Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The contextual variable “Attending church weekly or more often” is subdivided into low, medium, and high share according to proper country-specific cut-off points: up to 40%, between 40 and 60%, and over 60% for Poland; up to 30%, between 30 and 40%, and over 40% for Italy.*

5. Integrated discussion of key findings

There is a plethora of empirical evidence suggesting a meaningful influence of individual-level religiosity on partnership choices. The potential contextual influences of religious participation on family formation practices have been so far largely ignored. This paper aims at filling this gap providing insights into how religion influences the family formation processes. In particular, we analyzed the impact of a neighborhood context religiosity on an individual decision to enter cohabitation, and disentangled the neighborhood effect from the effect of an individual religiosity. We used the data on two European societies where secularization and individualization have not yet reached momentum: Italy and Poland. We combine the empirical evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research.

The qualitative research provided an in-depth understanding on the mechanisms of how the neighborhood may affect the individual decisions on union formation. The results suggest that, beside the role of individual level religiosity, in both countries individuals also attach importance to the contextual-level influences. We identified several different mechanisms of how religiosity of the respondents' surrounding may influence their decision to marry instead of cohabiting. The interviewees were especially concerned with a lack of social recognition for cohabiting couples and with a possible stigmatization by “the others” or “the neighbors”. In Poland, people felt that during any kind of events in the neighborhood during which the religion plays an important role, such as baptizing or the first Holy Communion of a child, visiting the home by a priest during Christmas, their marriage status can be exposed and condemned by the local priest and by the community. In fact, sanctions seem more tangible when childbearing is involved and it seems that a child makes a couple even more fragile with respect to external influences. They feel more obliged to marry as they feel responsible for the youngest member of the family and they do not want the social sanctions to impact their offspring. In Italy, the ideas of the social sanctions related to the marriage status were more abstract. Italians stressed that cohabitation means a lower position in the hierarchy of the local society and meets general social disapproval.

Moreover, the analysis of the FGIs ventured that the impact of social sanctions may vary in different regional contexts. In Poland, the respondents recurrently and unanimously said that religiosity and mechanisms of social control have greater impact on decision to cohabit or marry in rural areas. The anonymity of a big city offers some protection against the neighbors' looks and comments or the priest's condemnation. Instead, in Italy, the impact of religion and Catholic culture seems more abstract. Consequently, the respondents constantly referred to South-North division, saying that a role of religion is more powerful in the southern regions of the country, because South is more religious and more attached to the traditional values.

Then, by means of quantitative multilevel analyses we tested how strongly the mechanisms that we observed during the FGIs work in the general population. The quantitative outcomes confirmed that

individuals living in social environment where people are very religious tend to make life choices consistent with the norms and beliefs supported by the dominating religion, even if they are not very religious themselves. Furthermore, in line with qualitative findings, we also found that individuals living in Polish rural areas and in regions located in the eastern part of Poland as well as those living in southern part of Italy are less likely to cohabit. What is more, after controlling for these territorial characteristics, the role of neighborhood-specific religiosity weakened in the magnitude or lost its statistical power. This may indicate that social norms and traditions that are shaped by religion, rather than religious dogmas themselves, have a direct effect on the observed union formation behaviors.

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