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CHANGING PATHS TO ADULTHOOD IN ITALY. MEN AND WOMEN ENTERING STABLE WORK AND FAMILY CAREERS

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Abstract

Paths to adulthood have changed greatly in the last decades: entries into the labour market as well as into partnership or parenthood have been postponed, with also new sequences and interconnections. In this piece of work we observe life-courses from the ages of 14 to 35 of men and women born in four successive cohorts. We distinguish them by level of education, and we analyse the timing and frequencies of their first job, the first job as an insider (as an employee with a permanent contract or as a typical self-employed worker), episodes of atypical work or unemployment between first job and age 35, couple formation, and childbirth. Our analyses confirm that today's young Italians form a 'postponement generation', which achieves later, if at all, what previous generations had already achieved in their twenties. For men, until the cohort born in the 1960s, the norm for both high- and low-educated men was to be insiders at age 35, and to achieve that status rapidly. What has changed is that now men become labour-market insiders later, and the route is more tortuous, with long and repeated spells of unemployment or atypical work. For women – for whom being in employment, and working as insiders, has never been the norm – the change has been their greater involvement in the labour market, but with the greater risk, compared with men, of job insecurity, especially if their education level is low. In the later cohorts, the ages at first marriage or cohabitation and first childbirth have also changed, especially for highly-educated men. This is strongly connected with changes in labour market paths, but with gender differences. Not holding an insider position inhibits the assumption of family responsibilities for men. For women economic and job insecurity seem to have less influence on childbirth.

Keywords

Labour market stability and transition to first child/paths to adulthood; gender; education; changes across cohorts

JEL classification

J13 – J16 - J62

1. Introduction

If we compare the lives of young people today with those of their parents or grandparents, it is clear that the modes, timing and outcomes of becoming an adult have changed profoundly in all European countries. The timeframes of the various phases – completing full-time education, entering the labour market (with a ‘good’ job), the creation of a stable relationship, and the birth of a child – have extended. The sequences and synchronizations have also varied: it is increasingly unusual to find work soon after the completion of full-time education; young people leave the parental home soon after starting a career or only to get married, or they have children only after marriage. There has also been a transformation in the stages attained: increasingly more women are in higher education, and then enter the labour force and remain in it even after marriage or maternity, and increasingly more men and women do not marry, or do not have children [Cavalli and Galland 1996; Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Shanahan 2000].

However, the forms and speed of these changes are not identical everywhere. In Italy, as in the other Southern European countries, the ‘delay syndrome’ is much more apparent, especially with regard to entry into the labour market, leaving the parental home, and the transition to the first child [Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2004; Ambrosi and Rosina 2009]. Moreover, once the labour market has been entered, particularly in Italy, there is a high risk of becoming trapped in insecure careers for several years [Barbieri 2009]. This also has significant repercussions for family trajectories [Blossfeld et al. 2005; Bozzon 2009; Mazzuco et al. 2006 and 2007]. Another cause of delays in family transitions is the lack of policies which support the costs of children, both economic and in terms of opportunity, and the persisting presence of marked gender asymmetries. Although there have been important changes, female employment rates in Italy are still relatively low; the gap between male and female unemployment rates is still relatively wide, and the extent to which men share family obligations and responsibilities is among the lowest in Europe [Reyneri 2009; Naldini and Saraceno 2011]. Finally, whilst young people in other countries are experimenting with different forms of economic or housing independence (living alone, sharing with other young people, or cohabiting as a couple) and non-linear paths (for example, having a child while still students), in Italy the prolongation of the transition to adulthood has taken place within

traditional models of family formation, and the incidence of cohabitation and childbirth outside marriage is relatively small, though increasing quickly in the last few years [Naldini and Jurado 2010].

This study is prompted by previous research and the debate which it engendered. It concentrates on Italy, and explores the modes and timings of the transition to adulthood, using data from the Italian longitudinal household survey (ILFI 2005). We analyse life-courses from the ages of 14 (or the first job) to 35 of men and women born in four successive cohorts (1930-39, 1940-49, 1950-59 e 1960-69¹). We consider the first job, the first job as an insider (as an employee with a permanent contract or as a typical self-employed worker), episodes of atypical work or unemployment between the date of the first job and the age of 35, couple formation (by marriage or cohabitation), and childbirth.

To take account of the flexibilization of the labour market, dimensions which refer to the labour-market situation have been defined not only at the time of the first job, as is the usual practice in studies on the transition to adulthood, but also by considering the type of contract and the continuity of employment in the early part of a career. This is crucial for grasping the level of autonomy and security enjoyed by young adults. Economic and work-related flexibility and uncertainty are then studied in connection with family careers, given that while the dimensions of autonomy and security may have value *per se*, they are also, as evidenced by many studies, instrumental to the attainment of other adult goals, such as family formation [Gallino 2001; Blossfeld et al. 2005; Micheli 2006]. More specifically, we shall focus on what, and how many, young people have already formed a couple by the age of 35 (whether they are married or cohabiting) and have had at least one child; on what, and how many, young people are unemployed or inactive; if they are in employment, on whether they have, or do not have, open-ended employment contracts; and on how, and to what extent, the age at which these events occur, as well as the time elapsing between them, have changed. Our analysis of the labour-market situation will identify when these stages are reached and also the paths that have been followed. These may include periods of unemployment, work on atypical contracts, or inactivity. In the final section, we examine the connection between

¹ Because the most recent wave of the ILFI dates back to 2005, we have excluded subjects born after 1960, because we are unable to observe them until the age of 35.

work- and family-related trajectories, and we look at the impact of education and labour market position on the birth of the first child.

Entry into the labour market, spells of atypical work or periods of inactivity, and their duration, the moment of forming a couple or becoming a parent, but also the influence of economic independence and a career on determining the pace of the family career, differ between men and women. They also differ according to the investment in education. Education is a crucial vehicle of present and future resources, whether instrumental, cognitive or identitarian. The level of education on entry into the labour market, union and parenthood is therefore important for identifying timings, modes, and outcomes. In this study, therefore, unlike many Italian studies on the transition to adulthood which focus on differences by social class of origin [Schizzerotto 2002; Barbagli et al. 2003; Negri and Filandri 2010], we shall examine variations by level of education² and gender. Our purpose is to analyse for whom the path to adulthood has changed the most (men or women, or lower- or more highly-educated individuals), in what dimensions the change has been greatest (in the labour market or in family formation) and to what extent, and in what way education polarized patterns of entry into adulthood in the past compared with today.

2. The Italian model: changes since the second post-war period

Individual life-courses are deeply embedded in historical time. They are structured by the cultural, economic and institutional configurations of the context in which they unfold [Brückner and Mayer 2005; Kohli 2001]. The destandardization and extension of adult life-courses that we see today stem from the macro transformations which occurred from the mid-1970s onwards. As advocates of the second demographic transition have demonstrated, the change concerned those values which placed increasing emphasis on personal autonomy, self-fulfilment, consumption, the reversibility of choices, and freedom from familial and social constraints [Lestaege 1995; Liefbroer and Fokkema 2008; Van de Kaa 1994; Sobotka 2008]. As many institutional scholars have shown, also to change were the labour market, welfare

² Our analyses will be divided according to a higher or lower level of education. By 'higher', we mean possession of an upper-secondary diploma or a degree; by 'lower', we mean possession of an elementary or lower-secondary certificate.

system, and family structures amid which individuals build their lives [Esping-Andersen 1999; Mayer 1994; Livi Bacci 2009]. In many European countries, the second post-war period was a time of economic and social expansion, and of evolution of the welfare state, dependent employment, and protections designed to cover periods of unemployment and old age, and to support the maintenance and progression of wage levels. However, this growth took place within clear gender and family models: the first individual to enjoy protection was the so-called 'Fordist male breadwinner', on the assumptions of full employment, relative stability and homogeneity of the labour market, stable marriages, and the widespread domestic and care work undertaken by women who for the most part were not active in the labour market. The scenario changed after the mid-1970s: there was increased uncertainty in the labour market, in protection against new social risks, in the duration and frequency of marriages, and in the availability of female domestic labour [Blossfeld et al. 2005; Del Boca and Rosina 2009]. There were changes in life-courses, their patterns, and the interdependencies between work and family, and between men and women. During the 'Fordist' era, a typical male life-course was marked by a orderly, rapid, and complete sequence: school – work (immediately stable) – leaving home – marriage – children. In female life-courses, on the other hand, especially those of middle- to upper-class women, paid work was optional, or else limited to phases during which there were no family responsibilities to assume. The transition of women to adulthood again typically followed a orderly and rapid sequence, but it was less articulated, and consisted of school – (work) – leaving home – marriage – children. In the 'post-Fordist' era, however, the life-courses of young men and women have become more similar in certain respects. Education and work are everywhere increasingly characteristic of the female experience. Work has become increasingly uncertain for men and women alike, with regard to duration, income, and future prospects. Another effect of this growing uncertainty is that both men and women tend to put off leaving home and having a family [Blossfeld et al. 2005; Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002]. Nonetheless, in all European countries it is still women (and above all those with lower education levels) who are trapped in unstable, 'bad' jobs, and who reduce their workload or quit work when they have children.

Although these transitions have affected all countries alike, and assumed the aspects described, a good deal of research has provided a more diversified picture. Significant

variations in the process and configuration of life-courses exist in the past as they do today according to country, gender, social class or education, and for different areas within single countries. Even in the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s, not everyone experienced a 'good' 'Fordist' life-course, and not everyone enjoyed rapid and stable entry into adulthood. In the 1980s and 1990s, uncertainty increased, but not for everyone, nor in the same way, nor for the same amount of time, and not with the same outcomes in terms of poverty, opportunities, and choices such as starting a family.

Firstly, not all countries experienced the so-called 'golden age' to the same extent or in the same manner. In Italy, in particular, both industrialization and tertiarization were belated, and then only partial, and there were marked differences between the north and south of the country, between formal and informal, between small and large enterprises, and between the public and private sectors. The result was that the protections which had developed around the figure of the employed male head of family in the 1970s left large portions of the population exposed: men and women in non-primary labour markets, and non-working women, who gained access to the 'golden' protection offered by the labour market and welfare by secondary routes insofar as they were the wives of protected workers.

Secondly, not all countries responded in the same way to the 'post-Fordist' changes under way: on the one hand, the growing entry and permanence of women in the labour market and increasingly unstable marriages, which made it ever more desirable and necessary to reconcile family duties and paid employment; and, on the other, the growing flexibilization of the labour market which required new forms of protection unconnected with the type of contract, employer, status, and occupational history. In Italy, both 'protected flexibility' policies and those supporting family-work reconciliation are still weak. The model of industrial, corporative and familistic citizenship resists change [Solera and Negri 2007].

Even within the same context, uncertainty neither affects everyone nor does it consistently produce an 'inevitable' or 'negative' delay. In Italy, unlike in the past, it is now individuals from the higher social classes who begin work, leave home, and start families later. It is these same individuals who exhibit a closer match between first job and qualifications, and who, although they suffer periods of uncertainty with atypical contracts and low incomes, later set off along prestigious career paths. By contrast, individuals with low education levels or from a low social class, who accept a first job of any kind which does match their qualifications, or

is atypical, and above all who do not leave it quickly, are more likely to be trapped in precarious employment [Barbieri and Scherer 2005; Negri and Filandri 2010]. This change of sign in the effects of the social class of origin in Italy indicates that the delay which has undoubtedly characterized the life-courses of young people over the past decades – and especially those of young Italians – has not only been ‘undergone’ but also ‘acted upon’ and ‘chosen’. It may be a strategy of investment in education characterised by a wait before securing a ‘positive’ transition to adulthood, so to embarking on a worthy career, and obtaining a job consistent with the lifestyle and expectations with which the person has grown up (or at least not inferior to those of the parents).

This change of sign also shows that in a context like Italy, the family of origin and personal resources are still decisive. If it is true that social class and education structure life-courses everywhere, this is all the more so in familistic welfare regimes. Here, education levels have not only accompanied changes in behaviour and attitudes, but still strongly differentiate them – especially in the case of women. Education furnishes not only various modes of access to the labour market, but also different models of gender identity. It also transmits different types of economic, cultural and social capital, and various strategies to cope with the growing flexibilization of the labour market. In a context like Italy, where there is weak welfare and a strong family, the social class (of origin of the individual and his or her partner) still counts for a great deal; it cushions against increased uncertainty in the labour market, and gives support in meeting the direct costs and reconciliation costs of starting a family [Bertolini and Rizza 2005; Mencarini 2009, Mencarini and Tanturri 2006, Sabbadini 2002; Saraceno 2008].

3. Working and starting a family: the situation at age 35

From the mid-1960s onwards, the female labour supply changed markedly in all advanced capitalist countries. Women began to make a massive investment in education and the labour market. They both entered it with greater frequency and remained in it longer, reducing the number of interruptions around marriage or childbirth, or reducing the duration of those interruptions [Solera 2009^a e 2009^b]. This is evident in Figure 1, which shows that the share of

low-educated women without a spell of paid employment by the time they reached 35 halved between the first and second cohort (that is, for those who reached age 20 during the 1970s). On the other hand, both in the past and today, it is rare to find highly-educated women who have never worked. Their weight has shifted: in the older cohorts, only 13% of women had upper-secondary diplomas or degrees, whereas these represent 58% of the latest cohort (Table 1³). Their combination of work and family also changed; *ceteris paribus*, more highly-educated women less frequently leave the labour market to devote themselves full-time to family work, and they more frequently re-enter it if they have left [Solera 2009^a].

The growth of the female labour supply has been driven not only by changes in the desires, identity, and practices of women, and in their political visibility, but also in the demand for labour, with the growth of ‘women-friendly’ areas, notably in services, and especially in the public sector, albeit in a more limited – and territorially more heterogeneous – manner than in other European countries. There has also been a change in regulation of the labour market since the 1980s. As Anastasia et al. (2011) describe, the 1960s and 1970s were years of public regulation intended to ensure employment stability, and thereafter, in response to growing youth unemployment, to favour the labour-market entry of young people. On the other hand, in the mid-1980s, and above all at the end of the 1990s, there began a phase of labour-market deregulation. The Treu Law of 1997 introduced a series of new types of fixed-term employment contract, which were further liberalized and extended by legislation in the following years. The outcome was a growth of temporary work, but with two peculiarities. First, it did not ‘revolutionize’ the structure of the Italian labour market. Although the growth rate was among the highest in the previous fifteen years compared with the other European countries, especially those of Continental and Northern Europe, the share of temporary work in Italy as a percentage of total paid work remained low. Second, compared with Europe as a whole, temporary work in Italy is extremely segmented by gender (more women are affected) and cohort (more younger workers are affected; Dell’Aringa, 2009). This segmentation is connected with what many authors term ‘partial and selective deregulation’, which has almost exclusively concerned new forms of access to the labour market consisting of not only fixed-term jobs but also ones with low wages and limited protection, and which has instead left

³ In order to avoid too small numbers, especially in the older age cohorts, and to simplify comparison, university degrees and upper-secondary diplomas are treated jointly in the analyses which follow.

intact the levels of legislative and welfare protection afforded to open-ended employment relationships – and without universalistic, general reform of the social shock absorbers (unemployment benefits, guaranteed minimum wage schemes, and maternity and parental allowances and leave). This has reinforced the insider/outsider structure of the Italian labour market by introducing new cleavages. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, in a period when the Italian labour market was described as rigid, highly-regulated and protected, this, as said, in fact applied only to dependent employment, above all in the public sector and in large firms. Alongside these ‘Fordist’ workers – men for the most part –there was a significant minority of men and women precariously employed in agriculture, the services sector, and small firms, many of which were family-run and with frequent ‘births’ and ‘deaths’ [Contini and Trivellato 2005]. Self-employment and irregular work were rife, and many authors have interpreted their growth as a *de facto* response to the need for flexibility, lower labour costs, and the dismissal of workers not possible by legal means. The reregulation process of the past twenty years has meant that new forms of segmentation between typical and atypical labour, and between new and old entries into the labour market, have been added to the already-existing ones between formal and informal work, the public and private sectors, small and large firms, and employment and self-employment. The result of this flexibilization at the margins, therefore, has been that those most affected were the outsiders: young people, women (including those returning from maternity leave), and immigrants [Esping-Andersen and Regini 2000; Barbieri and Scherer 2005; Anastasia et al. 2011].

We shall not discuss here whether deregulation of the labour market was beneficial in terms of micro and macro equilibrium and outcomes. Figure 1 shows how many people were insiders at age 35 in the various cohorts. We follow Barbieri and Scherer [2005] by defining as insiders those who are ‘typical’, that is, who are in open-ended employment or are the ‘classic’ self-employed (craftsmen, traders, professionals, and not ‘quasi-subordinates’ such as employer-coordinated freelancers or casual workers). The insider/outsider definition is based on the type of contract and the type of social protection given to that contract or job. It is therefore part of the debate on welfare models, these being models for regulation of the economy and everyday life. Having a fixed-term contract does not necessarily mean greater job insecurity: many workers on fixed-term contracts have them renewed more than once, while many workers on open-ended employment contracts are made redundant. There is,

however, an imbalance in the levels of social protection and insecurity, both actual and perceived; uncertainties over the continuity and level of income, and over job stability. All these factors have a significant effect not only on the stages and features of the career, but also on the other areas of life, especially the family.

As said at the end of the first section, we distinguish all analyses not only by cohort and gender, but also by education level. This enables us to gainsay images of homogeneity and to show how the life-courses of men and women with higher and lower education levels differed between the past and today. This also permits, as we compare the situation at age 35 among the various cohorts, to control for seniority in the labour market; that is, the effect of the increased schooling and older age on first employment of today's young people compared with their grandparents or fathers and mothers because they are more educated.

Figure 1 shows that the share of insiders at age 35 is more or less constant in the first three cohorts, and then falls noticeably in the last one, made up of individuals born in the 1960s who entered the labour market at the end of the 1980s, and who turned 30 as the deregulation of the labour market was beginning, and after the economic crisis of 1992-3. The most stable cohorts, for both men and women, seem to be the second and third, those born in the 1940s and 1950s, the so-called 'Fordist' cohorts of the 'golden age'. What also emerges from Figure 1, however, is a clear gender structure assumed and promoted by the 'Fordist' model of economic regulation and of daily life, and which was only partially modified thereafter. For women, being an insider at age 35 has never been the rule, especially for those with lower education levels, either because they have never entered the labour market or because they entered it and then exited when they became wives or mothers, or because they were more involved with the fixed-term or irregular labour markets: one woman in two is an insider at age 35 if the level of education is high, and one in three if it is low. For men, on the other hand, being a worker and an insider was, and continues to be, the prevalent situation: in the first three cohorts, the rate is around 90% for the more highly-educated, and around 80% for the less highly-educated; in the last cohort, the rate is around 75% for both categories, so there is a slightly larger drop in the percentage of men with upper-secondary diplomas or degrees. If we exclude the first cohort, which is atypical, especially for women (40% had never had a job, and among those working, a significant share were farm helpers) the polarization of the

chances of being an insider at age 35 measured by education level has not significantly altered for either men or women.

It is not only the position in the labour market which has changed with respect to the past. The times of marriage and childbirth and the places they occupy in a life-course have also changed greatly. For those born in the 1950s, being married and having had children by the age of 35 was the norm. For the later cohorts, reaching the age of 35 brought different situations and experiences: not only were members of these cohorts less likely to have a stable position in the labour market, but they were also less likely to have lived in a couple or become parents (see Figure 2). The fall is apparent in all areas, but, as we have noted above, it was more prevalent in the transition to parenthood. It also affected all categories, but especially highly-educated men and women. This may be interpreted as due to a combination of choice and constraint. The higher level of investment in education, together with more protracted studies and the desire not to waste them by accepting work of any kind, or, for women, taking on family responsibilities which might compromise their placement in the labour market, has encouraged a delay in the transition to first childbirth. In a country where the flexibility of the labour market has increased, but the level of welfare protection in regard to this flexibility and the direct and indirect costs of children has remained low, the delays have been longer. As various studies have shown, one result of the deregulation discussed earlier and of the changes in the labour demand caused by informatization and the growth of the services sector has been an increase in job opportunities in recent decades. But wages have also fallen, both at the time of entry and thereafter, and the amount of time elapsing before achieving a certain level of job stability has increased. As a result, the amount of time necessary to reach complete economic independence has lengthened, so that young people are more dependent on their families, and the moment of leaving home, and work and life aspirations and projects are all delayed [Anastasia et al. 2011; Giorgi et al. 2011]. In a situation where gender models, despite significant transformations, still define work in the home as an ‘essentially’ female responsibility, and work done by women as ‘subordinate’ to that of men [Bimbi 1992; Saraceno 1992; Treas and Widmer 2000], achieving this income or career stability has a different significance and weight for men and women. As some empirical studies have shown, having a job, and the type of job, count more in the decision to start a family for men, who continue to bear responsibility for the direct cost of having

children, than it does for women [Bernardi and Nazio 2005; Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002]. It is mostly highly-educated men who have not yet had a child at 35, partly due to increased difficulties with becoming settled in the labour market, and partly because the rule that in a couple the man should be older than the woman still holds true. For women, on the other hand, who might be considered to bear the indirect costs of children – work in the home – the kind of job counts for little. What does count a great deal is the level of education, which, if it is high, implies a different place for motherhood in the life course; motherhood is increasingly carefully considered and interwoven with other types of experience and resources, material and symbolic, which women are loath to forgo.

The existence of different career paths by gender also emerges from a comparison of the timing of the various events which mark the passage to adulthood (see Figure 3). The various stages have been pushed forward for men and women alike. For men, regardless of the level of education, phases in the labour market always seem to precede those of starting a family. Both, however, take place earlier for men with lower education levels, especially with regard to the first job. In all cohorts, however, the timing of marriage or cohabitation varies little according to education level, whereas the timing of the birth of a child starts to differentiate in the last cohort (when the average age for the birth of the first child is 32 for low-educated men and over 35 for more highly-educated ones). The age when the first stable job is secured is also pushed forward in the last cohort, but the formation of couples takes place more rapidly thereafter, and the standard ‘first job – first job as insider – marriage – children’ sequence still holds true for both better- and lower-educated men. This suggests that there is a strong connection between the man’s work career and long-term projects as a couple. As shown elsewhere [Carbone 2010], it also suggests that the delays in parenthood experienced especially by highly-educated men are mostly caused by belated ‘good’ entry into the labour market. Once job positions have been obtained which are perceived to be consistent with class- or human capital-based aspirations, the transition to adulthood is accomplished rapidly, cohabitation is commenced as a married or unmarried couple, and a family is started, all within a short time.

This connection is less clear in the case of women, who more often start a family without having a job, especially a stable one. In the case of better-educated women, job arrives at the same time in the first three cohorts, and later in the last; in the case of lower-educated women,

working, and especially working on permanent contracts, has never been a normal situation, and this stage is reached rather late, if at all. In addition, compared with men, women experience all their life events within a shorter timeframe: in other words, as other studies [Zanetti 2010] have found, for women, the ‘work - couple - children’ phases are completed within a few years. Once again, it is with the last cohort that the pace changes: the transition starts later, but there is also a drop in the share of more-educated women who have completed all these stages by the time they reach 35.

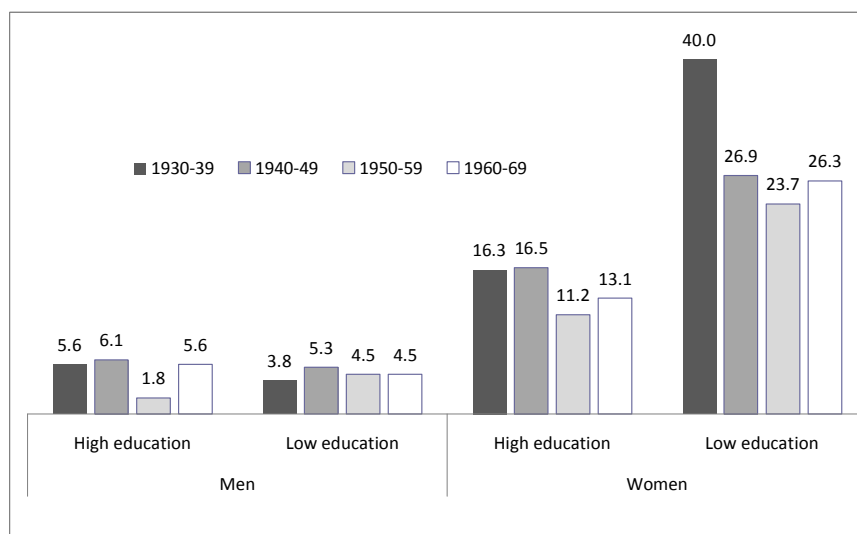
In general, both for men and women, the delay starts with the last cohort considered, those born in the 1960s, except for the chances of becoming an insider, where changes started with those born in the 1950s. Moreover, for men and women alike, polarization based on education levels seems to have increased with time. In the 1950s and 1960s, the tempo and sequences of life courses of lower- and better-educated men were quite similar as regards both entry into the labour market and settlement within it, forming couples, and having children. In the younger cohorts, the timeframes diverge, and, as we have seen, a much smaller share of educated men had married and had children by the time they reached 35. For women, education has always marked a line, above all as regards labour-market participation, but in the case of the younger cohorts it also polarizes maternity times.

Table 1. Men and women by educational level and cohort

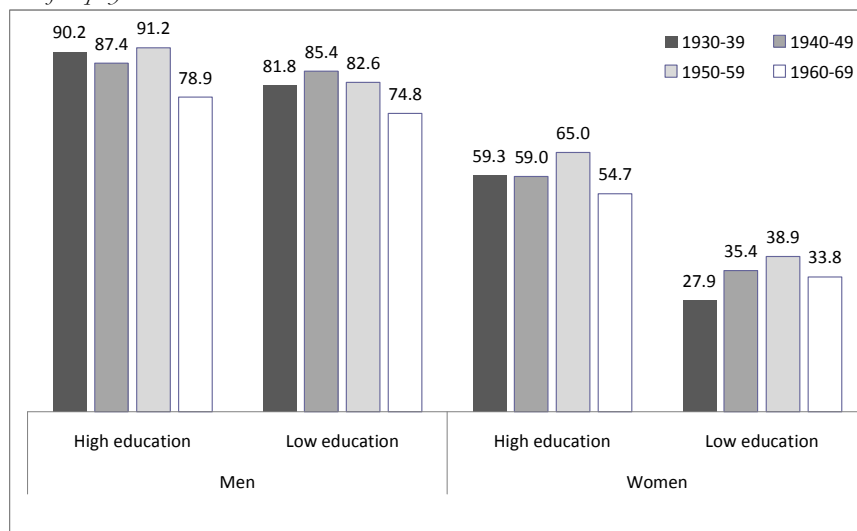
	Men (N= 3417)				Women (N=3598)			
	1930-39	1940-49	1950-59	1960-69	1930-39	1940-49	1950-59	1960-69
Primary school	77.6	63.5	50.8	45.1	87.5	70.6	53.1	41.6
Secondary school	16.5	26.8	36.6	40.2	9.5	21.6	34.7	42.3
Degree	5.9	9.7	12.7	14.8	3.1	7.8	12.2	16.1
N	661	827	908	1021	709	908	934	1047

Source: our elaboration on ILFI data (2005).

% of those having never worked by age 35



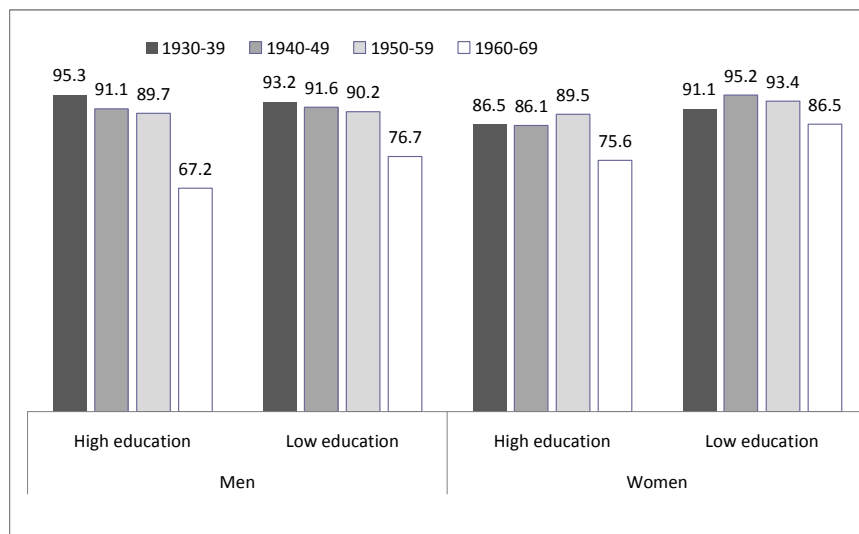
Insider in the labour market by age 35: among those ever working, % with a permanent contract or self-employed



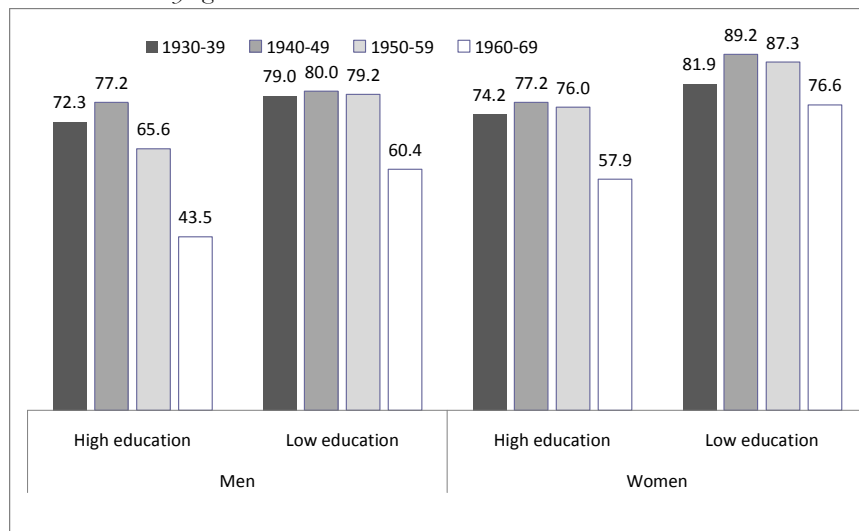
Notes: low education=up to lower secondary education; high education = upper secondary or tertiary education
Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Figure 1: Labour market status at age 35 by sex, education and cohorts

At least ever married or cohabited by age 35



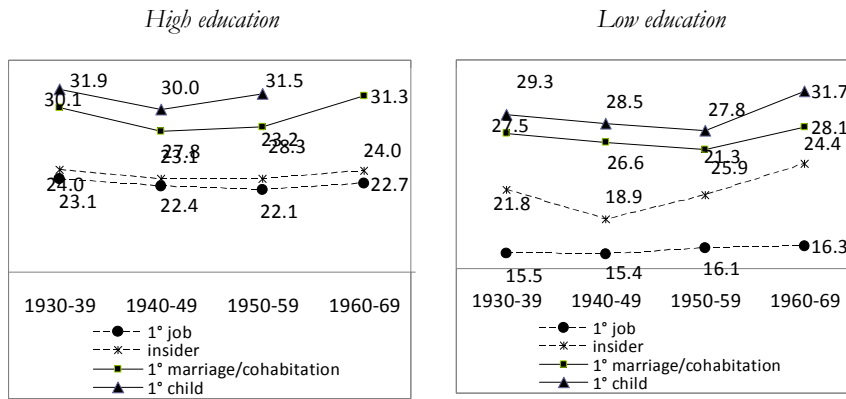
At least one child by age 35



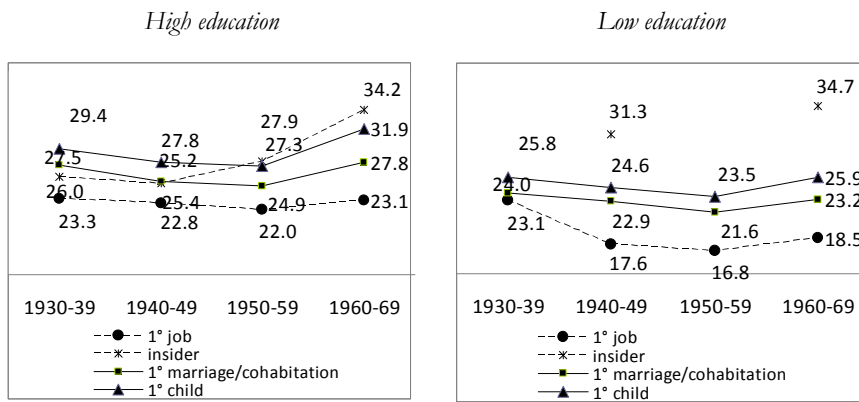
Notes: low education=up to lower secondary education; high education = upper secondary or tertiary education
 Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Figure 2: Family status at age 35 by sex, education and cohorts

MEN



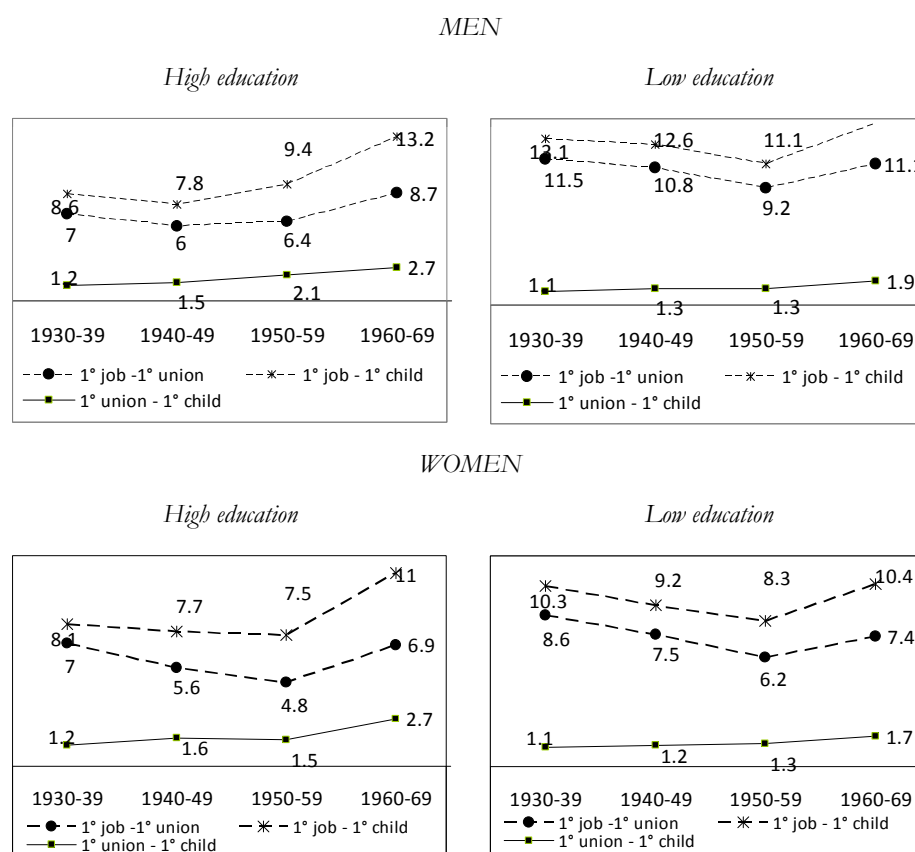
WOMEN



Notes: low education = up to lower secondary education; high education = upper secondary or tertiary education
 Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Figure. 3. Median age at different events of the transition to adulthood between 14 and 35 years old, by sex, education and cohort (Kaplan-Meier estimates).

The expansion and prolongation of the period of education, and the consequent delay in entry into the labour market, have certainly contributed to postponing the various events which punctuate the passage to adulthood. Late entry does not, however, appear to cause delays in starting a family. Educational level remaining the same, the age at which the first job is entered does not vary to any great extent. What changes most is the age at which the first typical job is started, and, as we shall see in the next section, the frequency of episodes of unemployment or atypical work in the period between the first job and reaching 35 years of age. This is also clear from figure 5.4, which shows the average intervals between first job and first union, first job and first child, and first union and first child. For the last cohort the distance between the timing of first job and of family formation becomes maximum, both for men and women, especially those highly-educated.



Notes: low education=up to lower secondary education; high education = upper secondary or tertiary education
Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Figure. 4. Mean interval between different events of the transition to adulthood between 14 and 35 years old, by sex, education and cohort (Kaplan-Meier estimates).

4. Life courses and 'life packages' between the first job and the age of 35

As we have seen, achieving stability at age 35 was, and still is, the predominant condition for men, although its significance started to decrease with the cohort born in the 1960s. For women, stable employment has never been the norm (albeit with an inverted U-shaped pattern, that is, growth from the first to the third cohort, and a fall in the fourth). What have changed most significantly, both for women and men, are working life-courses, which have become less linear, more delayed, and beset by uncertainties relative to contracts or income. Figure 4 shows the average number of episodes of unemployment or non-insider work (fixed-term contract or irregular employment) which men and women experience between their first job and their thirty-fifth birthday in the various cohorts.

If we do not distinguish between gender and education levels, life-courses seem to have become more difficult: compared with their parents' or grandparents' life histories, young people today often reach their thirty-fifth birthdays after having undergone spells of being unemployed, or working with fixed-term contracts or in the irregular labour market. It is, however, above all women, and especially those who are less educated, who are affected. For men, the incidence of a course which includes unemployment spells increases in the third cohort, but remains stable in the fourth, while a course across episodes of atypical work progressively increases, but without ever reaching the levels experienced by women. Moreover, although the polarization of life-courses by level of education has remained more or less constant for men, it has increased for women. As the Italian studies referred to above on 'partial and selective deregulation', and recent reports from the European Union [European Commission have shown, it is mostly women, and even more so women with lower education levels, who work part-time, or on atypical contracts, and risk high mobility levels and prolonged periods of uncertainty.

If we combine the three dimensions studied so far (that is, the position in the labour market at age 35, the route followed to attain it, and the birth of at least one child), we obtain a snapshot of how the 'life packages' of men and women aged 35 have changed. Among men born in the 1940s, one in two was a 'easy' insider with children at 35, and one in four a 'easy' insider without children. This had little to do with education levels, although it was more common for less-educated men to have become insiders in a 'difficult' way, after undergoing

at least one period of unemployment or working in the irregular labour market. For men born in the 1960s, by contrast, one in four was a ‘easy’ insider with children at age 35. Once again, differences in education levels do not seem significant, although, as we have seen, better-educated men delayed the transition to the first child for longer, and waited for the ‘right, stable’ job more often, and therefore did not go through periods of non-work or work on fixed-term contracts. Better-educated men, therefore, were ‘easy insiders without children, and ‘difficult’ insiders with children, more frequently than less-educated men.

For women, the ‘life package’ between work and family attained by the age of 35 depended closely on education even in the past. In the cohort of women born in the 1940s, one out of three women with an upper-secondary diploma or a degree was a easy insider with children, compared with only one out of five lower-educated women. In the cohort of those born in the 1960s, these shares diminish to one out of four women with upper-secondary diplomas or degrees and one out of six lower-educated women. Among lower-educated women, in the past as today, there was a large incidence of difficult insider packages with children, and of women with atypical contracts with children. On the other hand, it has always been more unusual for women with upper-secondary diplomas or degrees to pass through stages of temporary contracts and irregular work or through periods of unemployment. What has changed – as it has for men – is the timing of having children. Hence, whereas in the older cohorts, the second most widespread life-package (one out of five) was of difficult insiders with children, in the last cohort it was easy insiders without children.

The trends which emerge in Figure 4 and Table 2 are in line with the results obtained by other studies. Labour-market reforms over the past twenty years, together with a sluggish, and in some areas stagnant, economy weighed down by a very large public debt, have made employment conditions and income prospects more unstable. The initial career paths of young people have become more fragmentary, with more episodes of short-term employment and/or involuntary part-time work, and more interruptions due to periods of unemployment [Anastasia et al. 2011; Giorgi et al. 2011]. Women and the lower-educated are more frequently ‘trapped’ in atypical work [Bertolini and Rizza 2005; Dell’Aringa 2009]. To what extent this is a sign of weakness, or it constitutes being trapped in insecurity and poverty or a passage towards vicious circuits, is an open question. Certainly, atypical work, its duration and quality, and the importance attached to it is not unambiguous, and education appears once

again to draw significant demarcation lines. Bison et al. [2010] show that, since the Treu Law of 1997, the share of transitions to stable contracts has remained almost constant (at around 25%), while the percentage of transitions to inactivity or unemployment has diminished, and a smaller amount of time elapses before finding the first job. Barbieri and Scherer [2005], on the other hand, show that starting a career with an atypical or irregular job reduces the chances of moving into stable employment, and increases the likelihood of not being employed at 35. For university graduates, therefore, remaining unemployed for longer periods immediately after graduation, and waiting for the ‘right’ first job, seem to be more satisfactory than accepting earlier an atypical job, or a job in the irregular labour market, or one for which they are over-qualified. Piccone Stella [2007], however, demonstrates that the ‘flexibility-insecurity’, ‘flexibility-motivation’, and ‘flexibility-investment’ nexuses are not constant, and education is a crucial determinant. Flexibility is often represented as a forced condition to which one nevertheless adapts, through a socialization process which modifies states of mind and aspirations. [Micheli 2006]. To use an expression coined by Accornero [2006], in many cases, and especially in those where education levels and qualifications are high, “flexibility is sought more than it is undergone”, because of the pleasure of rejecting the constraints of a job which is always the same or of changing life-domains, or because of the chance to develop what may become a valuable individual career path independently and creatively. In any event, as a number of studies have shown, contractual instability leads to increased uncertainty, however much it may be experienced and practised. Even in the case of ‘valuable’ jobs, and even where effective safety nets exist (the resources of the individual him/herself, partner or family), this uncertainty tends to hinder long-term life projects. The world of atypical labour, in fact, is replete with couples whose family transitions are running late, even though there may be a declared intent to catch up [Micheli 2006].

Table 2. Life-course packages between first job and the age of 35, by cohort, sex and education

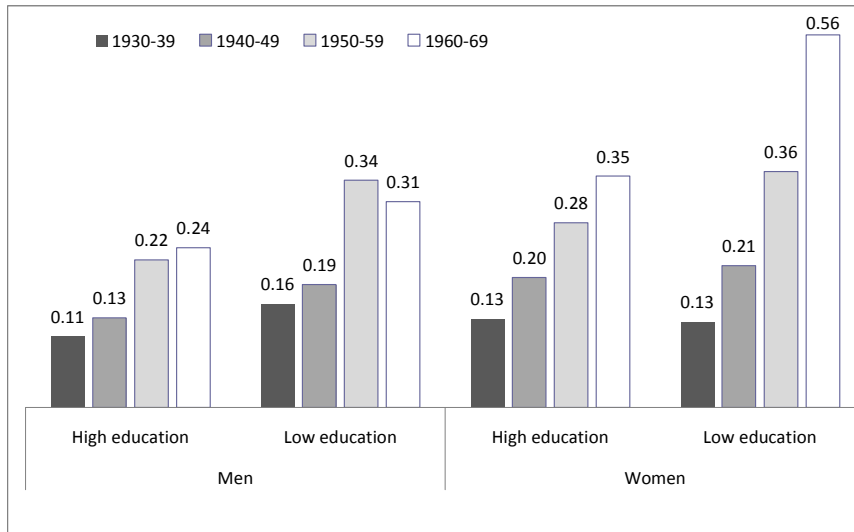
	Cohort	Men		Women	
		High education	Low education	High education	Low education
Easy insider with children	1930-39	47.1	43.2	38.4	23.1
	1940-49	57.3	47.7	32.3	24.6
	1950-59	44.0	39.1	32.7	24.3
	1960-69	25.2	26.0	20.5	15.3
Easy insider without children	1930-39	20.0	11.6	20.6	8.2
	1940-49	15.3	10.7	13.6	6.9
	1950-59	22.1	9.6	13.3	5.1
	1960-69	29.6	19.5	18.6	9.7
Difficult insider with children	1930-39	20.0	22.7	6.9	10.6
	1940-49	13.9	26.3	18.2	14.3
	1950-59	15.9	28.4	21.0	17.5
	1960-69	13.1	20.2	13.8	13.7
Difficult insider without children	1930-39	5.0	5.3	4.1	2.7
	1940-49	4.6	4.0	5.9	1.9
	1950-59	9.2	7.1	5.6	2.7
	1960-69	12.7	10.8	7.9	6.2
Atypical with children	1930-39	5.0	12.8	11.0	12.2
	1940-49	5.7	6.9	8.6	11.0
	1950-59	4.8	9.8	8.2	8.9
	1960-69	5.7	11.0	9.2	12.2
Atypical without children	1930-39	1.4	2.4	2.7	3.5
	1940-49	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.2
	1950-59	2.8	2.1	4.0	1.9
	1960-69	9.3	5.1	10.5	3.7
Outsider (not working)	1930-39	1.4	2.0	16.4	39.6
	1940-49	0.4	1.8	18.6	39.1
	1950-59	1.2	4.1	15.2	39.6
	1960-69	4.6	7.4	19.5	39.3

Notes: Insider: those, aged 35, working as self-employed or employee with permanent contract; Atypical: those, aged 35, working employee with fixed-term contract or without contract; Easy insider: those never experiencing, between first job and the age of 35, atypical job or unemployment; Difficult insider: : those ever experienced, between first job and the age of 35, at least one spell of atypical job or unemployment.

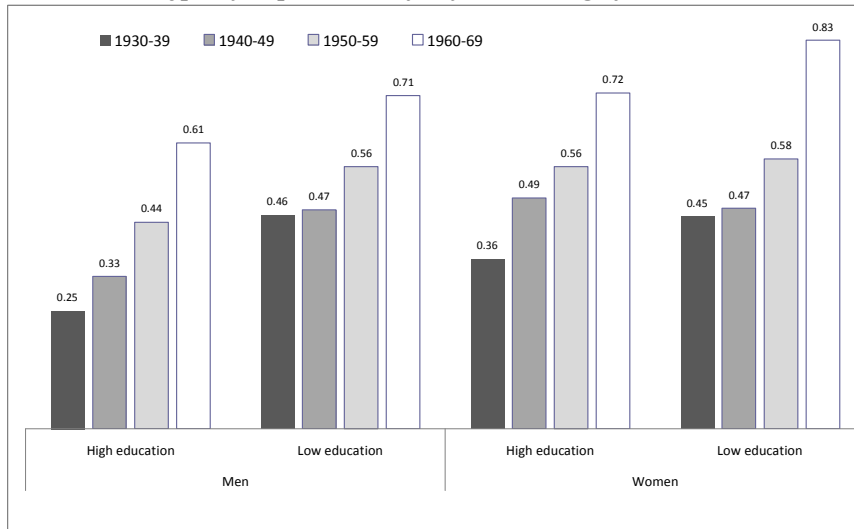
: low education=up to lower secondary education; high education = upper secondary or tertiary education

Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Mean number of unemployment spells between first job and the age of 35



Mean number of atypical job spells between first job and the age of 35



Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Figure 5: Unemployment and atypical job spells between first job and the age of 35, by sex, education and cohorts

5. *Starting a family: the impact of education and employment conditions by gender*

What, therefore, is the link between work and family trajectories? In this section, we use discrete event history models⁴ to analyse the extent to which education and the type of work indicate the path to the first child, to what extent this was the case in the past compared with today, and to what extent the experience of men and women differ. The results are set out in Tables 3 and 4, first for men and women from all the cohorts, with and without the effect of couplehood (in Models 1 and 2), and then cohort by cohort, again with and without the effect of couplehood (in Models 3 to 10).

In the models which analyse the entire sample of men and women, the main result is the inverted U-shaped pattern of the parameters expressing the cohort effect (as in Lucchini and Schizzerotto, 2001). Whilst for men and women born in the 1940s and 1950s the probability of having a child by the age of 35 was higher than it had been for the previous generation (men and women born in the 1930s), it falls, clearly and significantly, for the 1960s cohort. This decrease is greater for men.

Important gender differences emerge in the weight of education and type of work on parenthood. For women, a high education level leads to a delay in forming a couple, and in the last cohort it also causes a delay in maternity. For men, education also has a negative effect, especially in the last two cohorts. This effect, however, is closely correlated with later entry into a union, given that it later proves non-significant when controlling for whether or not an individual is part of a couple. As found by other studies (i.e. Vignoli et al. 2011), and as we pointed out above, delayed parenthood among educated men is more closely linked with delays in becoming settled in the labour market. Once settled, these men marry and have children within a short space of time. This is also evidenced by Tables 3 and 4 by the parameters regarding the ‘employed’, ‘class’ and ‘contract’ variables. For men, the negative effect stems not only from not having a job or being still in full-time education, but also from

⁴ Event history analysis models are longitudinal regression models based on data concerning the dates of the various episodes marking the life histories of the interviewees, and which enable study of the duration of an episode as a function of time and various explanatory factors. The dependent variable, also known as the ‘transition rate’, is the conditional probability that a certain event will occur in each period of time during the life stretch being studied. In our case, the event is the birth of the first child, our observational window is the life course between the ages of 14 and 35, the dependent variable is the conditional probability of having a first child in a particular month, given this had not happened up until the previous month. We also use discrete models: these are non-parametric models which make no assumptions about the functional form of the time effect, and which estimate the transition rate by using standard binary regression models (in this case, logistic models).

being unskilled blue-collar, having a fixed-term contract, or working in the irregular labour market.

However, job-related and economic insecurity do not have such a direct, clear effect on the risks of motherhood. For women, in fact, in all the generations considered, whether or not they are in employment appears to make no difference, except for a weak effect in the last cohort which is the reverse of that for men: women not in employment have children earlier. In any event, this weak effect disappears when controlling for couplehood, and therefore indirectly the characteristics of the partner. Similarly, the transition to a first child seems to be facilitated, and not hampered, in the case of women with a fixed-term job or in irregular employment. This may, in fact, be symptomatic of low labour-market involvement on the part of women who perceive paid work within a couple as ‘subordinate’ to that of the partner, and therefore as endogenous and functional to having children. For women, the sector counts more than the contract. The guarantees and protections relating to maternity are greater for women in subordinate employment than for self-employed women, and greater for public-sector female workers than for private-sector ones; and those with care responsibilities enjoy more favourable working hours, while their wages are not penalized. All of these elements work in favour of the decision to have a child.

These results generally confirm the existence of ‘male breadwinner’ gender models which condition childbearing choices. When the decision is taken to have a first child, it must be ‘he’, and not ‘she’ who enjoys a strong position in the labour market. Only ‘her’ investment in human capital seems to attenuate this model. The results also confirm that greater schooling and a later entry into the labour market are not the main reasons for the delays in childbirth exhibited by men and women born in the 1960s. These delays also emerge when controlling for duration of studies (whether or not the individual is still a student) and for education level. It is instead the position in the labour market, with the gender asymmetries already noted, which are influential.

Table 3. Effects on transition to first child between 14 and 35 years old, by cohort (discrete event-history analysis model) – Men

	All cohorts		1930-39		1940-49		1950-59		1960-69	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
<i>Duration from age 14</i>	0,01 ***	0,00 *	0,02 ***	0,00	0,01 ***	0,00	0,01 ***	0,00 **	0,01 ***	0,00
<i>Cohort (1930-39)</i>										
1940-49	0,19 **	-0,11								
1950-59	0,08	-0,28 ***								
1960-69	-0,45 ***	-0,60 ***								
<i>Education level (law)</i>										
Secondary school or degree	-0,23 ***	-0,06	-0,26 *	0,11	-0,08	-0,01	-0,23 **	-0,08	-0,33 ***	-0,03
<i>Geographical area (North)</i>										
Centre	0,15 **	0,22 **	0,10	0,35 *	0,17	0,23 *	0,28 **	0,24 *	-0,02	0,03
South – Isles	0,40 ***	0,55 ***	0,05	0,23	0,36 **	0,66 ***	0,52 ***	0,71 ***	0,58 ***	0,57 ***
<i>In education (No)</i>										
Yes	-0,57 ***	-0,49 ***	-0,14	-0,12	-0,40 **	-0,35	-0,82 ***	-0,90 ***	-0,99 ***	-0,91 ***
<i>Employed (Yes)</i>										
No	-1,25 ***	-0,55 ***	-1,05 ***	-0,28	-1,32 ***	-0,67 **	-1,20 ***	-0,58 *	-1,43 ***	-0,59 **
<i>Class^a (Service)</i>										

Routine non-manual employee	0,01	-0,01	-0,11	0,28	0,38 *	0,03	-0,10	-0,15	-0,27	-0,10
Skilled worker	-0,03	0,02	-0,04	0,07	0,00	-0,16	0,03	0,37 *	-0,15	-0,11
Unskilled worker	-0,15 *	0,01	-0,12	0,19	-0,11	-0,10	-0,18	0,05	-0,19	0,06
<i>Self employed (No)</i>										
Yes	-0,12	0,03	-0,31	0,40	-0,02	0,10	0,11	-0,13	-0,32	-0,05
<i>Contract^a (permanent)</i>										
Fixed-term or without contract	-0,13 *	-0,03	-0,08	0,01	-0,29	-0,31	-0,21	0,04	0,06	0,23
<i>Sector^a (public)</i>										
Private	-0,02	-0,02	-0,08	0,27	-0,06	0,07	0,08	-0,28 *	-0,13	-0,15
<i>In couple (No)</i>								3,64 ***		
Yes		3,88 ***		4,36 ***		3,95 ***				3,65 ***
<i>Costant</i>	-6,90 ***	-6,82 ***	-7,22 ***	-7,68 ***	-6,93 ***	-7,06 ***	-6,50 ***	-6,59 ***	-7,14 ***	-7,16 ***
Log-likelihood	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
N. person-months	13931,4	11344,2	2945,8	2268,1	3760,8	3040,5	3942,9	3281,4	3231,4	2696,9
N. people	628711	612272	120000	117896	145311	141927	161600	157602	201800	194847
	3412	3337	660	650	826	806	908	890	1018	991

Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Note: a Only for employees b Including unskilled workers in industrial and tertiary sector

Table 4. Effects on transition to first child between 14 and 35 years old, by cohort (discrete event-history analysis model) – Women

	All cohorts		1930-39		1940-49		1950-59		1960-69	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
<i>Duration from age 14</i>	0,01 ***	0,00 ***	0,01 ***	0,00 ***	0,01 ***	-0,01 ***	0,01 ***	-0,01 ***	0,01 ***	0,00 **
<i>Cohort (1930-39)</i>										
1940-49	0,28 ***	0,06								
1950-59	0,33 ***	-0,01								
1960-69	-0,09	-0,29 **								
<i>Education level (law)</i>										
Secondary school or degree	-0,34 ***	-0,02	-0,30 *	0,00	-0,41 ***	-0,04	-0,20 *	0,19	-0,35 ***	-0,21 *
<i>Geographical area (North)</i>										
Centre	0,02	0,13 *	-0,16	0,13	0,07	0,00	0,03	0,14	0,13	0,30 *
South – Isles	0,05	0,33 ***	-0,11	-0,12	-0,17 *	0,20	0,05	0,55 ***	0,39 ***	0,58 ***
<i>In education (No)</i>										
Yes	-1,29 ***	-0,69 ***	-0,70 **	-0,05	-1,23 ***	-0,53 **	-1,40 ***	-0,90 ***	-1,60 ***	-1,05 ***
<i>Employed (Yes)</i>										
No	-0,03	-0,04	0,09	-0,05	0,24	-0,10	-0,10	0,12	-0,33 *	-0,23
<i>Class^a (Service)</i>										
Routine non-manual employee	-0,09	-0,25 *	0,00	-0,72	0,10	0,07	-0,10	-0,24	-0,21	-0,38 *

Skilled worker	-0,29	*	-0,30	0,15	-0,23	-0,31	-0,26	-0,26	-0,42	-0,32	-0,19									
Unskilled worker	-0,14		0,00	-0,22	-0,36	0,07	0,21	-0,15	0,14	-0,19	-0,18									
Self employed (No)																				
Yes	-0,25	*	-0,24	*	-0,29	-0,28	-0,20	-0,13	-0,51	*	-0,49	*	-0,11	-0,19						
Contract ^a (permanent)																				
Fixed-term or without contract	-0,06		0,25	**	0,06	0,48	*	-0,02	0,25	-0,13	0,28	*	-0,12	0,10						
Sector ^a (public)																				
Private	-0,10		-0,10		-0,20	0,08	-0,26	*	-0,44	**	-0,02	0,00	-0,08	0,01						
In couple (No)																				
Yes			3,78	***		4,08	***		4,25	***		3,61	***	3,33	***					
Constant	-5,82	***	-6,38	***	-6,05	***	-6,57	***	-5,84	***	-6,54	***	-5,21	***	-6,28	***	-5,72	***	-6,45	***
Log-likelihood	-		-		-		-		-		-		-		-		-		-	
N. person-months	16517,4		13317,8		3405,5		2644,8		4425,65		3448,5		4397,87		3631,0		4239,46		3521,1	
N. people	535722		516527		106682		102241		126345		123220		127866		123652		174829		167414	
	3595		3515		708		685		907		891		933		916		1047		1023	

Source: our elaboration on ILFI data(2005).

Note: a Only for employees

b Including unskilled workers in industrial and tertiary sector

6. Conclusions

It is common discourse that young people in Italy today are worse off than they used to be, because what their parents achieved while still in their twenties is now achieved far later, if ever. It is also said, however, that choices have become more independent, more diversified, and less constrained within strict normative models. It is further claimed that waiting periods and postponements, as well as desynchronization and destandardization, are the result not only of structural transformations – that is, of a labour market which is increasingly difficult and uncertain, and a weak welfare system – but also of cultural changes, greater investment in education, and a process of individualization which places greater emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment, for women as well as men, which in its turn induces reversible choices and medium-term projects. In Italy, waiting periods and postponements, above all in regard to leaving the parental home, are also consequences of the country's strong family model, with its intense and prolonged inter-generational solidarity which supports choices but also constrains them back. Because the data available are only behavioural, and especially in the absence of data on desires, satisfaction, income or other measures of well-being, it has not been possible to determine which of these narratives is more convincing. However, by comparing the histories of young people in four successive cohorts between the ages of 14 and 35, and by separating them by gender and education level, we have at least been able to moderate the image of homogeneity or convergence which these interpretations frequently imply, and to show for whom, and to what extent, the path to adulthood has changed the most: whether for men or women, or for the better- or less-educated; whether in the labour market or in starting a family. Our findings therefore prompt further reflection on possible inequalities among cohorts, as well as within them. Our analyses have confirmed that today's young Italians form a 'postponement generation', which achieves later, if at all, what previous generations had already achieved in their twenties. In fact, the profile of the life-courses of today's 35-year-olds is far different from that of their parents and grandparents at age 35. The lack of continuity between the cohorts becomes evident with the last cohort studied, that of individuals born in the 1960s, who entered the labour market and built their careers and families in the 1990s, when the process of labour-market deregulation began in the context of

slow economic growth and scant reform of labour policies, the social shock absorbers, and policies in support of reconciliation and care. Although worker and welfare protection in the so-called 'golden years' may have exhibited a significant segmentation involving only dependent employees, above all those working in large firms and in the public sector, until the cohort of men born in the 1960s it was the norm for both higher- and lower-educated men to be insiders at age 35, and to achieve that status rapidly. What has changed is that workers become labour-market insiders later, and the route is more tortuous, with long and repeated spells of unemployment or atypical work. For women – for whom being in employment, and working as insiders, has never been the norm – the change has been their greater involvement in the labour market, but with the greater risk, compared with men, of job insecurity, especially if their education level is low. As a number of studies have argued, this greater level of insecurity is not unconnected with dominant gender assumptions regarding the allocation of family responsibilities both within the family itself and in the labour market and social policies.

In the later cohorts, the ages at first marriage or cohabitation and childbirth have also changed, especially for highly-educated men. These men, moreover, less and less frequently hold positions as insiders, and increasingly follow career paths characterized by episodes of atypical work. These episodes may be of a higher quality than in the case of lower-educated men, but they still induce delays in assuming family responsibilities. For women, on the other hand, economic and job insecurity seem to have less influence on childbirth, which reflects the continuing influence of a traditional model of roles division whereby it is the man who should be the breadwinner, and who must attain a good position in the labour market, before starting a family.

The polarization of behaviour according to education level has also increased among the cohorts, to the extent that in the case of the final one, the gaps between low and high education levels, and the delays for better-educated men, are maximum. For women, differences by education as a factor in labour-market participation have always been marked, but in the younger cohorts the gap in participation is growing, and family timings are diverging. For women, it is educational qualification and the choice of sector (private or public), rather than the type of contract and social class, which differentiate maternity times, which highlights the

importance of identity models – that is, the desire to engage in non-domestic spheres – as well as of the employment conditions which render these desires compatible with maternity.

Over time, and with marked differences by gender, the sequence of the path to adulthood changes as well. For men, the typical sequence was, and still is (although it is today delayed), ‘first job – first stable job – marriage – children’. By contrast, the majority of educated women marry, and then have their first child, before becoming insiders, because it still seems that the normative pre-condition for starting a family is that it should be the man who is an insider. The sequence does not change in the case of lower-educated women: for these being an insider has never been important, so that more than one-half of women never achieve this status, partly because many have never worked.

Joint examination of employment conditions and family and childbirth goals before age 35 shows an evident change between the young people of today and their parents and grandparents. There has been a progressive decrease in the share of men and women achieving insider status in the labour market via a simple route, and who have a child before they reach 35.

In general, our findings show that substantial changes taken place in the times and paths towards adulthood in today’s younger generation compared with those of the parents and grandparents. These changes are indubitably the outcome of new preferences and new opportunities. Delays in entering the labour market and in assuming familial and parental roles have enabled the younger generation, particularly women, to make greater investment in human capital, and to venture into more diversified areas of life. For more highly-educated individuals, delay is also a strategy to secure a ‘good’ transition to adulthood, and to begin virtuous careers which ensure a certain lifestyle and the fulfilment of aspirations and investments. In Italy, the delay is more prolonged, even among more highly-educated young men and women; and the contrasts with less-educated men and women are more marked than elsewhere. Structural and institutional constraints also have an impact. The growing instability of employment conditions and earnings in the early stages of a career – which result from changes in the demand for labour and in its regulation over the past twenty years which have not been off-set by support in terms of universalistic welfare, nor in regard to unemployment, living apart from the family of origin, and caregiving responsibilities – has certainly done

nothing to facilitate independence from the family of origin or the realization of family-based projects.

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