
3. Grasping the diversity of cohabitation. Fertility intentions among cohabiters across Europe¹

3.1. Introduction

Non-marital childbearing has increased in most European countries, as well as in the United States and Canada, because of increasing births to cohabiting couples (Kennedy and Bumpass, 2008; Kiernan, 2001; Raley, 2001). Nowadays, about half of all first births in Norway, France and East Germany, nearly 40 percent in Austria, and about 25 percent in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom take place within cohabiting unions (Perelli-Harris *et al.*, 2012). Even in countries such as Spain, where nonmarital childbearing has traditionally been low, 24 percent of first births currently occur in cohabiting unions (Castro-Martín, 2010). In Eastern Europe, where conceptions is more likely to prompt marriage, the proportion of first out of wedlock births to cohabiting parents is generally lower than in Western Europe, but it is still sizeable in many countries, such as Bulgaria (22%), Hungary (18%) and Russia (17%) (Perelli-Harris *et al.*, 2012).

Prior research suggests that examining the fertility behavior of cohabiters constitutes a promising avenue for understanding the role that cohabitation plays in an individual's partnership trajectory, how it is intertwined with marriage, and how it fits into the family system (Kiernan, 2001). Thus far there is no broad consensus as to whether cohabitation is seriously challenging the hegemony of the legal and social institution of marriage as the proper setting in which to bear and rear children. Some scholars have emphasized that marriage is increasingly being decoupled from the childbearing process (Kiernan, 2001; Smock and Greenland, 2010), yet others have argued that cohabitation is far from replacing marriage, even in the Scandinavian countries, which are characterized by a very high prevalence of cohabitation and high proportion of births within cohabiting unions (Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011; Wiik *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, although couples are increasingly entering unions by cohabiting rather than marrying directly, and in most countries the legal status of the parents' union is not relevant for defining a child's rights, for many couples, cohabitation is an alternative to marriage only

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until children come along (Sassler and Cunningham, 2008). The intention to have children remains a prominent reason to move from cohabitation to marriage (Moors and Bernhardt, 2009). These patterns suggest that marriage might not necessarily become irrelevant in the family formation process, but instead postponed to a later stage in the couple's trajectory.

This article extends prior research on the links between cohabitation and fertility by drawing attention to the different meanings that cohabiters attach to their unions and how these meanings are associated with plans to have a child in the near future. It is widely acknowledged that cohabitation might mean different things to different people, and involve various levels of commitment (Bianchi and Casper, 2000; Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Kiernan, 2001). The meaning that cohabiters attach to their unions is likely to be related to the views cohabiters have about the appropriate timing, sequencing and context of childbearing. One could argue that cohabiters who already have joint children apparently view their union as an appropriate setting in which to have and rear children. Studies from the United States nevertheless emphasize a relatively high rate of unintended pregnancies among cohabiting women (Musick, 2002; Sassler, Miller and Favinger, 2009). Still, cohabiters who already have a child with their partner –intended or unintended– might attach different meanings to cohabitation than cohabiters without joint children. Our first research question therefore was this: How do cohabiters with and without joint children differ in the meanings they attach to cohabitation?

Across Europe, there is substantial variation in the prevalence of cohabitation and the meanings attached to it (Sobotka and Toulemon, 2008). Heuveline and Timberlake (2004) classified Western and Northern European countries as being more advanced in the societal diffusion of cohabitation than countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In Western and Northern Europe there is also greater provision of institutional support for parents and children irrespective of parents' marital status (Perelli-Harris and Sánchez Gassen, 2012). As a consequence, certain types of cohabitation might be overrepresented in this part of Europe, such as cohabitation as an "end in itself" rather than a stepping stone in the marriage process. Our second research question therefore was: How do cohabiters across Europe differ in the meanings they attach to cohabitation?

Identifying different types of cohabitation based on the meaning that cohabiters attach to their unions gives us the opportunity to examine whether the various meanings of cohabitation differ in their association with

short-term fertility intentions. We focused on fertility intentions within three years rather than fertility behavior because behavior is influenced by both intentions and constraints, and the latter may prevent goal achievement; hence, behavioral measures cannot adequately tap the perceived desirability of a behavior (Manning *et al.*, 2012). When joint children are already present, the intention to have an additional child represents an increasing commitment to the union, but is commonly guided by different considerations than the intention to have a first (joint) child (Barber, 2001; Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1995). Our third research question therefore was: How is the meaning attached to cohabitation associated with fertility intentions among cohabiters with and without joint children?

A cross-national comparative perspective can greatly extend the scope of our knowledge of the role of cohabitation in the family system by examining whether the association between the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions is analogous in different contexts. Because of limited sample sizes of specific types of cohabitation in some countries, we focused our comparisons in two large regions: North-Western and Central-Eastern Europe. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to them as Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Despite considerable heterogeneity in family formation dynamics within both regions (Hoem *et al.*, 2009; Sobotka, 2008), this geographic division follows the historical nuptiality regimes described by Hajnal (1965) –late and non-universal marriage West of the imaginary line from St. Petersburg to Trieste, and early and almost universal marriage East of the line– as well as the geopolitical division of Europe in two blocs for more than four decades, during which the pattern of early and nearly universal marriage in Eastern Europe was reinforced through policies such as housing provision for newly-wed couples. Studies have shown that the legacy of historical marriage patterns is still identifiable during the Second Demographic Transition (Puur *et al.*, 2012).

3.2. Background

3.2.1. *The meaning of cohabitation*

Two prominent views on cohabitation have been put forward in the literature: Cohabitation as a stage in the marriage process and cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. According to the first perspective, cohabitation has become a normative step on the way to marriage, which remains a highly valued institution. Four different subtypes may be distinguished. First, cohabitation can be considered as a form of engagement or the last phase

of courtship, and thus a *prelude to marriage* in which couples have firm intentions to marry (Bianchi and Casper, 2000; Brown, 2003; Brown and Booth, 1996). Second, cohabitation can be viewed as a testing ground for marriage. Cohabitation as a *trial marriage* often responds to uncertainties regarding whether the dating partner is a suitable potential spouse (Bumpass and Sweet, 1989; Seltzer, 2004). Third, the choice of cohabitation might be related to economic constraints rather than preferences (Gibson-Davis, Edin and McLanahan, 2005; Kalmijn, 2011; Kravdal, 1999). For some cohabiters, the cost associated with a wedding could be a barrier to marriage (Kravdal, 1997; Manning and Smock, 2002). For others, employment precariousness or low prospects of financial stability might be perceived as incompatible with the idea of getting married (Clarkberg, 1999; Oppenheimer, 1988; 2003). These cohabiters possibly consider themselves *too poor to marry* (Kenney and Goldstein, 2012). Fourth, some cohabiters could hold indifferent or negative attitudes towards the institution of marriage, but still envision themselves marrying in the future. These cohabiters may plan to marry in order to please their partner, family, friends or society in general or they might intend to marry for pragmatic reasons (*e.g.*, taxation and social security benefits, child custody laws) despite their indifference to or negative opinion about the institution of marriage. This group of cohabiters has been labeled as *conformists* (Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2012).

The view of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage implies that cohabitation is taking over the role and functions of the institution of marriage. Instead of being a step on the way to marriage, cohabitation is regarded as an “end in itself”. Two main reasons have been distinguished in the literature. First, some couples might view marriage as an outmoded institution or as an unwarranted interference of the church or the state in one’s private life, and hence actively choose cohabitation as an ideological *rejection of marriage*. Second, cohabiters may decide not to marry because they consider *marriage irrelevant* for them. This view implies not rejection, but rather indifference towards the institution of marriage (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Kiernan, 2001). These couples tend to have neutral attitudes towards the institution of marriage, but they do not perceive any added value of formalizing their relationship. They believe that a formal marriage certificate is just “a piece of paper” that would not make any difference regarding their mutual commitment or entitlements.

3.2.2. *Differences in meanings of cohabitation between cohabiters with and without joint children*

Cohabiting couples with children are generally assumed not to consider marriage as a prerequisite for parenthood. This might be true for some cohabiters who indeed view their union as a suitable context in which to bear and rear children (Sassler and Cunningham, 2008). Cohabiting parents thus might more frequently view their union as an alternative to marriage, either because they *reject marriage* or consider it *irrelevant*, than childless cohabiters may do. Yet one cannot presume that all children born into cohabitation have been intended (Musick, 2002; Sassler *et al.*, 2009). Some cohabiting parents started living together in response to an unintended pregnancy (Raley, 2001; Reed, 2006) and economic constraints might play a relevant role in the deferral of marriage. Qualitative research from the United States has also shown that many poor urban women have children outside of marriage because motherhood is highly valued as a way of providing meaning in their lives, as well as to test the relationship with the father of the child (Edin and Kefalas, 2005). Hence, there are also reasons to expect cohabiting parents to be more frequently classified as *too poor to marry* or in a *trial marriage*. Furthermore, children born into a cohabiting union might change the meaning that cohabiters initially attached to their union, leading to a different composition of cohabitation types among cohabiters with and without children.

3.2.3. *Differences in meanings of cohabitation between Eastern and Western Europe*

Comparative research has shown wide cross-European variation in the prevalence and meanings of cohabitation (Kasearu and Kutsar, 2011), congruent with cultural explanations of family change. The Theory of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) assumes that new family behaviors, linked to increasing secularization and individualization, generally spread from the Northern European countries to the rest of the developed world (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Van de Kaa, 1987). The shift from direct marriage to cohabitation as the dominant pathway toward family building is one central feature of this transition. Cross-national differences in the prevalence and role of cohabitation have often been explained by societies being at different stages of the SDT (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Kiernan, 2001; 2002b). In Western Europe, unmarried cohabitation and non-marital childbearing are more socially approved of and legally protected than in Eastern Europe (Perelli-Harris and Sánchez Gassen, 2012; Pongracz and Spéder, 2008). Consequently, Western European cohabiters are expected to more frequently regard their union as an alternative to marriage, and Eastern European

cohabiters are expected to more frequently view their union as a *prelude to marriage* or be classified as *conformists*.

3.2.4. *Association between the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions*

Traditionally, marriage was considered a precondition for having children. Nowadays, there is a growing temporal disassociation between marriage and parenthood, but the symbolic link between marriage and childbearing still persists (Holland, 2013; Moors and Bernhardt, 2009; Musick, 2007; Perelli-Harris *et al.*, 2012). Cohabiters who view their union as a *prelude to marriage* might hence be the most likely to plan to have a child in the near future. *Conformists* also envision marriage but they do not share the positive attitudes towards marriage with the prelude type of cohabiters. For them, the intention to have a child might be part of the rationale to get married. We expected to find little divergence in fertility intentions between both types of cohabiters.

It has been argued that the forerunners in the spread of childbearing within cohabitation were individuals who rejected traditional marriage and challenged its moral and legal hegemony as the only legitimate context for family formation (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 1988). Cohabiters who view their union as an alternative to marriage, either because they *reject marriage* or consider it *irrelevant*, are likely to consider cohabitation as a proper setting in which to have and raise a child (Guzzo and Hayford, 2014). The absence of marital intentions does not imply low commitment to their union. On the contrary, cohabiters in these types of cohabitation tend to be in stable long-term relationships (Bianchi and Casper, 2000) and hence prone to make relationship-specific investments such as having children. On the other hand, some cohabiters who reject marriage may be less focused on children or might have chosen cohabitation precisely because having children was not envisaged in their life plans (Haskey, 2013). Overall, we expected this group of cohabiters to be less likely to report fertility intentions than those who view their union as part of the marriage process.

Fertility intentions reflect preferences but they also reveal actual and expected constraints. Cohabiters who are *too poor to marry* might view children as part of the costly and therefore postponed marriage project and were thus expected to put childbearing plans on hold until material preconditions are met (Clarkberg *et al.*, 1995).

Finally, planning to have a child is unlikely when a couple's relationship horizon is uncertain, such as in a *trial marriage*. This cohabitation type probably comprises an overrepresentation of "bad matches", that is, cohabiting unions with relatively low relationship commitment and potentially high instability that might be more likely to end up separating than starting a family.

In brief, we expected to find a hierarchical ordering of cohabitation types in terms of their relation with fertility intentions: The *prelude to marriage* type and the *conformists* being associated with the highest odds of intending to have a child, followed by cohabiters who *reject marriage* or consider it *irrelevant*, and at the lower end, the couples *too poor to marry* and those in a *trial marriage* (*Hypothesis 1*).

The meaning attached to cohabitation probably plays a more prominent role in cohabiters' intentions to have a first than a subsequent joint child, given that cohabiting unions without children in common are more heterogeneous in terms of commitment, stability and the intertwining of partners' social and economic lives (Brown, 2010). Among cohabiting parents, other factors, such as the number and age of current children and the parents' own experience of parenthood, are expected have a stronger bearing on fertility intentions than the meaning of cohabitation. The presence of children also blurs the distinction between cohabitation and marriage and is likely to transform these cohabiting unions into marriage like unions. Hence, we expected differentials in fertility intentions by cohabitation type to be smaller among cohabiting parents than among cohabiters without joint children (*Hypothesis 2*).

The overall prevalence of cohabitation, the social acceptance of childbearing outside marriage, and the institutional support provided to cohabiting parents might influence which types of cohabitation are most strongly associated with short-term childbearing plans. In Western Europe, cohabitation is widely diffused and childbearing within cohabitation commonplace, so the anticipation of future marriage might play a lesser role in shaping childbearing plans. Thus, we expected the fertility intentions of cohabiters who consider their relationship as an alternative to marriage and cohabiters who view their union as a *prelude to marriage* to be more alike in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe (*Hypothesis 3*).

3.2.5. *Other factors influencing fertility intentions*

Fertility intentions may be associated with other demographic and socio-economic factors as well. Some of these factors themselves might be

related to the type of cohabitation, thus possibly confounding the association between meaning of cohabitation and intentions to have a(nother) child. The parity specificity of fertility intentions has been largely emphasized (Ajzen and Klobas, 2013). The intention to have a first child marks a crucial transition in one's life course –the decision to become a parent–, whereas intentions to have subsequent children are qualitatively different and affected by the experience of parenthood (Dommermuth, Klobas and Lappegard, 2011). Relationship duration reflects union stability and increasing commitment, and hence might be viewed as an asset for having a child together (Bouchard, Lachance-Grzela and Goguen, 2008). Because of the existence of age norms related to childbearing, as well as fecundity limits, an inverted U-shaped relationship between age and fertility intentions was expected (Billari *et al.*, 2010). Highly educated individuals tend to have more resources and better opportunities to balance work and family, and we thus expected them to have higher odds of intending to have a(nother) child than their lower educated counterparts (Gauthier, 2007). In line with prior studies documenting that employment increases the odds of family formation (Kalmijn, 2011; Thornton *et al.*, 2007) whereas enrollment in education and a lack of consolidation in the labor market leads to a postponement of childbearing aspirations (Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991; Clarkberg *et al.*, 1995), we expected employment to have a positive effect on fertility intentions, and school enrollment and unemployment to have a negative effect.

3.3. Method

3.3.1. Data and sample

We used data from the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) for nine countries. The GGS is a set of comparative surveys of a nationally representative sample of the 18-79 year old resident population in each of the participating countries (Vikat *et al.*, 2007). To date, harmonized Wave 1 data collected between 2004 and 2009 are available for 15 countries: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and the Russian Federation. The overall size of the main samples differs from country to country but in most cases they contain about 10,000 respondents. We used data from Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Romania and the Russian Federation because the other countries either did not implement, erroneously implemented the question on marital intentions or the question on attitudes towards marriage – crucial indicators for our cohabitation typology. The overall response rates varied from 49.7 percent in Russia to 78.2 percent in Bulgaria.

Of all the respondents who shared a household with a partner to whom they were not married ($n = 9,489$), we excluded from the analysis those with a partner of the same or unknown sex ($n = 91$), as well as female respondents older than 45 years ($n = 1,075$) or male respondents with a partner older than 45 years ($n = 957$), in order to cover the fertile years of a woman considering the prospective nature of the question on fertility intentions (3 years). In addition, we excluded from the analysis respondents who were infertile or had an infertile partner ($n = 444$), were pregnant or had a pregnant partner ($n = 381$). The final restriction was intended to exclude respondents who did not provide a valid answer regarding fertility intentions ($n = 242$), with missing data on the key indicators defining the typology of cohabitation, namely intentions to marry within three years ($n = 158$), agreement with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution ($n = 506$) or involves subjective economic deprivation ($n = 17$), and with missing data on the control variables ($n = 53$). The high number of missing data on attitudes towards marriage is mainly caused by the way the Norwegian data was collected. In Norway, this question was part of a self-administered questionnaire that respondents were requested to submit via mail after the interview had taken place and thirty percent of them did not return the questionnaire ($n = 475$). Our final analytical sample, hence, comprised 5,565 cohabiters from nine European countries, ranging from 270 in Romania to 953 in Norway. We distinguished cohabiters without joint children ($n = 3,070$) from cohabiters with at least one joint child ($n = 2,495$). We coded cohabiters in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Russia as living in Eastern Europe, and cohabiters in Austria, France, Germany and Norway as living in Western Europe.

3.3.2. *Measurements*

The dependent variable, short-term fertility intentions, was derived from the question: “Do you intend to have a child during the next three years?” with the answer categories 1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *probably not*, 3 = *probably yes*, and 4 = *definitely yes*. In Hungary the only answer categories were 1 = *yes* and 2 = *no*, and in Norway 1 = *definitely yes* and 2 = *definitely no*. We created a dummy variable for fertility intentions coded 1 if positive (*definitely yes*; *probably yes*; *yes* in Hungary) and 0 if negative (*definitely no*; *probably no*; *no* in Hungary).

In order to translate the meanings of cohabitation into an empirically measurable classification, we used three key indicators, namely (1) attitudes towards the institution of marriage, (2) intentions to get married, and (3) perception of economic deprivation. By doing so, we built extensively upon previous work (Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2012). To measure attitudes

towards the institution of marriage, respondents were asked “To what extent do you agree or disagree that marriage is an outdated institution?” with answers on a 5-point scale: 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *disagree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*. Respondents with values of 1 or 2 were classified as having positive attitudes towards the institution of marriage, respondents with values of 4 or 5 were classified as having negative attitudes towards marriage, and respondents with a value of 3 were classified as indifferent in their attitudes towards marriage. To measure marriage intentions, respondents were asked: “Do you intend to marry your partner within the next three years?” In Norway, respondents were asked for their marriage plans within two years. Respondents who answered *definitely yes* or *probably yes* were considered to have marriage plans. Those who responded *probably no*, *definitely no* or *does not know* were classified as having no marital intentions. Norwegian respondents could choose only between *yes* and *no*. In Hungary, a negative answer could only be *no*. Finally, a third indicator was used to capture feelings of economic deprivation. Respondents were asked: “Thinking of your household’s total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet?” Responses on a 6-point scale that ranged from 1 = *with great difficulty* to 6 = *very easily*. We classified respondents who answered *with (great) difficulty* as feeling economically deprived.

Combining the 3 indicators, we distinguished 6 types of cohabitation. Cohabitors with positive attitudes towards the institution of marriage and who intended to marry were assumed to view cohabitation as a *prelude to marriage*. Cohabitors with positive attitudes towards marriage but who had no intentions to marry in the near future were considered not yet being ready to marry. Those of them who did not feel economically deprived were classified as the *trial marriage* type of cohabitation. Those of them who felt economically deprived were classified as being *too poor to marry*. Cohabitors who held indifferent or negative attitudes towards marriage but nevertheless reported intentions to marry were classified as *conformists*. Cohabitors with negative attitudes towards marriage who had no intentions of marrying were classified as *rejecting marriage*. Finally, those who held an indifferent attitude towards marriage and had no intentions of marrying were classified as considering *marriage irrelevant*.

We included a number of control variables in the logistic regression models, namely number of biological children, joint children with the partner, gender, age, union duration, education attainment, employment status, and living in a country of Eastern Europe versus Western Europe. For age and

union duration, we also included a squared term to test the non-linearity of the relationship. The data provide an internationally comparable measure of *education attainment* using the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 2006). We distinguished three levels: 1 = *primary and lower secondary education*, 2 = *upper secondary and post-secondary non-university education*, and 3 = *all levels of university education*. We also distinguished between 1 = *employed*, 2 = *not employed*, and 3 = *enrolled in education*.

3.3.3. Analytical strategy

First, we calculated descriptive statistics on the prevalence of cohabitation, the proportion of cohabiters with joint biological children and the share of cohabiters with intentions to have a(nother) child, as well as the typology indicators and the distribution of meanings of cohabitation for each country included in the present study. Second, we compared the prevailing meanings of cohabitation between cohabiters with and without joint children as well as between Eastern and Western European countries. Third, we conducted binary logistic regression analyses for cohabiters with and without joint children separately and examined the association between the meaning attached to cohabitation and the odds of intending to have a(nother) child, pooling data from the nine countries. Before pooling the data, we ran logit models separately by country (results not shown). Despite the low statistical power of some of these models due to small numbers of observations in some countries, we found no differences in the association between the covariates and the dependent variable across the countries pooled for the analyses. Fourth, we tested the interaction between cohabitation type and parental status to examine the magnitude of the difference in fertility intentions of cohabiters with and without joint children. Finally, to explore the possibility of contextual variation in the association between the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions, we tested the interaction between cohabitation types and living in Eastern or Western Europe for cohabiters with and without children separately.

3.4. Results

Table 3.1 provides some general indicators of the diffusion of cohabitation and the profile of cohabiters in each of the countries under study. There is considerable diversity in the prevalence of cohabitation across countries, ranging from eight percent (Romania) to 39 percent (Norway) of all co-resident unions, but it is generally higher in our Western European

Table 3.1. Percentage distribution of indicators used in the cohabitation typology, meanings of cohabitation, and characteristics of cohabiters by country, for respondents 18-45 years (N = 5,556)

	Western Europe				Eastern Europe				
	Austria	France	Germany	Norway	Bulgaria	Hungary	Lithuania	Romania	Russia
Typology indicators									
Agreement: marriage outdated	26.0	26.4	26.4	21.5	49.6	33.6	29.8	19.5	26.6
Disagreement: marriage outdated	43.9	51.8	48.7	43.7	26.1	38.5	34.5	49.1	48.4
Intentions to marry (3 years)	49.4	41.3	39.9	19.3	48.2	65.6	72.6	85.7	58.0
Feels economically deprived	5.1	24.5	15.9	2.8	72.7	16.5	12.6	42.0	47.9
Meanings of cohabitation									
Prelude to marriage	29.1	28.7	23.2	12.1	17.8	31.1	27.5	42.6	28.5
Trial marriage	15.3	17.4	21.6	31.2	1.6	7.0	5.7	1.1	7.4
Too poor to marry	0.7	6.2	2.7	0.9	6.9	1.2	1.4	3.7	12.2
Conformists	20.1	12.6	14.4	6.9	30.3	38.8	45.0	40.4	29.4
Rejection of marriage	17.5	20.0	20.3	19.7	31.5	15.0	10.4	5.2	12.9
Marriage is irrelevant	17.4	15.0	17.8	29.2	12.0	9.0	10.1	7.0	9.6
Fertility intentions by cohabitation type									
Prelude to marriage	69.1	59.0	61.3	58.3	57.9	71.2	59.4	48.7	57.3
Trial marriage	37.6	39.2	20.4	45.1	10.0	34.6	42.9	33.3	23.5
Too poor to marry	40.0	26.4	23.1	22.2	22.7	11.1	20.0	10.0	19.6
Conformists	59.1	54.2	56.5	50.0	53.1	61.8	60.6	37.6	50.4
Rejection of marriage	27.6	27.7	15.5	30.9	28.2	28.2	15.8	14.3	27.1
Marriage is irrelevant	33.8	33.9	11.8	30.9	29.9	38.6	16.2	10.5	20.5
Cohabitors with fertility intentions	48.7	42.9	32.6	39.9	40.6	55.1	49.6	38.2	40.7
Cohabitors among all co-resident unions	30.9	33.6	20.4	38.6	16.3	22.2	18.2	7.6	19.7
Cohabitors with at least one joint biological child	38.1	51.6	31.4	54.4	66.8	32.9	25.6	51.1	39.2
N	766	849	478	953	641	782	367	270	459

sample (32%) than in our Eastern European sample (16%). A substantial proportion of cohabiting unions involve joint biological children, ranging from one-quarter in Lithuania to more than half in France, Norway, Bulgaria and Romania. Intentions to have a(nother) child within 3 years are also high among cohabiters, ranging from 33 percent in Germany to 55 percent in Hungary. Table 3.1 also shows the percentage distribution of the indicators used to build the cohabitation typology for each of the countries included in the study. Marital intentions are most frequent among Romanian cohabiters (86%) and least frequent among Norwegians (19%), and in general more frequent in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. In all countries except Bulgaria, there are more cohabiters holding positive attitudes towards marriage than cohabiters who consider it an outdated institution. The share of economically deprived cohabiters is particularly high in Bulgaria (73%) but also sizable in Russia (48%) and Romania (42%).

Based on these indicators, Table 3.1 presents the resulting mix of cohabitation types. In all countries, cohabitation is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with a variety of meanings attached to it. A substantial proportion of cohabiters view their union as a *prelude to marriage*, except in Norway, where this proportion is only 12 percent. Cohabitation as a *trial marriage* is relatively common in Western Europe, particularly in Norway (31%), but rare in Eastern Europe.

Although a large proportion of cohabiters report difficulties to make ends meet in several Eastern European countries, many of them still plan to marry; hence, cohabiters classified as *too poor to marry* are relatively scarce, though more common in Eastern Europe. *Conformism* is clearly more widespread in Eastern European countries, ranging from 30 percent in Russia and Bulgaria to 45 percent in Lithuania. By contrast, cohabitation as an *alternative to marriage* is more widespread in Western European countries, with the exception of Bulgaria, where a surprisingly high percentage of cohabiters reject the institution of marriage (32%).

Cohabiting parents were expected to differ from their childless counterparts in the meanings they attach to cohabitation. The results in Table 3.2 confirm that the prevalence of each cohabitation type, except the conformist type, differs significantly between the two groups. Cohabiters with joint children less frequently view their union as a *prelude to marriage* or a *trial marriage*. In turn, they more frequently reject the institution of marriage or consider *marriage irrelevant* compared to cohabiters without joint children. They are also overrepresented among cohabiters *too poor to marry*.

Table 3.2. Percentage distribution of cohabiters without ($N = 3,070$) and with ($N = 2,495$) joint biological children by meanings of cohabitation

	Without joint children	With joint children
Meaning of cohabitation		
Prelude to marriage	30.3	18.7 ^a
Trial marriage	16.1	11.8 ^a
Too poor to marry	2.6	4.9 ^a
Conformist	23.3	22.9
Rejection of marriage	13.7	24.0 ^a
Marriage is irrelevant	14.0	17.6 ^a
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i>	3,070	2,495

Note: ^a Differences between cohabiters with and without joint children by meaning of cohabitation tested using Chi-square-statistics, results significant at $p < 0.001$.

We were also interested in assessing whether differences in the societal diffusion of cohabitation across Europe would imply that Eastern and Western European cohabiters diverged in the meanings attached to cohabitation. The results in *Table 3.3* show that cohabitation types oriented towards marriage (prelude to marriage and conformists) tend to prevail in Eastern Europe. Among cohabiters without joint children, Eastern Europeans less often view their union as an alternative to marriage or as a *trial marriage* than their Western European counterparts. Among cohabiters with joint children, differentials are smaller. The proportion of cohabitating relationships classified as *prelude to marriage* and rejecting marriage are similar in Eastern and Western Europe, but cohabiting parents in Eastern Europe are less likely to view their union as a *trial marriage* or consider *marriage irrelevant*, and they are more likely to be classified as *conformists* or *too poor to marry* than their Western European counterparts.

In *Table 3.4* we present the results of two separate logistic regression models on 3,070 cohabiters without joint children and 2,495 cohabiters with joint children, pooling data from the nine countries of the study and controlling for potentially relevant covariates. During the analysis, we first estimated a model including only the cohabitation typology and a dummy variable indicating whether the cohabiter lived in Eastern Europe, and in a second step we added the rest of the covariates. Including the control variables in the model did not alter the statistical associations between type of cohabitation and fertility intentions (although the effect size became slightly attenuated).

Table 3.3. Percentage distribution of cohabiters without ($N = 3,070$) and with ($N = 2,495$) joint biological children in Eastern and Western Europe by meanings of cohabitation

	Without joint children		With joint children	
	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Western Europe
Meanings of cohabitation				
Prelude to marriage	35.2	26.1 ^a	18.5	18.8
Trial marriage	5.7	25.0 ^a	3.8	18.1 ^b
Too poor to marry	3.1	2.3	7.3	3.1 ^b
Conformist	36.4	12.0 ^a	34.1	14.2 ^b
Rejection of marriage	11.7	15.4 ^a	24.1	24.0
Marriage irrelevant	8.0	19.2 ^a	12.2	21.9 ^b
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i>	1,422	1,648	1,097	1,398

Note: ^aDifferences between Eastern and Western European cohabiters *without* joint children by meaning of cohabitation tested using Chi-square-statistics, results significant at $p < 0.001$.

^b Differences between Eastern and Western European cohabiters *with* joint children by meaning of cohabitation tested using Chi-square-statistics, results significant at $p < 0.001$.

Because of space limitations, Table 3.4 shows only the results of the full models. The results confirm that, for both cohabiters without and with joint children, the meaning that cohabiters attach to their union has an important bearing on their fertility intentions. Hypothesis 1 suggested a hierarchical order of cohabitation types in their relation to fertility intentions: The *prelude to marriage* type being associated with the highest odds of intending a child, and the *trial marriage* type with the lowest. The findings partially support this hypothesis. Across Europe and regardless of whether children in common are present or not, cohabiters who view cohabitation as a *prelude to marriage* (reference category) have indeed the highest odds of intending to have a(n)other child in the next three years, and *conformists* do not differ significantly from them. Also in line with our expectations, cohabiters who attach other meanings to their union have significantly lower odds of reporting short-term fertility intentions. We find nevertheless that those types of cohabitation in which marriage plans are not present do not significantly differ from each other in their association with fertility intentions. In brief, there are considerable differences between cohabitation types regarding

Table 3.4. Summary of binary logistic regression predicting intentions to have a(nother) child within three years, for cohabiters without ($N = 3,070$) and with ($N = 2,495$) joint biological children

	Cohabitors without joint child(ren)			Cohabitors with joint child(ren)		
	B	SE	OR	B	SE	OR
Meaning of cohabitation (Prelude to marriage omitted)						
Trial marriage	-1.28***	0.13	0.28	-0.46**	0.19	0.63
Too poor to marry	-1.52***	0.27	0.22	-0.68***	0.29	0.50
Conformist	-0.12	0.12	0.89	-0.07	0.15	0.93
Rejection of marriage	-1.50***	0.14	0.22	-0.71***	0.16	0.49
Marriage is irrelevant	-1.37***	0.14	0.25	-0.73***	0.15	0.48
Number of biological children						
1	-0.97***	0.16	0.38			
2+	-2.06***	0.26	0.13	-1.77***	0.12	0.17
Female (male omitted)						
Age	0.24**	0.09	1.27	-0.22**	0.11	0.80
Age squared	0.43***	0.05	1.54	0.30***	0.08	1.35
Union duration	-0.01***	0.00	0.99	-0.01***	0.00	0.99
Union duration squared	0.04	0.03	0.96	-0.02	0.04	0.98
Living in Eastern Europe	-0.00	0.01	1.00	-0.00	0.02	1.00
Living in Western Europe	0.12	0.09	1.13	-0.69***	0.12	0.50
Education (primary education omitted)						
Secondary education	0.03	0.13	1.03	0.01	0.14	1.01
Tertiary education	0.26†	0.15	1.29	0.23	0.18	1.26
Employment (employed omitted)						
Unemployed/not employed	0.15	0.14	1.17	0.06	0.14	1.06
Enrolled in education	-0.85***	0.15	0.43	-0.26	0.39	0.77
Constant	-5.19	0.84		-2.51	1.23	
Log likelihood	-1750.99			-1136.57		
Df	17			16		

†p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001..

fertility intentions, but they do not follow exactly the hierarchical order we had presumed.

Although our focus was on the association between the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions, other covariates also influence the intentions to have a(nother) child, and we briefly report associations that are statistically relevant. For cohabiters without shared children, having children with a prior partner reduces the odds of intending to have a child within the current relationship. For cohabiters with joint children, those who already have two or more children –joint or not– are less likely to intend to have another child. Age showed a curvilinear association with fertility intentions. The effect of union duration was not statistically significant after age was included in the model. Women have higher odds of reporting fertility intentions than men when they do not yet have children in common with their current partner, but the opposite is true when they have joint children. Contrary to our expectations, education attainment and employment status do not appear to have a significant impact on cohabiters' fertility intentions, once we control for other covariates. Only being enrolled in education reduces significantly the odds of fertility intentions among cohabiters without joint children.

The separate analyses of cohabiters with and without joint children suggest that the strength of the association between the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions is weaker among cohabiting parents than among cohabiters without joint children. In order to assess the magnitude and significance of these differences, we estimated a logistic regression model on the whole sample, including interaction terms between cohabitation types and a variable indicating whether the respondent had at least one joint child with the current partner (*Table Annex A.3.a*). The interactions were statistically significant and the results confirmed Hypothesis 2, which anticipated less variation in fertility intentions by cohabitation types among cohabiting parents than among cohabiters without joint children.

Finally, we were interested in examining whether the cohabitation typology was similarly associated with fertility intentions in Eastern and Western Europe. We ran two additional logistic regression models for cohabiters with and without joint children separately, including interaction terms between cohabitation types and the variable distinguishing Eastern European from Western European cohabiters (*Table Annex A.3.b*). None of the interaction terms turned out to be statistically significant, suggesting that the meaning cohabiters attach to their union is similarly associated with fertility intentions

in Western and Eastern Europe. Hypothesis 3 hence cannot be confirmed. This result is not consistent with the SDT narrative, which predicts that the link between marriage intentions and childbearing intentions should be weaker in Western Europe. With regard to divergences in fertility intentions between Eastern and Western European cohabiters, Table A.3.b shows that differences are not significant among cohabiters without joint children, once the composition by cohabitation types is controlled for. By contrast, the odds of intending to have another child are around 50 percent lower among cohabiters with joint children in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. This pattern might be linked to the very low fertility of Eastern European countries.

3.5. Discussion

This study of current cohabiters from nine European countries makes a number of important contributions to comparative research on the diversity of cohabitation and its role in the family formation process. We proposed a typology that was aimed at grasping the different meanings that cohabiters attach to their unions and portraying the prevalence of various forms of cohabitation across Europe. On the basis of this typology, we examined the linkages between the meaning of cohabitation and short-term fertility intentions, taking into consideration potential differences between cohabiters with and without joint children and potential divergence between Eastern and Western Europe.

The first key contribution of the current study is the attempt to grasp the diversity of cohabitating relationships across Europe. We showed how nine European countries differ in the prevalence of different types of unmarried cohabitation, the proportion of cohabiting parents, and the prevalence of childbearing intentions among cohabiters. We also showed that across Europe, cohabitation is a heterogeneous phenomenon with various meanings attached to it. Some cohabiters are very much oriented towards marriage, either because the institution was central in their view of family life or because they succumbed to normative pressures. Others viewed cohabitation as an end in itself, either because they ideologically rejected marriage or considered it irrelevant. Yet others would like to proceed to marriage but are still evaluating their relationship or consider themselves *too poor to marry*. In Eastern Europe, cohabiters seem to lean more towards marriage. The proportion of cohabiters that viewed their union as a stage in the marriage process or who planned to marry despite holding unfavorable attitudes towards the institution of marriage was significantly higher in Eastern Europe

than in Western Europe. Viewing cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, and also as a *trial marriage*, was less widespread in Eastern Europe. Despite large differences in the overall prevalence of unmarried cohabitation, and in the legal rights and responsibilities granted to cohabiting couples, we find that across Europe –and countries of the former soviet bloc are no exception–, a significant proportion of cohabiters already have children with their current partner. The relatively large share of cohabiting parents in Eastern European countries might seem at odds with the diffusion stages implied by the SDT framework. It could be, however be that a significant proportion of Eastern European cohabiters with joint children adopted the strategy to postpone marriage longer than parenthood, given the strong and relatively low age norms for first parenthood in these countries, as prior research in the Polish context suggests (Mynarska, 2010).

The second key finding of the current study is that the various meanings that cohabiters attach to their unions influence short-term fertility intentions differently, net of other covariates. This result confirms prior research emphasizing the importance of taking into consideration the heterogeneity of meanings, motives and functions of cohabitation when trying to elucidate its role in the family system (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Kiernan, 2001). In line with our hypothesis, cohabiters who viewed their union as a *prelude to marriage* were clearly more likely to report intentions to have a(nother) child than cohabiters in any other cohabitation type, except for the group we have labeled as *conformists* because they planned to marry despite their unfavorable opinion about the institution of marriage. An important implication of this finding is that across Europe, cohabiters' intentions to have a child are still closely associated with plans to get married. This result corroborates prior research showing that the anticipation of marriage increases willingness cohabiters to make relationship-specific investments, such as planning for and having children, to further strengthen the commitment between the partners (Musick, 2007).

The third main finding is that cohabiters with and without joint children differed in the meanings they attached to cohabitation as well as in the association between cohabitation type and fertility intentions. Cohabiters with joint children were overrepresented not only among those who viewed their union as an alternative to marriage (*i.e.*, *rejection or irrelevance of marriage*), but also among those who were *too poor to marry*. The aspiration to marriage was less central for cohabiters with joint children, suggesting that they are more likely to consider cohabitation as an appropriate setting for childrearing. As expected, we also found evidence of a weaker association between the meaning of cohabitation and the intention to have another child

among cohabiting parents than among cohabiters who did not have a child in common. The coefficients in the model for cohabiters with joint children indicate that the number of children already born is much more relevant in explaining the intention to have an additional child than the meaning attached to cohabitation.

Finally, the way in which a particular meaning of cohabitation is associated with the likelihood of having fertility intentions was largely similar across Europe. Although Eastern European cohabiters with joint children were less likely to intend to have another child than their Western European counterparts, the association between cohabitation type and fertility intentions was analogous across Europe. In particular, the link between the anticipation of marriage and the intention to have a child was strong across contexts. Cohabiters who perceived their union as having a long-term perspective, who did not feel too poor to marry, who valued the institution of marriage, and in particular those who planned to marry in the near future, were more prone to intend to have a child. The cohabitation typology proposed to grasp the diversity of meanings of cohabitation across Europe is thus a useful tool to understand differences in the fertility intentions of cohabiters in various contexts.

It is important to acknowledge a number of limitations of the present study. First, we relied on cross-sectional data. Our classification of cohabiters into different types of cohabitation is a snapshot of the current state of the cohabiting union. Both the meaning of cohabitation and fertility intentions could change over each respondent's individual life course as well as over the course of an intimate relationship. Measuring the meaning of cohabitation and intentions to have a child at the same point in time implies that we cannot effectively address processes of selection as well as reverse causality that could be at play. Individuals who do not intend to have any (more) children could opt for cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, the latter being normatively more strongly associated with having children. In turn, cohabiters who want to have children might be more likely to view their current union as a stage in the process toward marriage and thus select themselves into cohabitation types that favor marriage. Finally, intending to have a child could encourage cohabiters to pursue plans to marry. Only longitudinal data could effectively address these issues.

Second, we relied on individual data when measuring the fertility intentions of cohabiters. Although intentions to have a child can be understood as an individual desire that might differ from the partner's, in reality they often

incorporate to some extent the partner's view on having children (Testa, 2012; Thomson, 1997). Data on fertility intentions of both partners would have enabled us to get a better grasp of the dyadic nature of reproductive decision-making in cohabiting unions, but couple-level data are not available in the *GGS*.

Finally, although we relied on large data sets, our sample of cohabiters, in particular in Eastern European countries, was still rather small and some of the meanings of cohabitation identified are relatively marginal. Although we are aware of the drawbacks of pooling the data of countries that still vary largely in the diffusion of cohabitation and its role in the family formation process (Puur *et al.*, 2012), we did so in order to increase the statistical power of our analysis. If more countries were available, multilevel analyses would have enabled us to get a better grasp of the complex links among country contexts, meanings of cohabitation, and fertility intentions (Stegmueller, 2013).

This study shows that grasping the diversity of cohabitation by distinguishing the different meanings attached to it is a promising avenue for future research on the links between cohabitation and marriage, and between cohabitation and fertility. Cohabitation means different things to different people and understanding how it is intertwined with the intention to have a child could expand our understanding of the role of cohabitation within the family system. Given the recent release of first Wave 2 data of the Generations and Gender Surveys, future research might examine how cohabiters in the different types of cohabitation succeed in accomplishing their fertility intentions or how the conception or birth of a child fosters the transition to marriage or changes the meaning attached to cohabitation in different European contexts.

