# Marriage Choices in Contemporary Italy. Couples' Places of Meeting Between Individualization and Structural Determinants

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This article focuses on the study of the places where spouses first met in contemporary Italy. Using data provided by the nationally representative survey "Family, Social Subjects and the Life Cycle", carried out in 2016 by Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) and made available in 2020, the article investigates trends in couples' places of meeting and the relation between contexts of meeting and structural determinants such as social class and territorial affiliation. The results support the idea that even in contemporary societies partner's choice is shaped by a set of social and cultural constraints and is not solely the result of personal preferences inspired by the ideal of romantic love.

*Keywords:* partner choice, couples' places of meeting, social class, homogamy, marriage, Italy

## The Study of Partners' Meeting Places

This study focuses on analyzing the places where individuals meet the people they subsequently marry. The settings in which individuals meet their spouses have long been studied in the sociological literature because they constitute, along with personal preferences and social group pressures, one of the main forces that can shape marriage choices (for an introduction, Bozon & Heran, 1989; Kalmijn & Flap, 2001; Lampard, 2007; Mollenhorst, Völker, & Flap, 2008). The venues of the partner meeting are related to the type of person who will be chosen and the selection patterns of the couple being formed (Coleman, 1981). For these reasons, expectations regarding the level of similarity between partners with respect to relevant social characteristics such as social class, education, age, religion, and territorial affiliation are related to the different meeting contexts.

The more internally homogeneous the meeting places are, the greater the chances that unions among similars will be formed (Kalmijn, 1998). For example, the neighborhood promotes the formation of couples who are highly homogeneous in terms of the social characteristics of the family of origin, while the school privileges similarity by achieved traits, such as the education and occupation of the partners. Studying meeting places and monitoring their evolution over time provides an opportunity to gather insights into the phenomenon of social homogamy and heterogamy, and to reflect on the broader issue of social mobility and social inequalities.

Besides, different population groups tend to meet in different places: for example, members of different social classes and individuals with different territorial origins use some meeting places while they tend to avoid others (Bozon & Heran, 1989). The study of meeting places offers an opportunity to investigate the social

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influence represented by class affiliation and cultural norms reproduced within territorial affiliation on a personal decision such as partner's selection. Spousal choice has to do with group dynamics and social closure (Weber, 1922).

Moreover, meeting venues tend to have a link to marital outcomes. A number of studies have highlighted how the context in which the partners met can be linked to the subsequent levels of relationship satisfaction and attachment expressed by the spouses, and to the stability and duration of the marriage itself (beginning with Bott, 1957 through Rosenfeld, Reuben, & Hausen, 2019). In this sense, the study of meeting places allows for a better understanding of marriage dynamics and their evolution over time.

This research aims to provide an original contribution to the study of meeting places, offering an analysis of the contexts in which individuals first met their spouse, with a focus on contemporary Italian society, and also studying more recent marriage cohorts. Italian society emerges as a case of great interest. On the one hand Italian society exhibits family and marriage arrangements still bound to traditional models. On the other hand in recent decades Italy has experienced strong pressure towards modernization and presents significant instances of family change, such as the trend towards postponed marriages, reduced fertility rates, increase in *more-uxorio* cohabitations, growth in separation and divorce rates. However, there are territorial differences, particularly along the North-South axis. In the Northern Italy, family models are closer to the European average, whereas in the South more traditional models persist. In the larger towns there are family models which are more favorable to change, whereas in the smaller towns traditional models still persist (for a brief introduction see Arosio, 2015; for an overview of demographic and family trends in Italy and a comparison at European level, see also Istat, 2021 and Eurostat, 2019). The study will attempt to highlight which meeting places are most used in contemporary Italy and the dynamics of change over time in access to different marriage venues. It will also deal with the outcome of marriage histories by investigating levels of homogamy and relating them to the place where the spouses met. Finally, the link between social position and territorial affiliations with the circumstances of the meeting will be analyzed to explore the role of social and cultural forces that can shape partner choices.

## Spousal Choice Between Individualization and Structural Determinants

Among the most relevant works on the places where partners meet are the foundational writings of Bozon and Heran (1987; 1988; 1989), which deepen the analyses with specific reference to French society in the twentieth century.

The authors have proposed a three-category typology of meeting places: public, select and private places (Bozon & Heran, 1988). Public places are defined as places where meeting is facilitated by simultaneous presence in a setting, such as neighborhood, village festivals, and public clubs. Selected settings denote places where there is an implicit or explicit selection to access, such as places of work, study, and organized activities. Finally, private places are characterized by shared membership and personal social networks, such as one's own home or the family and friends' homes, and all activities mediated by personal social relationships. Bozon and Heran (1987) also showed changes over time. At the beginning of the twentieth century in France there is a prevalence of meetings in private places. From the 1960s, encounters occurring in public places grow. From the 1980s onward, the number of couples meeting in public places decreases and the number of encounters occurring in selected settings rises, while there is stability regarding private places. Starting from this framework, research in other contemporary Western countries shows broad similarities to what has been shown

for France, even if with some specificities. For example, in Great Britain meetings that take place in public places assume greater consistency, in the United States in selected ones (for a review see Lampard, 2007).

Bozon and Heran (1988) pointed out a relationship between meeting places and class membership. Members of the more privileged classes tend to meet in selected and private places, while members of the lower classes tend to meet their partner in public settings. The authors also suggest the existence of regional differences: in urban contexts the importance of private meeting places is observed, while in rural contexts meeting in public places is of relevance.

Empirical evidence concerning the growth over time of meetings that take place in selected places, and the decline of meetings in public venues has been linked by some authors to the decline of the power of tradition in partner choice (Giddens, 1992) and the growth of individualization phenomena affecting contemporary societies, which also have implications for the way romantic relationships are established and developed (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2003). Focus on self-identity and values as self-realization are supposed to subtract individual choices from tradition and social and cultural norms (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

The tendency to meet more and more frequently in selected places probably also reflects other life changes that have occurred in recent decades: on the one hand, increased permanence in the educational system and increased schooling for women, and on the other hand, the growth of women's participation in the labor market and the decrease in women's segregation in the workplace (although segregation still exists in contemporary Western societies—see e.g., Charles & Grusky, 2004). These circumstances result in young people in the age groups most favorable to relationship formation living much of their existence precisely in the places of study and work. Supporting this, among the selected places, school and work grow mostly, less leisure activities. Moreover the empirical evidence of association between social origins and territory with meeting places seems to support idea that social and cultural affiliations matter (see among the others Bozon & Heran, 1988; Lampard, 2007; and Potarca, 2017). Socioeconomic status also seems to influence marriage and divorce patterns in most of the Western contemporary societies (see for instance Esping-Anderson, 2016; for a review see Karney, 2021). Social forces matter along with personal choices and ideal of romantic love (for an introduction to the concept of romantic love in contemporary societies see Arosio, 2016).

## Data and Hypotheses

Within this framework, it appears interesting to study meeting places in contemporary Italy, monitoring trends and studying determinants. It appears valuable to carry out analyses that allow investigating link between meeting places and position in the stratification system. This means investigating whether the choice of spouse has been removed from the influences of social and cultural norms or not, by studying the link between meeting places and social classes and between meeting places and geographical affiliations.

The dataset that will be used in the analyses is the nationally representative survey "Family, Social Subjects and the Life Cycle", conducted by Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) in 2016 and made available in 2020[1]. The survey is the main statistical source on family structure and social characteristics of households in Italy and their dynamics over time. The availability of these data provides a very up-to-date look and allows the study of the most recent marriage cohorts[2].

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[1] Information on the survey can be found at https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/185678.
[2] The data were provided by Istat. The application for the release of data was supported by the UniData center of the University of Milano-Bicocca.

The analyses concern the first marriage of people who have been married at least once. Already Bozon and Heran (1987) showed that there is difference in the place of meeting with reference to the order of marriage (this means that first and subsequent marriages show different propensity to meet in public and selected places). In addition, the analysis of the first marriage provides a way to control for the attrition caused by separation, divorce and widowhood. This allows information to be collected on couples no longer married at the time of the survey.

The question used in the questionnaire is "Consider your first or only marriage. Where did you meet your future spouse?" with closed answers[3]. We are aware that the answer may be questionable, as suggested in the literature (e.g. Kalmijn & Flap, 2001). Specifically, the process of getting to know can occur at multiple times, and the role of social relationships may be important not only in private places but also in other meeting places.

The places of the first meeting are coded using the three-category classification scheme developed by Bozon and Heran (1988) (see section 2).

Public places include meetings that took place in a disco, neighborhood, street party, street, transportation, other public places. Selected places include school and university, work environment, vacation place, religious organization, marriage agency. Private places include party among friends, home of friends and relatives.

Couples who met on the Web are classified as "other public place". Internet dating is an increasingly widespread and accepted phenomenon in contemporary Western societies (Cacioppo et al., 2013; Rosenfeld et al., 2019; Lampard, 2020) and it would be interesting to understand how this place affects partner meeting rules (Potarca, 2017). However, in Italy online dating is still a residual though increasing phenomenon (Arosio, 2017). Married Italian couples in the marriage cohort "2000-2009" who met online are under 1%; in cohabiting couples the rate rises to 3-4% (Arosio, 2017).

The analyses are carried out in three steps and are supported by specific hypotheses.

*Trends in place of meeting.* We hypothesize that as in other contemporary Western countries, Italy has seen a growth over time in meetings occurring in selected places, particularly at school and at work, where people spend much of their daily lives. Similarly, we assume a decrease in the number of meetings occurring in public places, while we expect a constant relevance of private settings, based on personal relationships. We hypothesize that different meeting places will show different rates of homogamy.

*Bivariate relationship.* We assume the existence of class specific trends and territorial specific trends in places of meeting. This finding supports the idea that there are structural factors that shape marriage choices, and that these choices are not driven only by individual preferences and the ideal of romantic love. Social and cultural affiliations continue to be important in contemporary societies.

*Multivariate analysis.* Trends that emerge through bivariate analysis can also be analyzed through a multivariate model to highlight determinants that lead to meetings in one place or another. We hypothesize the relevance of class and territorial differences, which express social and cultural norms, also controlling for other factors.

## Trends in Places of Meeting

Table 1 shows the trends in partner's places of meeting over time in Italy, starting with spouses in the marriage cohort "before 1970" and ending with the cohort of spouses "2010-2016".

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[3] The questionnaire is available at https://www.istat.it/ws/fascicoloSidi/514/Questionario.pdf.

Table 1

*Place of Spouse's Meeting by Marriage Cohort. First Marriages. Italy. Percentage Values (N = 17,314)*

| | Marriage cohort | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Before 1970 | 1970-1979 | 1980-1989 | 1990-1999 | 2000-2009 | 2010-2016 | Total | Homogamy |
| School, University | 1.8 | 4.8 | 6.7 | 6.4 | 7.6 | 7.2 | 5.3 | 73.3 |
| Vacation place | 2.8 | 5.1 | 6.1 | 6.9 | 6.2 | 7.1 | 5.4 | 55.6 |
| Disco | 3.2 | 7.8 | 8.0 | 9.2 | 9.1 | 8.2 | 7.3 | 56.7 |
| Neighborhood | 17.4 | 10.2 | 8.3 | 8.6 | 6.0 | 4.4 | 10.1 | 63.3 |
| Street party | 15.8 | 10.1 | 8.9 | 6.0 | 4.9 | 3.6 | 9.2 | 64.8 |
| Friends' party | 9.9 | 13.3 | 15.2 | 16.7 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 14.1 | 61.6 |
| Friends and relatives' house | 17.8 | 15.7 | 15.0 | 12.8 | 17.1 | 14.8 | 15.7 | 61.4 |
| Work place | 8.3 | 9.0 | 8.2 | 9.3 | 9.6 | 13.5 | 9.2 | 59.9 |
| Religious organization | 1.3 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.3 | 1.8 | 2.1 | 1.8 | 55.1 |
| Street | 12.5 | 11.7 | 11.7 | 10.7 | 9.4 | 5.9 | 10.9 | 60.3 |
| Other public | 4.7 | 5.7 | 5.2 | 6.0 | 5.9 | 6.1 | 5.5 | 57.3 |
| Other | 4.5 | 4.8 | 4.7 | 5.1 | 7.0 | 9.3 | 5.5 | 60.5 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 61.3 |
| Public | 56.2 | 47.8 | 44.2 | 42.7 | 37.9 | 31.0 | 45.4 | |
| Select | 14.8 | 21.6 | 24.1 | 26.2 | 27.1 | 32.9 | 23.0 | |
| Private | 29.0 | 30.5 | 31.7 | 31.1 | 34.9 | 36.0 | 31.6 | |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Select/Public | 0.26 | 0.45 | 0.55 | 0.61 | 0.72 | 1.06 | 0.51 | |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

The Italian data show the overall relevance of meetings in public places, such as neighborhood, local festivals, street and transportation (45.4% of the total of the meetings). However, over time, meetings in public places have greatly decreased (from 56.2% in the cohort of spouses "before 1970" to 31.0% in the cohort "2010-2016").

Over cohorts the proportion of meetings in selected places rises from 14.8% to 32.9%. Most prominent is the growth of meetings occurring in school places and universities, and in work settings.

Meetings in private venues are quite stable over time, with only increase in the last marriage cohorts (see Table 1).

The ratio of meetings in selected places—where access is guided by implicit or explicit selection procedures—to meetings in public places—based on presence in a setting—rises from 0.26 in the first marriage cohort to 1.06 in the last marriage cohort (see Table 1). This means that while in the first half of the twentieth century the ratio of those who met in selected places to those who met in public places was one-third, in more recent marriage cohorts the two meeting places become equivalent.

Rates of homogamy are different in different meeting places (see Table 1)[4]. This finding confirms our hypotheses and supports the idea that meeting places can shape the outcome of the meetings themselves.

## Social and Cultural Factors as Determinants

Data in Table 2 and Table 3 are used to investigate the influence of structural factors, both social (position

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[4] The survey data allowed only the rate of educational homogamy at the time of engagement to be calculated in relation to first marriage.

in the stratification system) and cultural (spatial patterns at territorial level)[5].

Class specific trends and territorial specific trends in places of meeting clearly emerge in the analyses (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2

*Spouse's Meeting Place by Class of Origin and Individual Qualification. First Marriages. Italy. Percentage Values (N = 16,375)*

|  | Public | Select | Private | Total | Select/Public |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Class of origin* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Higher class | 31.8 | 37.6 | 30.6 | 100.0 | 1.2 |
| Middle class | 33.5 | 33.5 | 33.0 | 100.0 | 1.0 |
| Self employed | 44.4 | 23.2 | 32.4 | 100.0 | 0.5 |
| Working class | 50.0 | 19.2 | 30.8 | 100.0 | 0.4 |
| *Education* |  |  |  |  |  |
| University | 18.3 | 45.4 | 36.3 | 100.0 | 2.4 |
| Secondary school | 34.3 | 32.1 | 33.6 | 100.0 | 0.9 |
| Lower secondary | 47.4 | 21.5 | 31.1 | 100.0 | 0.4 |
| Primary school | 57.5 | 13.5 | 29.0 | 100.0 | 0.2 |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

Higher class members show a higher propensity to have met their partner in select places than lower class members. Self-employed and working class use public places most frequently. No differences emerge between class members for dating in private venues. Ratio select vs. public is 1 in the upper classes; it is 0.5 in the lower classes (see Table 2).

As far as the level of education is concerned, higher educational qualifications are more frequently associated with meetings in selected and private places. Those with lower educational qualifications prefer public meeting places (see Table 2). The ratio select/public is over 2 when considering University, it decreases to 1 in high school graduates and drops to 0.2 in lower educational qualifications (see Table 2).

Table 3

*Spouse's Meeting Place by Geographic Area and Size of the Urban Area. First Marriages. Italy. Percentage Values (N = 16,375)*

|  | Public | Select | Private | Total | Select/Public |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Geographic area* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Northwest | 42.9 | 27.9 | 29.2 | 100.0 | 0.6 |
| Northeast | 46.5 | 24.6 | 28.9 | 100.0 | 0.5 |
| Center | 46.2 | 23.2 | 30.6 | 100.0 | 0.5 |
| South | 47.4 | 18.5 | 34.1 | 100.0 | 0.4 |
| Islands | 44.4 | 16.8 | 38.7 | 100.0 | 0.4 |
| *Size of the urban area* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Up to 10,000 inhabitants | 53.0 | 20.4 | 26.7 | 100.0 | 0.4 |
| More than 10,000 inhabitants | 42.2 | 24.1 | 33.7 | 100.0 | 0.6 |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

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[5] Class of origin is obtained through the father's occupation when the respondent was 14 years old. The educational qualification belongs to the respondent at the beginning of the engagement.

We assumed that different territorial affiliations, in terms of both geographical area of residence and the size of the urban area in which the people live, are linked to different cultural norms that influence the meeting places. This idea is supported by the data in Table 3. People in Northern Italian regions are more likely to meet their partners in the selected venues. In Southern Italian areas, which are more associated with traditional family models, the proportion of meetings in public and private places increases. In large urban areas, dating in selected and private places prevails. In small towns, the numbers of meetings in public places are relatively higher (see Table 3).

## The Multivariate Model

The insights from the previous analyses are tested by multivariate analysis using a multinomial logistic regression model that estimates the propensity to have met in the different meeting places, related to social and cultural settings, while controlling for the other factors included in the model, particularly the time dimension.

The dependent variable is the meeting place of the partners in Bozon and Heran's (1988) three-partition scheme. The independent variables are marriage cohort, social class of origin (expressed through father's position when the subject was 14 years old), level of education (expressed through educational qualification at the beginning of the engagement), geographic area of residence, and size of town. Table 4 shows the percentage distributions of the variables in the model.

Table 4

*Percentage Distribution of the Variables Involved in the Model (N = 14,416)*

|  |  | Valid percent |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Meeting place | Public | 45.5 |
|  | Select | 23.7 |
|  | Private | 30.8 |
| Marriage cohort | Before 1970 | 21.3 |
|  | 1970-1979 | 19.8 |
|  | 1980-1989 | 18.1 |
|  | 1990-1999 | 17.8 |
|  | 2000-2009 | 15.5 |
|  | 2010-2016 | 7.6 |
| Class of origin | Higher class | 3.5 |
|  | Middle class | 14.9 |
|  | Self employed | 33.5 |
|  | Working class | 48.2 |
| Education | University | 5.0 |
|  | Secondary school | 31.1 |
|  | Lower secondary | 37.3 |
|  | Primary school | 26.5 |
| Geographical area | Northwest | 21.0 |
|  | Northeast | 22.8 |
|  | Center | 18.0 |
|  | South | 28.5 |
|  | Islands | 9.7 |
| Size of town | Up to 10,000 inhabitants | 37.7 |
|  | More than 10,000 inhabitants | 62.3 |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

Table 5a

*Logistic Regression of Meeting Places on Selected Independent Variables (N = 14,416). First Marriages. Italy*

Select places (Ref. Public)

|  |  | B | St.Err. | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marriage cohort | Before 1970 | -0.445 | 0.103 | <.001 | 0.641 |
|  | 1970-1979 | -0.197 | 0.095 | 0.037 | 0.821 |
|  | 1980-1989 | -0.254 | 0.094 | 0.007 | 0.775 |
|  | 1990-1999 | -0.165 | 0.093 | 0.075 | 0.848 |
|  | 2000-2009 | -0.129 | 0.094 | 0.173 | 0.879 |
|  | 2010-2016 (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Class of origin | Higher class | 0.739 | 0.117 | <.001 | 2.093 |
|  | Middle class | 0.592 | 0.065 | <.001 | 1.807 |
|  | Self employed | 0.241 | 0.05 | <.001 | 1.273 |
|  | Working class (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Education | University | 1.779 | 0.122 | <.001 | 5.922 |
|  | Secondary school | 1.008 | 0.073 | <.001 | 2.739 |
|  | Lower secondary school | 0.425 | 0.069 | <.001 | 1.53 |
|  | Primary school (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Geographical area | Northwest | 0.444 | 0.088 | <.001 | 1.558 |
|  | Northeast | 0.306 | 0.087 | <.001 | 1.357 |
|  | Center | 0.031 | 0.091 | 0.736 | 1.031 |
|  | South | 0.012 | 0.087 | 0.893 | 1.012 |
|  | Islands (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Size of town | Up to 10,000 inhabitants | -0.326 | 0.046 | <.001 | 0.721 |
|  | More than 10,000 inhabitants (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
|  | Intercept | -1.267 | 0.125 | <.001 |  |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

Table 5b

*Logistic Regression of Meeting Places on Selected Independent Variables (N = 14,416). First Marriages. Italy*

Private places (Ref. Public)

|  |  | B | St.Err. | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marriage cohort | Before 1970 | -0.262 | 0.094 | 0.005 | 0.769 |
|  | 1970-1979 | -0.225 | 0.089 | 0.012 | 0.798 |
|  | 1980-1989 | -0.225 | 0.088 | 0.011 | 0.799 |
|  | 1990-1999 | -0.255 | 0.089 | 0.004 | 0.775 |
|  | 2000-2009 | -0.141 | 0.09 | 0.118 | 0.869 |
|  | 2010-2016 (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Class of origin | Higher class | 0.281 | 0.118 | 0.017 | 1.324 |
|  | Middle class | 0.295 | 0.063 | <.001 | 1.344 |
|  | Self employed | 0.14 | 0.044 | 0.002 | 1.15 |
|  | Working class (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |
| Education | University | 1.098 | 0.12 | <.001 | 2.998 |
|  | Secondary school | 0.551 | 0.063 | <.001 | 1.735 |
|  | Lower secondary school | 0.158 | 0.058 | 0.006 | 1.171 |
|  | Primary school (Ref.) | 0 |  |  |  |

Table 5b to be continued

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geographical area | Northwest | -0.127 | 0.076 | 0.097 | 0.881 |
| | Northeast | -0.172 | 0.075 | 0.022 | 0.842 |
| | Center | -0.318 | 0.077 | <.001 | 0.728 |
| | South | 0.026 | 0.071 | 0.718 | 1.026 |
| | Islands (Ref.) | 0 | | | |
| Size of town | Up to 10,000 inhabitants | -0.427 | 0.042 | <.001 | 0.653 |
| | More than 10,000 inhabitants (Ref.) | 0 | | | |
| | Intercept | -0.263 | 0.109 | 0.016 | |

*Note.* Source: Our analyses on Istat data, Family and Social Subjects Survey. Italy, 2016.

Table 5a and Table 5b show the results of the multinomial logistic regression model, studying the effect of the independent variables on the probability of the partner being met in select venues (ref. Public places) (see Table 5a); and on the probability of the partner being met in private venues (ref. Public places) (see Table 5b). The column B provides the estimated coefficients for predicting the dependent variable from the independent variables. The column Standard Error (St.Err.) provides the standard errors associated with the coefficients. The column Significance (Sig.) provides the p-value used in testing the null hypothesis that the coefficient is 0. Coefficients having a p-value of 0.05 or less are considered statistically significant. Exp(B) are hazard ratios.

As far as meeting in select places is concerned (see Table 5a), we note a relevant and statistically significant effect of the parameters in the model. Older marriage cohorts, compared to more recent cohorts, show reduced chances of meeting in selected places than in public places. Starting with those who have married since the 2000s, meetings in selected places increase. Position in the stratification system plays a relevant and statistically significant role. The higher the social origin of couples, the greater the propensity to meet in selected places; the same is seen for educational qualifications. Territorial affiliation also matters. In the regions of Northern Italy, dating in the selected places is favored over those living in Central and Southern Italy. Even in large urban areas, meetings in selected places are preferred.

As far as meeting in private places is concerned (see Table 5b), we note that the influence of the independent variables appears smaller than in the model in Table 5a but nevertheless interesting. In the oldest marriage cohorts, the propensity to meet in private places compared to public places is lower. Position in the stratification system is relevant. The higher the class of origin, the greater the propensity towards private places. The higher the educational qualification the greater the propensity towards private places. Public places are preferred in the Center of Italy, as well as in less populous areas, more traditional and less prone to change.

To sum up, data support the idea that meeting places are changed over time and continue to be shaped by social and territorial belonging, reflecting the existence of cultural and social norms.

## Conclusions

In this article, meeting places in contemporary Italy have been investigated with reference to the issue of social stratification and cultural belonging. The focus on changes among marriage cohorts allowed the theme of social change to be studied.

The analyses brought out clearly emerging temporal, class and territorial specificities. The results were confirmed by multivariate analyses.

A shift from public to select venues in meeting places is recorded across marriage cohorts in Italy.

Class origin and individual educational qualification were used to express position in the stratification system. Higher class members show preference for select venues; self-employed and blue-collar workers prefer public contexts. Higher educational qualifications are more frequently associated with meetings in selected and private places. Those with lower educational qualifications are more likely to meet partner in public places.

Geographic area and center size of residence were studied to express the strength of memberships in cultural patterns on a territorial basis. People in Northern Italy tend to be more likely to meet their partners in the selected venues. In Southern Italian areas, the proportion of meetings in public and private places increases. In large urban areas, dating in selected and private places prevails. In small towns, the numbers of meetings in public places are relatively higher.

Dynamics related to partner meeting places reflect changing patterns of life, but at the same time highlight the continuing importance of social and cultural norms on the lives of individuals.

For these reasons, research and analyses on this topic are useful, in order to have very up-to-date data that monitor an evolving phenomenon. Data that allow longitudinal and comparative studies would be very valuable. It would also be interesting to investigate not only heterosexual marriages, but also civil unions or same-sex unions. Moreover, it remains to explore, especially in Italy, the issue of Internet dating, which is a growing phenomenon with potential theoretical implications.

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