

The Spread of Consensual Unions in Europe as a Diffusion Process

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Outline

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- **Cohabitation as a diffusion process**
- **Description of the diffusion process**
- **Analyses of the diffusion process**
- **Results**
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Introduction

In the early 1960s cohabitation was rare and stigmatised everywhere in Europe.

Today it is widespread (and changed its meaning), but not to the same extent everywhere:

Southern Europe: cohabitation is still rare and practised by a minority

West Germany, Austria and The Netherlands: accepted as prelude to marriage

France, GB, Norway, East Germany: accepted as alternative to marriage (high rate of extramarital births)

Denmark, Sweden: status normatively like marriage

Cohabitation as a Diffusion Process

Research questions:

What drives the diffusion of cohabitation?

How do different institutional contexts affect the diffusion process?

Data:

Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS)

Method:

Individual level-diffusion analysis with event history models

Exponential model with time constant and time varying covariates

Key Elements in the Diffusion Process

1. Innovation

An innovation is any idea, object, or practice that is perceived as new by the members of the social system. In the 1960s and 1970s cohabitation was rare and an *innovative* behaviour.

2. Communication channels

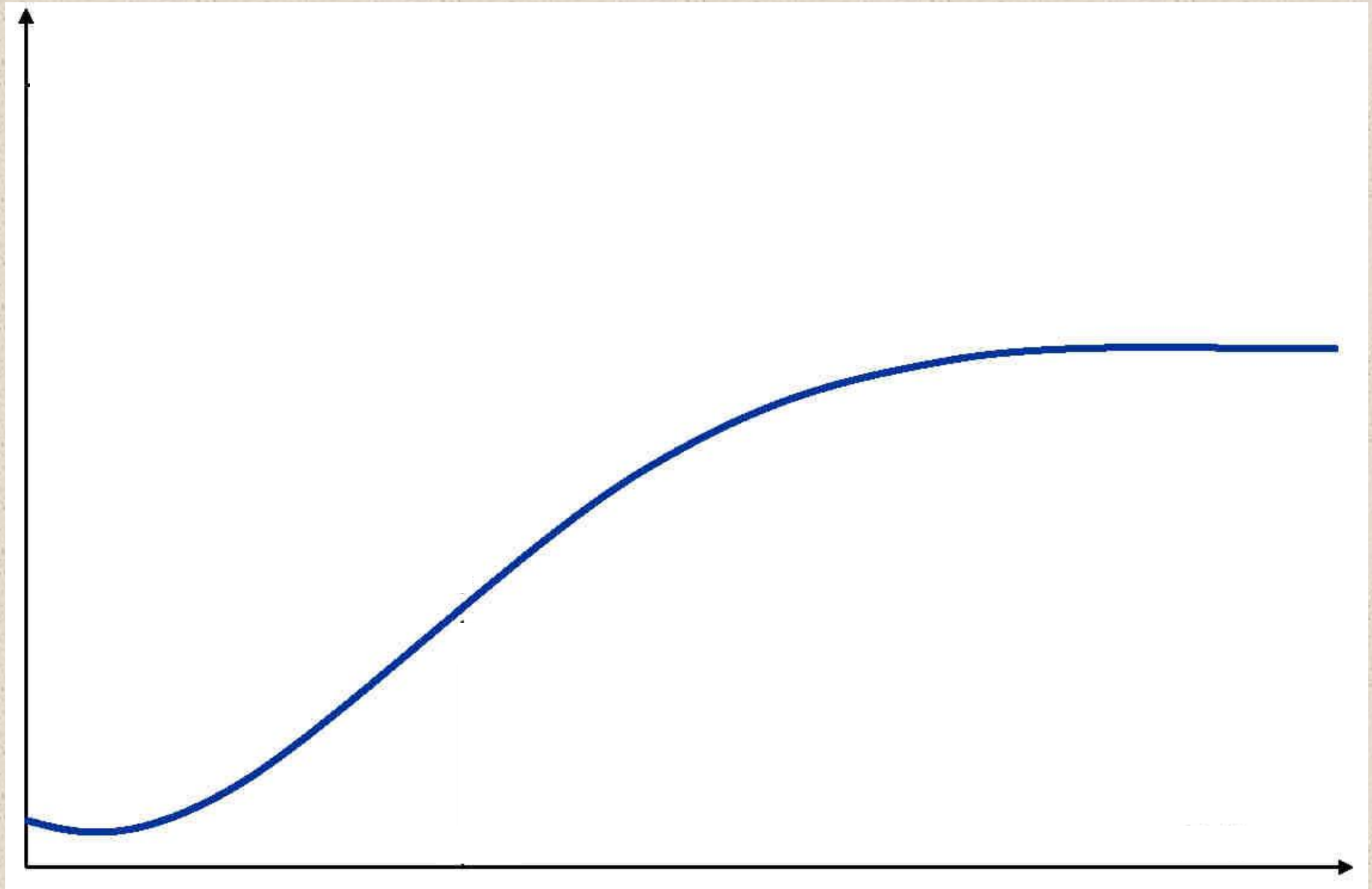
Communication channels are the means by which information is transmitted to or within the social system (e.g., *mass media* or *interpersonal communication*).

3. Time

Time relates to the relative speed with which the innovation is adopted: *changing rate of adoption*.

Model of a Diffusion Process

$N(t)$



Process Time t

Characteristics of the Diffusion of Cohabitation

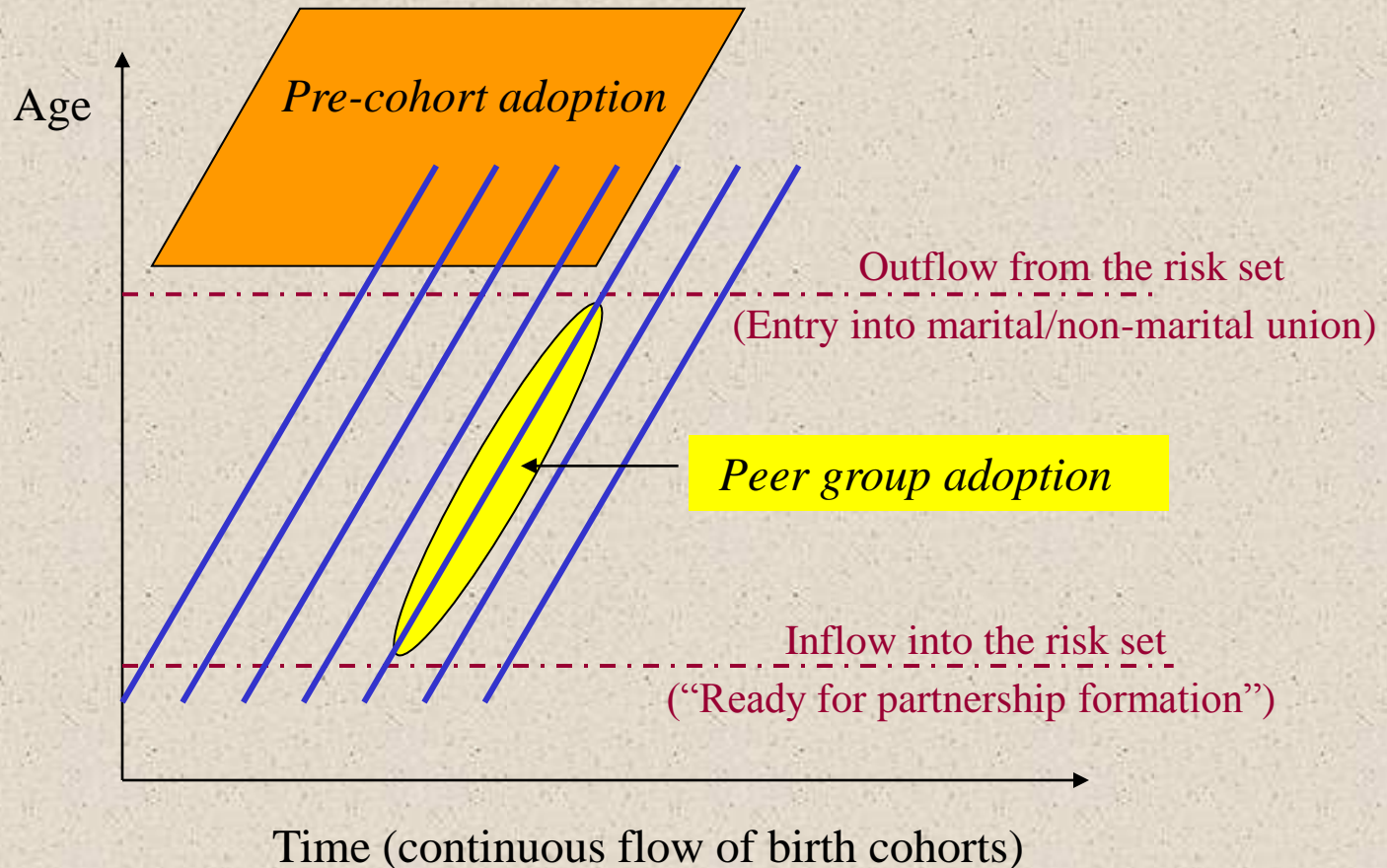
Diffusion of cohabitation is studied:

- from a rare and deviant behavior to a widespread and accepted partnership choice
- over the life course and across successive birth cohorts of women
- the population of potential adopters is therefore not static but dynamic (there are continuously new cohorts entering and leaving the risk set). The population is continuously in flux.

Time-related Dimensions of the Diffusion Process of Pre-marital Cohabitation

Diffusion of Cohabitation is a highly time-related process:

- Potential adoption is typically confined to a specific window in the life-course
- Highly dynamic population of potential adopters over time



The diffusion process: **mechanisms** and **indicators**

Knowledge-awareness:

Pre-cohort adoption

$$P_c = \frac{\sum_{i<c} \sum_{j<t} n_{ij}}{N_p(t)} * 100$$

Every new birth cohort faces an increasing proportion of “cohabiters” among previous birth-cohorts (rising incidence). They will then experience cohabitation as less deviant, or stigmatised, and more socially accepted right from the beginning.

Direct social modelling:

Peer group adoption

$$P_g = \frac{\sum_{i=c} \sum_{j<t} m_{ij}}{N_c} * 100$$

Confirmation of attitudes and behaviours through direct experiences “vicarious trials” by *similar* others, who constitute concrete examples. Not only direct interpersonal contacts but also the perception of the behaviour *proper* to the occupants of their position (vicarious reinforcement, abstract modelling, ‘structural equivalence’).

Peer group adoption:

$$P_g = \frac{\sum_{i=c} \sum_{j<t} m_{ij}}{N_c} * 100$$

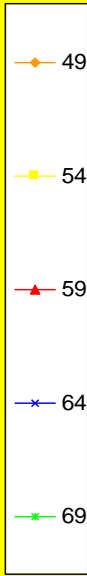
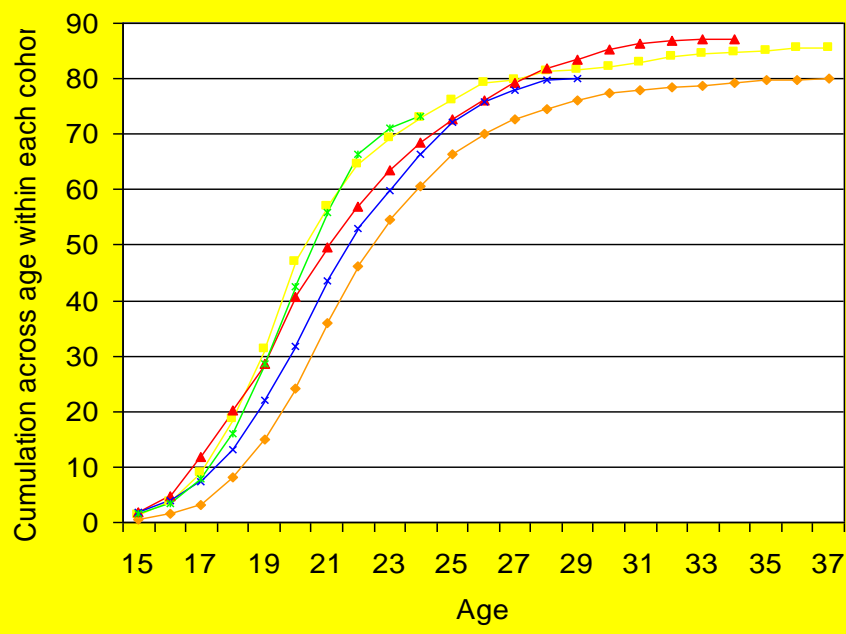
number of prior adopters with age c and birth cohort t

Pre-cohort adoption:

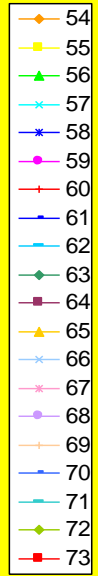
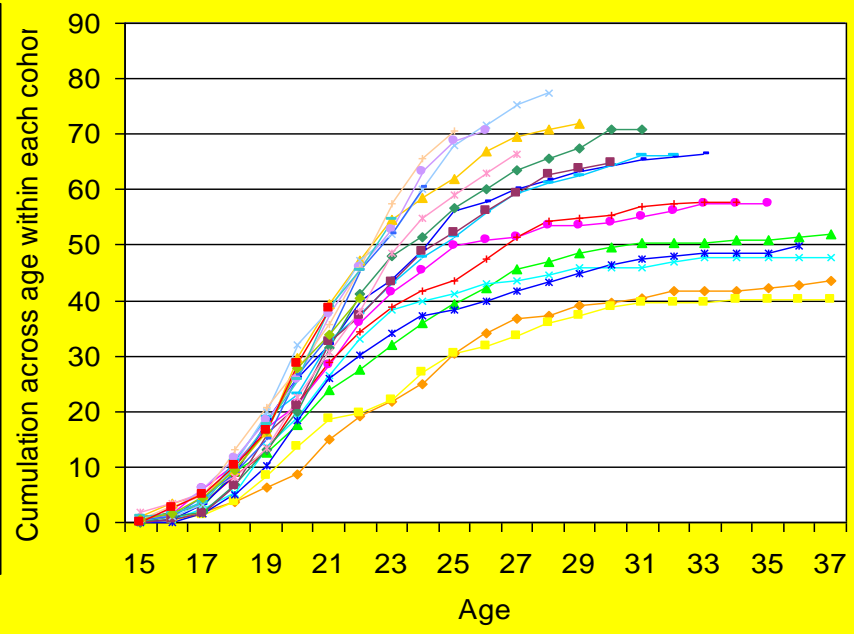
$$P_c = \frac{\sum_{i<c} \sum_{j<t} n_{ij}}{N_p(t)} * 100$$

number of prior adopters in the birth cohort t at age c

Sweden



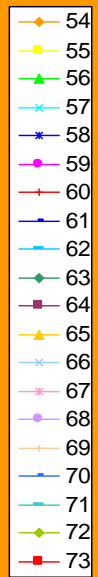
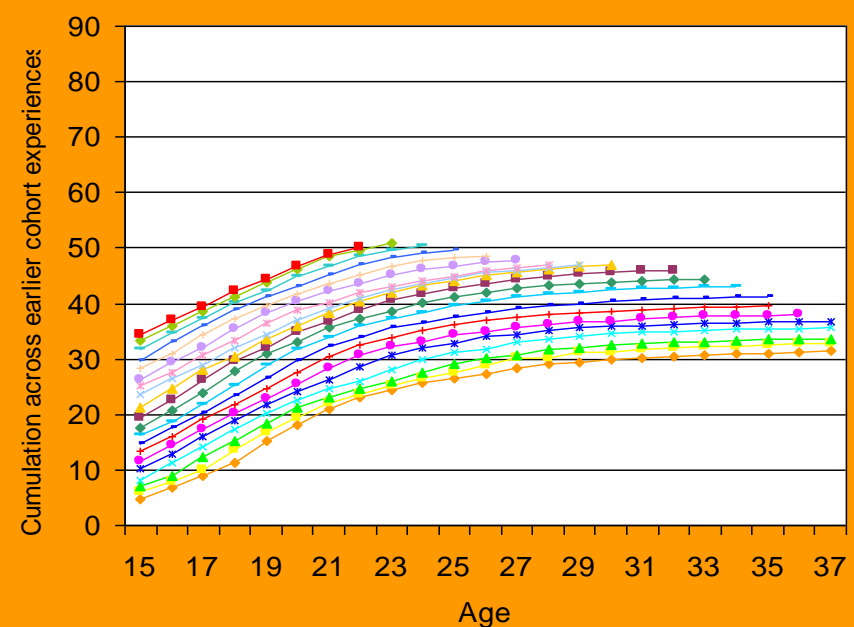
France



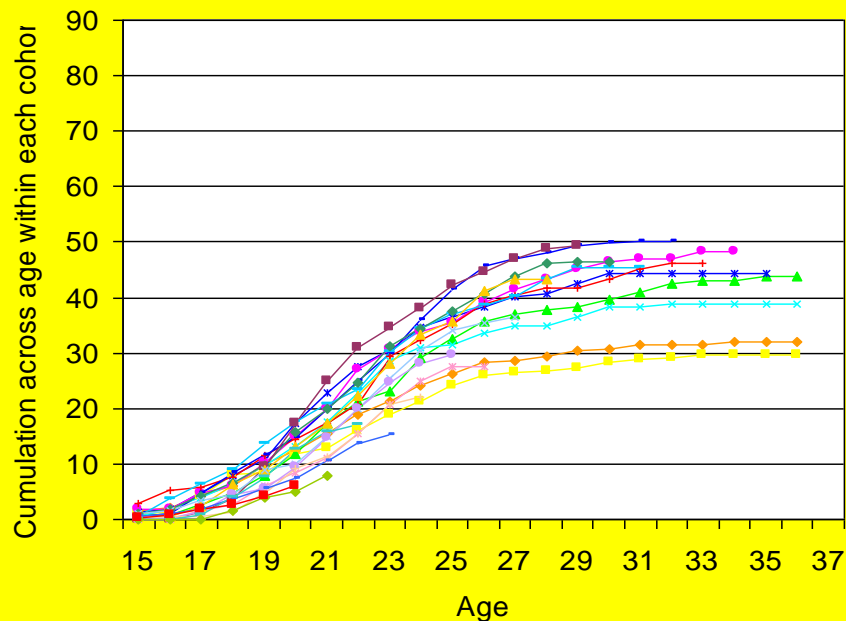
Peer group adoption:

Pre-cohort adoption:

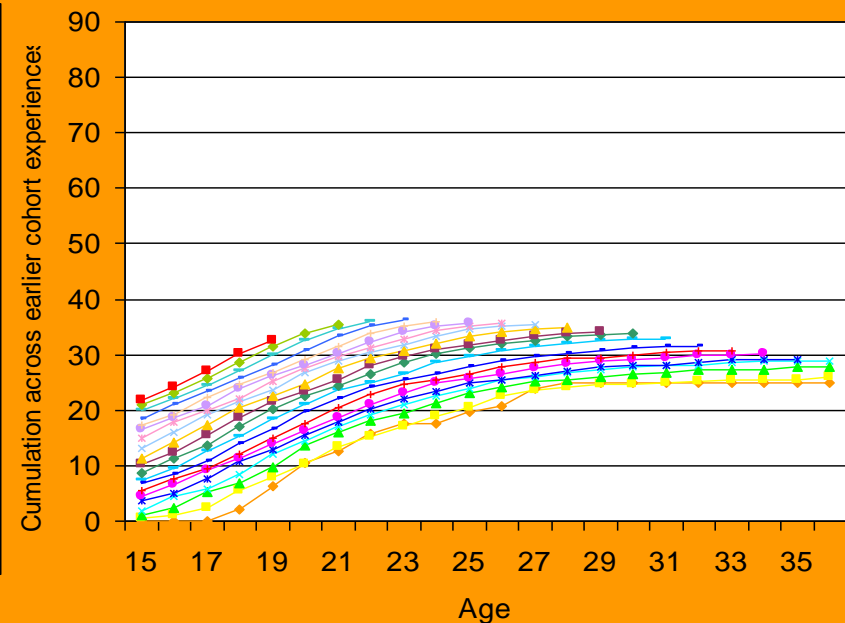
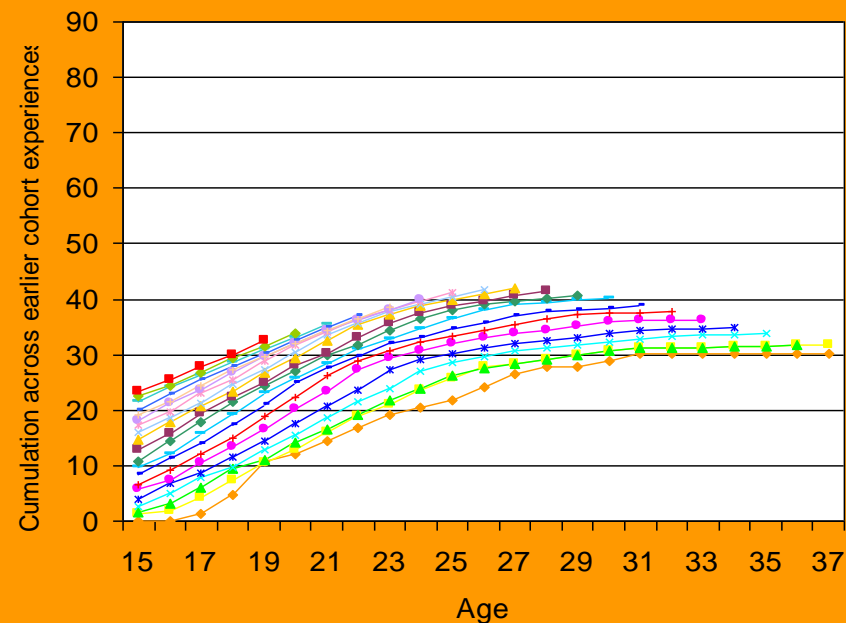
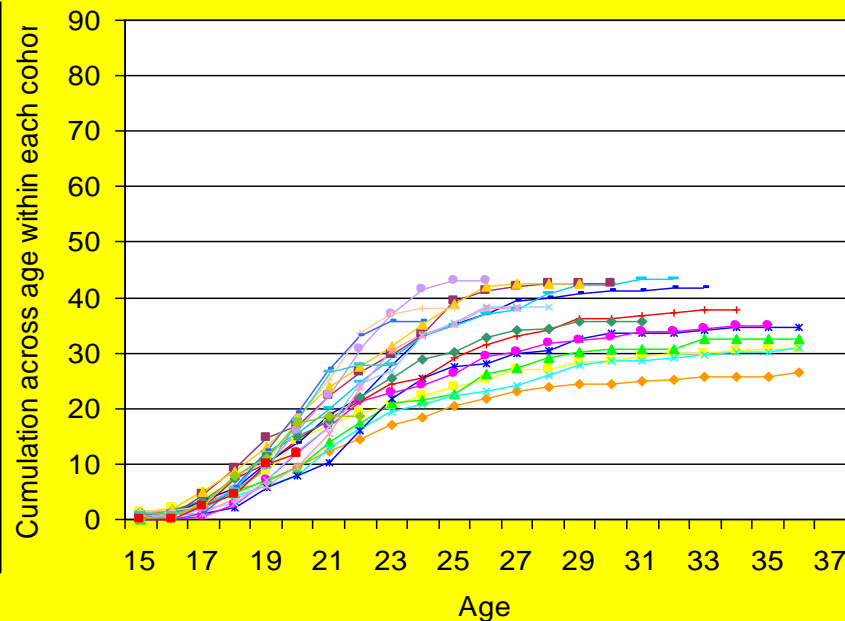
(not computable for Sweden)



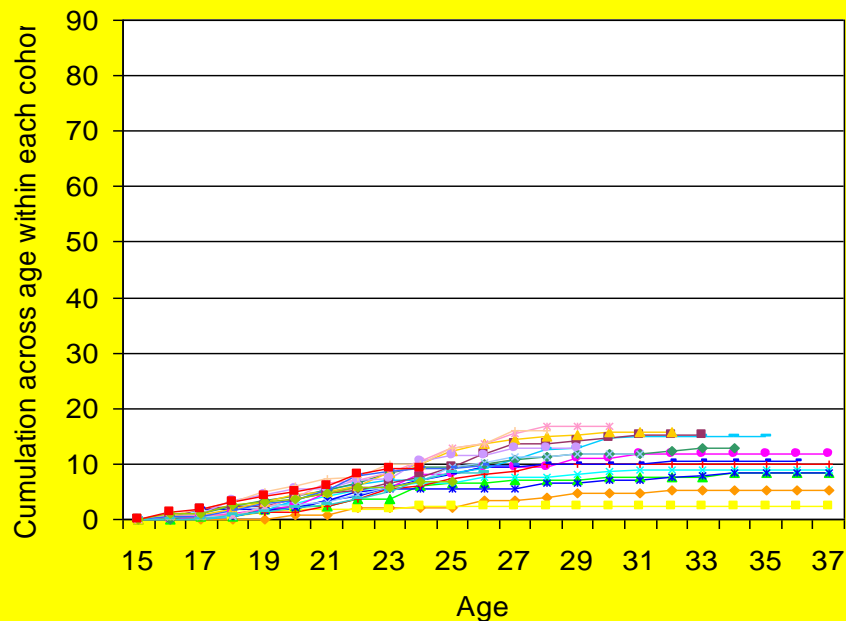
West Germany



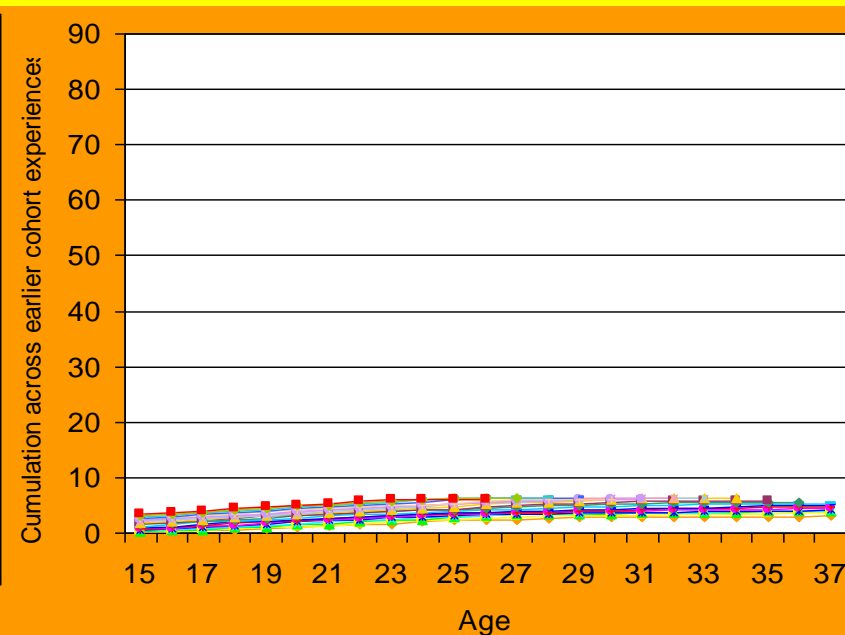
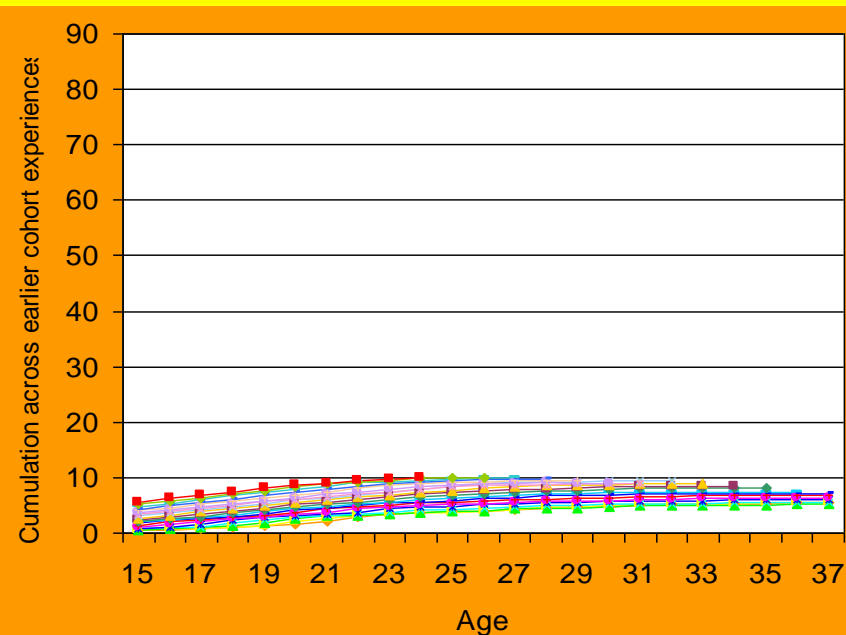
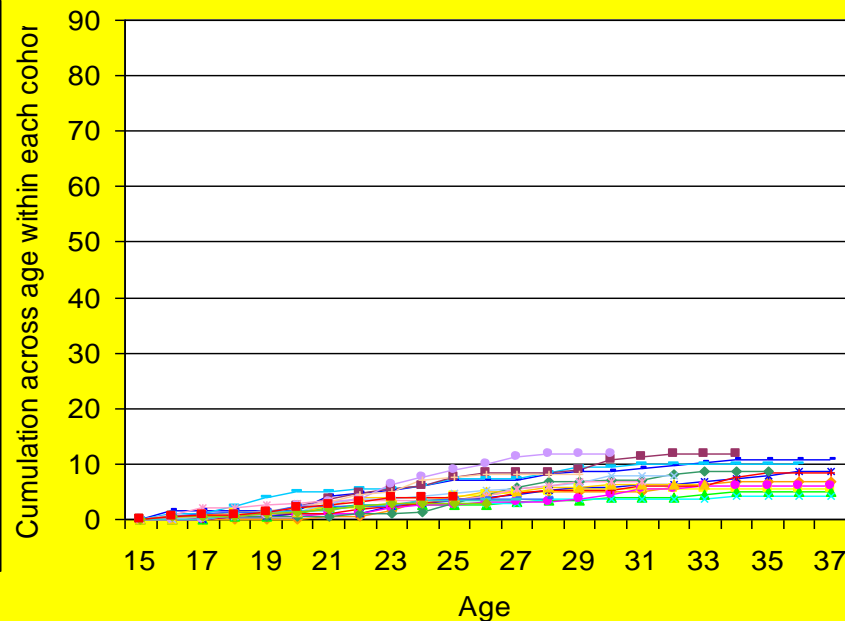
East Germany



Spain



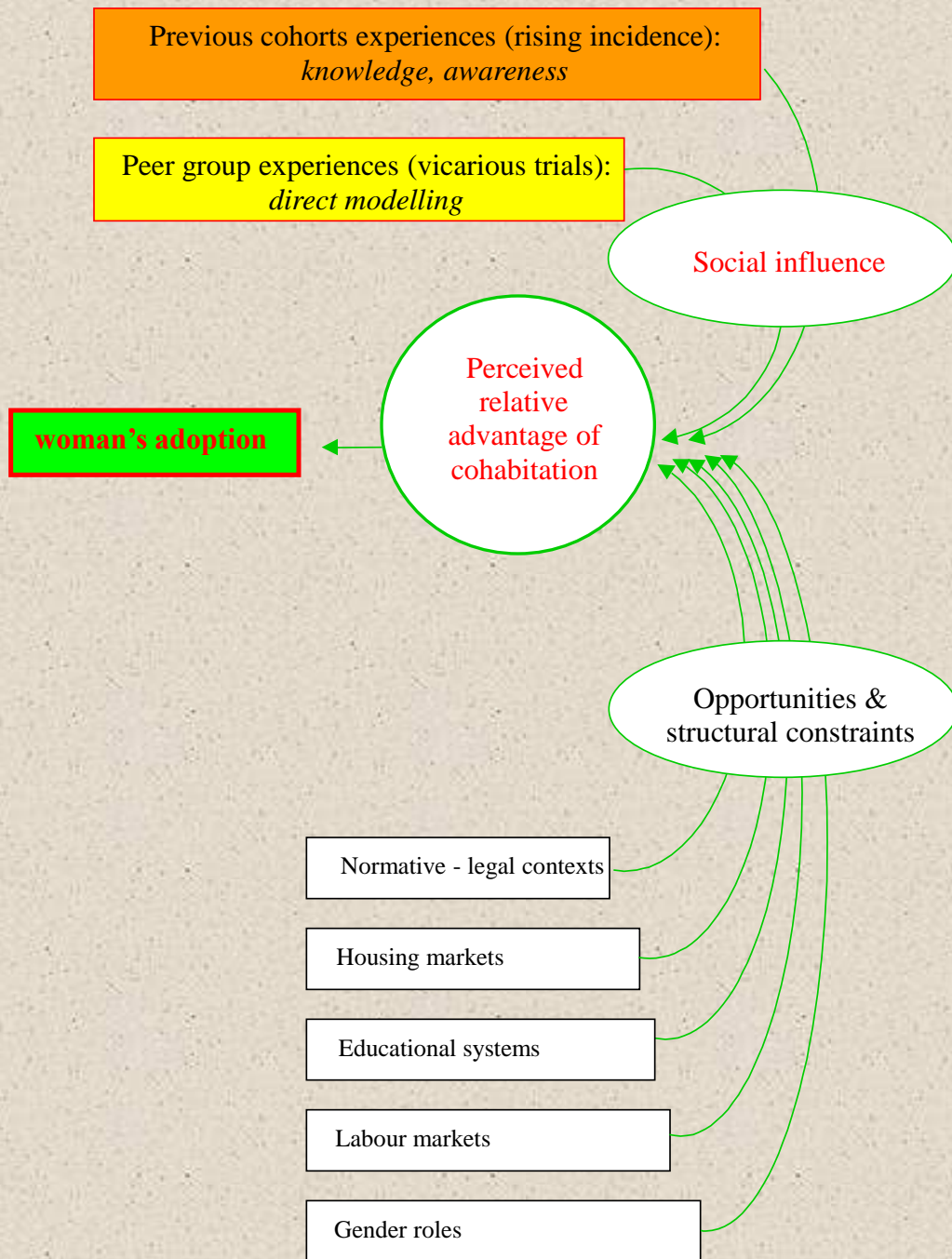
Italy



Relative Advantages of Consensual Unions

What are the relative advantages of cohabitation for young people?

- increasing uncertainty of youth labour markets
- increasing uncertainty of the phase of transition into adulthood
- long-term commitments (marriage) are increasingly problematic
- consensual unions are a flexible living arrangement
- it offers safer sexual relationships in a long-term partnership
- it offers many of the benefits of marriage (including the pooling of resources, the economies of scale) that living together provides



Rising **uncertainty of young peoples' labour markets** makes cohabitation increasingly advantageous:

But young people face also constraints which render some decisions unfeasible or too costly to consider. Limits can depend on **institutional settings** on economic resources or on expressions of **social influence** (norms, social pressure)

Hypotheses: Influence of Institutional Contexts

Normative context (family traditions, national context, importance of religion, local conditions etc.)

Educational expansion (duration of educational participation, level of qualification)

Affordable housing (home ownership rates, rental market, laws)

(Growing uncertainty in) Labour Markets

Changes in gender roles (women's growing economic independence, male-breadwinner ideology)

The Statistical Model

$$r_R(t) = \exp(\alpha' x(t)) * \exp(\beta_1 P_g + \beta_2 P_g^2 + \beta_3 P_g^3) * \exp(\gamma_1 P_c + \gamma_2 P_c^2 + \gamma_3 P_c^3)$$

propensity to move from non-adoption to adoption at time t

effect of time varying and time constant individual characteristics

effect of the intra-population diffusion process on the rate of individual adoption

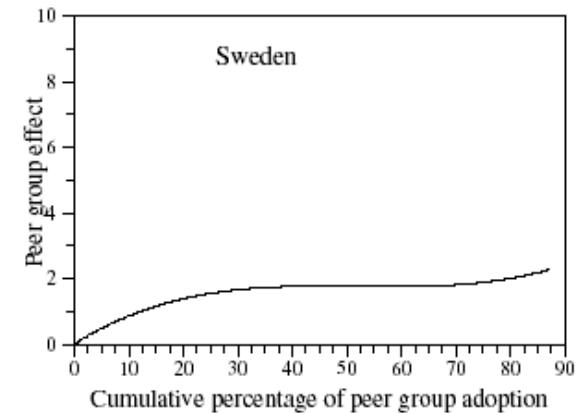
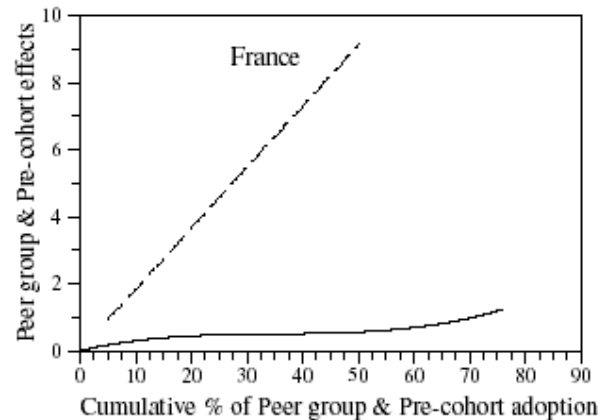
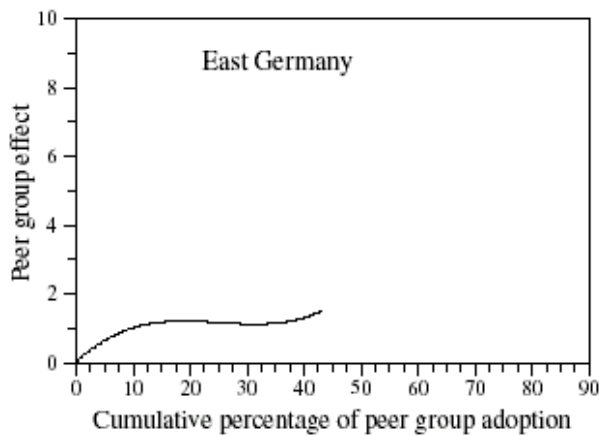
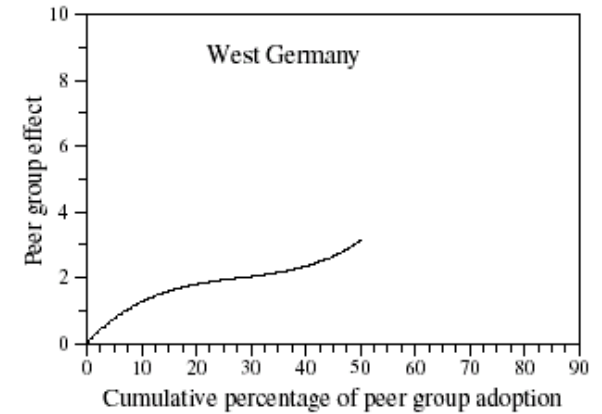
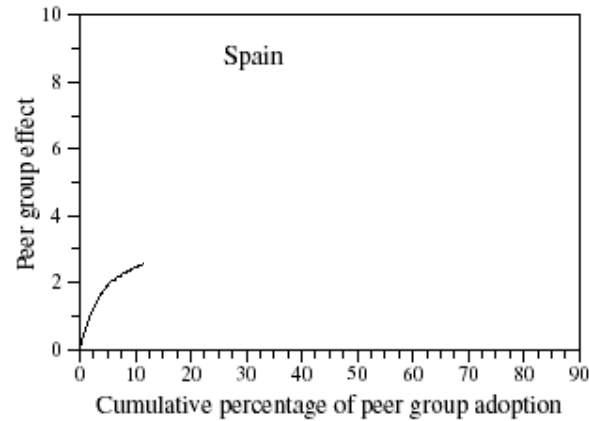
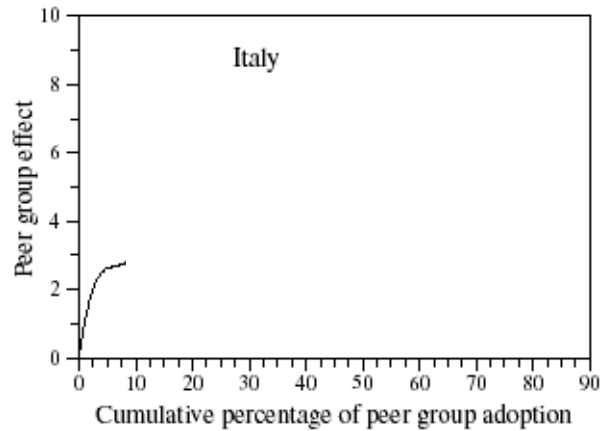
Results: Diffusion of Cohabitation

Women, born 1954-73, observed from 15 to 39 years of age

Controlling for: age, and birth cohort (not shown). Same models for marriage.

	West Germany	East Germany	Italy	Spain	France	Sweden
In education	-0,35	-0,18	-1,26	-0,68	-0,73	-0,24
Level of education						
Primary (ref.)						
Secondary	0,21		-0,29			-0,23
Tertiary					0,25	-0,18
Being employed				-0,42	(0,15)	0,21
Empl. experience			0,06	0,06	n.a.	
Religiosity	-0,15	-0,16	-1,00	-0,55	n.a.	n.a.
Parental Divorce	0,31	0,39	0,42	0,78	0,29	0,25
Single vs. Parents	0,34	0,26	1,42	1,90	0,59	0,18
Pregnancy	+	+	+	+	+	+
Residence at age 15			+ big	+ big		- big
Region			- south			
Peer group / pre-cohort			----- See figures -----			

Effects of Cumulative Peer Group and Pre-cohort Adoption



Conclusions

The spread of cohabitation can be described as a diffusion process.

There seems to be no important intergenerational mechanism working at the early stage of the diffusion process. Cohabitation is rather driven by peer models.

Amongst institutional factors, the housing market (also for leaving home) is crucial, especially in the Southern countries.

Cohabitation in Italy (and Spain) is *restricted* to specific groups of the population: highly educated women, who have gained residential independence, (and in the case of Italy) live in the North, work, and grew up in big urban centres. Diffusion process seems to be blocked.

No autonomous cohort trend remains after introducing *diffusion* covariates.

	Sample	Single (% exit)	Cohabitation (direct) (% 1 st partn.)		Marriage (direct) (% 1 st partn.)	
Sweden	2597	1500 (62%)	2133 (92%)	(819)	183 (8%)	(97)
France	2144	749 (39%)	1287 (70%)	(697)	560 (30%)	(453)
West Germany	2497	1031 (52%)	895 (58%)	(485)	638 (42%)	(448)
East Germany	2555	726 (36%)	868 (44%)	(512)	1092 (66%)	(788)
Spain	2735	344 (15%)	257 (12%)	(143)	1914 (88%)	(1725)
Italy	3234	374 (16%)	214 (9%)	(136)	2072 (91%)	(1856)