

Are cohabitators more egalitarian? A comparative analysis of the division of household
labour in five European countries

Abstract

This article compares the gendered allocation of household labour between married and cohabiting couples in Germany, France, UK, Italy and Spain, testing whether cohabitators show more egalitarian divisions of labour and hypothesising that the effect of cohabitation differs across countries, depending on the baseline equality and on the meaning of cohabitation. In order to examine to what extent there is equality, each partners' contribution to the total housework time is considered, but also who does what: some tasks are more constraining than others and gender and partnership differences specific to those tasks are investigated too. The empirical analysis is based on Multinational Time Use Surveys (N = 58,490), using OLS linear regression models. Results show that cohabiting couples have a more egalitarian division of labour but that there are important country differences.

Keywords: Cohabitation/Gender roles/Marriage/Same sex couples/Time use

Reproductive work, defined as "unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home" (Coltrane 2000), is key for the good functioning of society, and because of its special characteristics, it has often been presented as opposed to productive or paid work. Historically, housework has constituted a gendered activity, being ascribed to the private sphere and considered women's speciality. In the late twentieth century, the generalised increase in female labour force participation lead some authors to predict the end of this gendered specialization, but in spite of cross-country evidence pointing at a higher involvement of men in housework, an egalitarian distribution seems hard to achieve (Davis & Greenstein 2004).

The persistent gendered division of labour has induced sociologists to question the reasons of such division, as well as to investigate under what conditions more egalitarian distributions of housework emerge. Studies on the division of household labour have focused especially on married couples, given that heterosexual marriage was the normative form of partnership until very recently, but with the spread of alternative living arrangements, the unit of analysis has widened in order to include same sex and cohabiting couples. Specifically, previous research on cohabitation has shown that non married couples have a more egalitarian division of labour than marrieds (for instance Batalova & Cohen 2002; Coltrane 2000).

By contrast, most of the literature on cohabitation and housework has linked this empirical regularity with the different meanings of the relationship, which are known to vary significantly across countries (Heuveline & Timberlake 2004). In this sense, this article contributes to the existing literature by assessing the effects of cohabitation in different countries, taking into account that its effect may not be homogeneous, but related to the role that cohabitation plays in each society. The countries studied in this

paper differ in the spread of alternative living arrangements and also on the meanings attributed to cohabitation. The specific mechanisms that may produce differences cannot be tested with the available data, but the first step will be to establish whether there are significantly diverse effects.

The structure of the article is the following. First the literature on different partnerships and the division of labour is reviewed, deriving testable hypotheses. The second section describes the data (Time Use Surveys) and discusses the methods available for the statistical analysis, whose results are presented in the third section. Given the focus on country differences, a significant space of the empirical section is devoted to providing a description of the distribution of the main variables in the five countries under study.

1. Gender roles, domestic work and living arrangements

In the 1990s the study of domestic work became an important area of social science studies, and the relevance of its relationship to other social phenomena, such as family relations, labour markets, values, and the life cycle was soon established (Coltrane 2000). This type of unpaid work presented a strong gender asymmetry, along the model of the *male breadwinner*, according to which the husband worked outside the home and the wife was responsible of the home and children. Such specialization pattern was dominant during most of the twentieth century, and several sociological theories offered explanations for its persistence. Even though there are important variations, these explanations can be classified into two groups: theories that focus on relative resources and theories that point at socialization processes.

Relative resources theories date back to Becker's New Household Economics (1981), who interpreted women's specialization in household tasks as a result of a rational calculus made by the household as a unit, and resulting from men's comparative

advantage on human capital and labour market characteristics. This portrait of the division of labour inside the family was refined through the ideas of negotiation and bargaining (Lundberg & Pollak 1996), where household decisions were not made according to a unitary utility function, because individual members have their own preferences and must bargain with each other to reach an equilibrium. Individual bargaining power depends on the potential contribution to the household, which is usually measured in terms of earnings. If women's bargaining power was higher than men's, alternative specialization models could emerge, and therefore these theories are considered gender neutral. Empirical evidence has shown that women in full time paid work contribute less to housework than women who do not work or work fewer hours; and that double income couples show a more egalitarian distribution of tasks (Gershuny 2000). Results have been less clear for men, although those who work fewer hours have also been found to do more housework (Bianchi et al. 2000). However, in some cases full time employed women increase their contribution to domestic chores when their partner loses the job (Brines 1994), and this is difficult to explain from the relative resources perspective.

The second group of theories, and an alternative explanation to relative resources, focuses on socialization processes and gender role formation. According to these theories, women's higher involvement in domestic work is not due to the characteristics of the labour market or to a rational calculus made by the household, but to their own gender identity and existing social norms. Gender identity is formed from childhood on, along a complex process in which many institutions play a role: through this process, women continuously see and learn that higher domestic skills are expected from them. Developing this point, doing gender theories argue that gender identity is built through everyday interactions (West & Fenstermaker 1993), and women continue to do more

housework because it is associated to femininity, as part of the confirmation of their own identity. Gender theories have also found empirical support for their claims: the literature has shown that couples with egalitarian gender values share their housework in a more egalitarian fashion (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994; Lück & Hofäker 2003; Meil 2005), and that highly educated women contribute less to housework, whereas the inverse effect is found for men: more education implies more housework on their side (Anxo 2002; Bianchi et al. 2000; Gershuny 2000; Perkins & de Meris 1996; Pittman 1995). Despite this, evidence related to education must be interpreted cautiously, because it may either be an indicator of egalitarian values or a proxy for social class, human capital and bargaining power.

In addition to ascertaining the importance of socioeconomic variables and gender values on domestic work performance, comparative studies have also found national differences in the division of labour. Some countries are more egalitarian than others, and several explanations have been proposed: the structure of the labour market and women's position in it (Breen & Cooke 2005); welfare policies that may support the role of women either as carers or as workers (Bühlmann et al. 2010; Geist 2005); macro-level gender inequalities (Fuwa 2004), and undefined factors that go beyond the usual policy distinctions (Gershuny & Sullivan 2003). These studies have pointed out the importance of considering the role of macro-level as well as couple's or individual characteristics in order to explain the gendered allocation of housework.

But countries do not only differ on their average share of domestic work by sex, they also differ on the popularity of alternative forms of partnership. With the diffusion of new family models, the type of partnership became a variable of interest for studies on the division of domestic work, and results have consistently shown that cohabiting couples hold a more egalitarian division of housework than marrieds (Batalova &

Cohen 2002; Baxter 2005; Shelton & John 1993; South & Spitze, 1994). Even though this empirical regularity is well established, the reasons for it are not obvious: on the one hand, cohabitation may be selective of couples with special traits. Consensual unions have been found to hold more egalitarian gender values than marrieds (Clarkberg et al. 1995), which may definitely lead them to more egalitarian housework allocations, although longitudinal studies have found a trend towards a more traditional division of labour when cohabitators marry or have children (Gupta 1999). Cohabitation also selects couples with different socioeconomic profiles than marriage (Kiernan 2002), and given that socioeconomic variables affect significantly the division of labour, as mentioned above, consensual unions may distribute domestic chores more equally as a consequence of these divergent profiles. On the other hand, something may happen inside the relationship that fosters a different division of labour: for instance the duration of cohabiting unions, usually shorter than that of marriages, may reduce women's interest in specialising in reproductive work (Clarkberg 1999); or unmarried co-residence may be used as part of partners' selection process, where willingness to share housework may be considered a desirable trait (Breen & Cooke 2005), and especially so in countries with a high degree of gender inequality (Ono 2003).

The latter explanation is related to the role of cohabiting unions and the meaning that individuals attribute to them in their partnership biographies. According to Heuveline and Timberlake's empirical study (2004), cohabitation may play five roles, and in each country one of those roles prevails: in Italy and Spain consensual unions would be defined as marginal (not prevalent and publicly discouraged); in Germany they would act as a stage in the marriage process (cohabitation being a childless stage often ending in marriage); in contrast, in France they would be an alternative to marriage (with a high incidence of long term cohabitation and childbearing). UK is not included in their

original study, but examining its traits (Kiernan & Estagha, 1993) it can be considered an alternative to singlehood (relatively high incidence, but with few long term unions and transitions into marriage). An additional possibility, unfortunately not covered in this paper, is that cohabitation is indistinguishable from marriage, as it happens in Scandinavian countries.

Taking into account these different meanings, is it reasonable to expect cohabitation to have the same effects on the division of domestic work for all countries? It is assumed that couples who spouse more traditional values marry directly, and that therefore, in general, cohabiting unions are less traditional concerning family values and therefore would show more egalitarian divisions, but this trend towards equality could be modified in either direction by different mechanisms. The literature has not considered this issue in a systematic manner, and therefore only speculations based on previous research results can be made here.

On the one hand, the equalising effect of cohabitation will depend on the degree of equality: the effect will probably be smaller in countries where domestic tasks are shared more equally. On the other hand, the different meanings of the relationship may either reinforce or modify the equalising effects on the union. In countries where cohabitation is marginal, couples of higher socioeconomic status are often overrepresented among cohabitators, because they lead the spread of innovative behaviours. In the case of Italy and Spain, this is combined with a high degree of gender inequality in the private sphere, and therefore cohabitators are expected to be significantly different to marrieds and to show more egalitarian arrangements. Likewise, in countries where cohabitation is a stage in the marriage process, cohabitation would produce egalitarian effects if women valued willingness to share housework in their potential partners, but the opposite effect could be found if women's domestic skills were a

highly valued trait instead. In contrast, when cohabitation is an alternative to singlehood –it could be considered a lesser bond (Schoen & Weinick 1993)- partners may not feel the same pressure to be considered potential spouses as in the former case. As a result, men may find no incentive to show their willingness to share, but also women may find no incentive in specialising, leading to contradictory and mutually neutralising effects. Cohabiting unions can also act as an alternative to marriage or be indistinguishable from it. In those cases, partner selection has already been accomplished, and cohabitators may either behave as marrieds in terms of housework, or may differ from them precisely on that front due to the previous selection of more egalitarian matches.

The above mentioned mechanisms are speculations and very difficult to test empirically with quantitative data. They have been mentioned in order to illustrate the causal mechanisms that may mediate the relationship between cohabitation and more egalitarian divisions of housework, however, the aim of this paper is not to test those mechanisms, but to examine whether country effects of cohabitation are similar or not, in order to open the possibility of exploring causal mechanisms in further research.

Before doing that, some precisions about the dependent variable must be made.

Up to this point, housework has been considered as a general concept, and this may not be the most appropriate strategy. Domestic work is composed of household tasks (such as cooking and ironing) and care tasks (of children or dependent adults). Both types of task have been often analysed together, but in this article the focus will be on the first type of tasks. The idea behind this selection is that both types of work are considered differently by family members: household tasks are often routine tasks, performed out of necessity, deemed boring, and easy to externalise at a relatively low cost. Care tasks, however, have also an emotional component attached to them and this makes it more difficult to find a substitute that can perform them at a low cost. Furthermore, the

literature has shown that indeed parents do not try to bargaining with child care, but rather enjoy activities together with their children, thus considering childcare closer to leisure in some respects (Hallberg 2003; Sayer 2005).

But even if the analysis is restricted to household tasks, this concept includes different tasks with varied characteristics: cooking, ironing or shopping for groceries are not equally routinary or time-constraining activities. Cleaning tasks (cleaning the house, washing dishes or doing the laundry) are considered central, routinary and repetitive tasks, as opposed to gardening or shopping, which are performed occasionally, are closer to leisure and can be more time-flexible and easy to postpone. The gendered division of household tasks also follows these lines, and it has been observed that, on average, women concentrate more on routine tasks and men focus on more leisurely tasks; to such an extent that some authors use the label “female tasks” to denote the former and “male tasks” to refer to the latter (Thompson & Walker 1989; Bianchi et al. 2000). Therefore, if the division of tasks is to be investigated, it will be more informative to consider who does what in the couple and to what extent, instead of only measuring how much individuals do.

To sum up, and taking into account previous theory and findings, the hypotheses to be tested in the empirical section of this paper are the following:

(H1) Women will contribute to housework more in all unions, but unmarried couples will have a more egalitarian distribution. In two senses:

- a) Cohabiting women will contribute to housework less than marrieds, whereas cohabiting men will contribute more than married men.
- b) Men in consensual unions will do higher proportions of female tasks than marrieds.

(H2) Due to the different levels of both gender equality in the private sphere and natures of the relationship, cohabitation effects will differ by country, and in general, will be stronger in more inegalitarian countries.

2. Data and method

The data used in this research were extracted from the Multinational Time Use Surveys Project (MTUS), which harmonises time use surveys carried out by national statistics institutes in all participating countries. In addition to providing information on background socioeconomic variables and household characteristics, respondents of these surveys are asked to fill in a diary of activities. The diary divides the day into 10 or 15 minutes periods, and respondents have to inform on what activity they were performing during each period. Data collection took place in 2002-2003 for Spain and Italy (N=46774 and N=51206 respectively), in 2001-2002 for Germany (N=11949), 2000-2001 for UK (N=15467), and 1998-1999 for France (N=15441). After selecting couples who were either married or cohabiting in all countries, the total sample adds up to 58490 individuals.

Time use diaries provide information on how many minutes per day are devoted to specific household tasks, which constitute the dependent variable of this paper, measuring the total time devoted to domestic chores and also the time devoted to specific tasks. According to the hypotheses, significant differences are expected between men and women in tasks that are more repetitive and time-constraining, such as preparing meals and cleaning, less significant differences in the tasks that are closer to leisure. Thus, four types of tasks are considered here: cleaning (includes cleaning the house, washing dishes, doing the laundry and all related tasks), cooking (preparing meals and also setting the table), shopping (running errands and buying food or any

item for the household) and occasional tasks (gardening, doing reparations, trainig pets). Because different effects are expected by sex, models were run separately for men and women.

Concerning regression techniques, the use of a multilevel model was discarded in this paper, mainly because of the small number of countries in the sample, which does not allow for enough variation on country level variables. The main aim of this research is to assess the impact of cohabitation on the individual's (level-1) contribution to domestic work in different countries (level-2). A multilevel analysis would determine to what extent the variance is explained by the different levels, as well as whether the effect of cohabitation differs by country, but given the absence of country level variables, it would not add substantial meaning to a linear regression analysis, because it would not identify specific country effects, which is one of the points of interest in this article.

When analysing time use data, a common problem is that many individuals do not spend any time at all doing the activity that the researcher is interested in. As a result, the dependent variable is not normally distributed due to a large number of observations with the value zero, and regression analysis is problematic. In order to account for these observations, Tobit regression is commonly used in time use studies, but its comparative advantages versus OLS are also subject to discussion. In this paper, OLS is preferred to Tobit because there is no theoretical reason that leads to predict some type of selection into the value 0, and because the large random sample makes OLS results less biased (Stewart 2009). The analyses were ran using Tobit too (results available form the author) and no significant differences were found.

The estimated equation for the models is therefore:

$$y = \alpha + \beta X_i + u_i ,$$

where the dependent variable y measures the amount of tasks that each individual performs. X_i comprises a set of independent variables, where the main covariates are marital status (measured with a dummy variable with a positive outcome for cohabitation), country, and the interaction between both variables. Other independent variables of interest are educational attainment (primary, secondary or college), activity in the labour market (full time, part time or not active), whether the diary was completed on a weekend, age (corrected by age squared), presence of children under 14, number of children younger than 6, and partners' characteristics (educational attainment and participation in the labour market).

The dependent variable is measured in two different ways. The first one considers the number of minutes that each individual devotes to the specific chores, and will provide information on whether cohabitators do more or less housework than marrieds. The second one measures the percent contribution of each individual to the household total time. This codification takes into account the actual sharing of the tasks and not simply the amount of time devoted to them, which can be high but equal to the partner's or low and unequal. The baseline model considers that both couple members are working full time, thus the dependent variable will give insight into equity inside the relationship.

For routine and female tasks, it will be considered that both decreases in women's share or time and increases in men's share or time are lead to fairer divisions of housework; whereas for occasional tasks the interpretation will be the opposite. The reference for country comparisons in all models is Spain, because together with Italy, it is expected to be one of the cases with unequal divisions, and has a higher number of cohabitators than the Italian sample. In addition to the pooled models, separate analyses were run by country as a further check.

3. Results

The five countries examined are heterogeneous in what concerns cohabitation and family formation patterns, as mentioned in the first part of this article. Such differences are coherent with the MTUS data, summarised in Figure 1. France is the country where cohabitation is more present from the cross-sectional perspective, with 20 percent of those in union cohabiting without marriage. United Kingdom also shows a relatively high level of cohabitation, with a 14 percent, whereas in the other three countries (Germany, Italy and Spain) cohabitation is not very extended and does not reach a 3,5 percent in the Italian case. However, if only young couples are considered, the extension of cohabitation changes remarkably, as represented by the black line on the graph. The ranking of countries remains unaltered, but the proportion of cohabiting unions increases in all of them, especially in Germany and less so in Italy. This may indicate a potential increase of cohabiting unions, but may also be interpreted as an indicator of the relationship working as a short term arrangement or as a prelude to marriage.

[Figure 1 about here]

One of the theoretical bases of this research assumes that cohabitators and marrieds are different, or that each partnership selects individuals who are significantly diverse. These differences are visible in Table 1, which summarises the distribution by sex and living arrangement, taking into consideration variables such as age, educational attainment, labour status and children. These data present average trends for the whole sample, the distribution by country not being shown here for the sake of simplicity. Cohabitators are on average 10 years younger than marrieds, which may be due to a different diffusion of cohabitation across cohorts but also to cohabitation meaning a previous step to marriage, as already mentioned. Non-married couples also show higher educational levels than marrieds, salient at the college level and more significant for

women, although this difference was not found among cohabitators in the UK, where cohabitation seems to be more popular among those with secondary education (data not shown). The gap in education might be related to the age structure of both living arrangements, but it is not completely explained by age composition. This profile of higher education is coherent with the higher rates of labour market participation among cohabiting women, as well as with lower inactivity and more full-time enrolment, in this case also for the UK. For men, the differences in labour market involvement are small and most likely related to the age composition of each group. Finally, the last variable in this descriptive table controls for the presence of children in the household, and also points at an important difference between unions, namely that childbearing is more frequently associated to marriage, even though the percentage of cohabitators with children is over a 40 percent and therefore not low. Italy was the case where the differences in terms of childbearing were most significant (only 34.3 of cohabitators had children).

[Table 1 about here]

The lower part of Table 1 summarises the distribution of domestic work among couples, where “total time” presents the number of minutes devoted to each task, and “proportion” shows the percent contribution of each couple member. If the total time devoted to housework is analysed, the difference between men and women is remarkable, but there are also important differences among unions: cohabitators invest less time in housework than marrieds; the gap for men being quite small (around five minutes) but very important in the case of women (over an hour). Men in cohabiting unions spend less time than married men doing household tasks, but when specific tasks are considered, they spend more time than marrieds in routine or female tasks and much less in occasional, male tasks. Cohabiting women consistently spend less time in all

tasks than married women. The distribution of tasks between both members of the couple also points at a fairer distribution in cohabiting than in married unions, although women's share is over 70 percent for both union types. The distribution seems to follow the female/male tasks typology: women do higher proportions of cleaning and cooking whereas men do higher percentages of the tasks as we move from more routine to less routine tasks.

The data in Table 1 pool all countries together, however, there are important differences concerning housework performance across countries. On the one hand, the average time per day devoted to housework by couples differs by country: Italian couples dedicate 419.8 minutes; Spanish ones 386.5; Germans 375.6; English couples 352.4 and French couples 344.1. On the other hand, there are also differences on the equality of the division. Figure 2 summarises the distribution of housework, by sex and country, and for all types of task. If all housework is considered, UK would rate as the most egalitarian country, followed by France, Germany, and as more inegalitarian cases Italy and Spain. The difference is significant: men in the UK do on average one third of the housework whereas in Italy they hardly manage a 20 percent. This pattern is the same for all tasks considered, except for shopping –where no pattern is found- and for occasional tasks, which are clearly male tasks: men do more than half of them in all countries.

This descriptive evidence is favourable to the first hypotheses of the paper, but descriptive results may be hiding correlations with other variables, such as women's labour force participation. In order to control for socio-economic variables and composition effects, and to examine the separate effects of cohabitation predicted in the second hypothesis, a regression analysis is needed. Tables 2 and 3 summarise results from an OLS regression with both the total and the percent contribution to housework

as dependent variables and where the independent variables of interest are partnership status (cohabitation or marriage), country, and the interaction between partnership status and country. Table 2 presents results for men and Table 3 for women. Other control variables –not shown on the table- were derived from the theories that explain housework performance, and relative to economic resources and time availability: age and age squared, educational attainment, labour force status, number of children, number of children under 6, day of the week (whether it was a weekday or weekend), partner's educational attainment and partner's labour activity. An additional control is included measuring the total amount of time that the household devotes to tasks, because the distribution of tasks may be distributed differently depending on the total load. Men and women are analysed separately because the independent variables are expected to produce different effects by sex.

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Table 2 presents regression results for men. Model 1 takes as a dependent variable the percentual contribution to total and specific domestic tasks, and Model 2 the number of minutes devoted to each task. Results for Model 1 show that the dummy variable for cohabitation is significant for all types of activity except for shopping. Men in cohabiting unions do higher shares of routine housework than married men, but do lower proportions of occasional tasks, which are considered to be male tasks in the literature. By country, and taking as a reference Spain, men from all countries contribute more to housework on average than the Spanish, except for the Italians, who contribute less to all tasks, and the French, who show negative although very small coefficients for cooking and cleaning. The interaction between cohabitation and country is not significant for the total share of housework, although it does reach significance for specific cases: cohabitation is associated with lower proportions of cleaning and

cooking, as well as higher percentages of occasional tasks in the case of the UK, and again with higher contributions to occasional tasks in Germany and France.

If the total dedication in minutes is examined instead, as analysed in Model 2, results are very similar to the former, indicating that in most cases, men's higher shares of a specific task are associated to a higher time investment in that task. The only exception is the case of UK, where cohabiting men spend significantly less time than marrieds in total tasks, but this does not seem to affect their total share, probably because of the different effects across tasks: they do less cooking and cleaning but more occasional tasks, cancelling out the effect when the total is examined. The other exception is the occasional tasks category, where percentages and total minutes are not clearly related, but this will be discussed below.

Results for women, presented in Table 3, are coherent with the former. For the percent contribution to domestic work, cohabitation is negatively associated with overall housework tasks, as well as with routine tasks, and positively associated with the proportion of occasional tasks. By country, and taking Spain as a reference, women in the UK and Germany do significantly lower and French women slightly lower proportions of housework, whereas Italian women do slightly more. The interaction coefficients for cohabitation and country show a clear pattern in two cases: in the UK cohabiting women do higher shares of total housework, and in particular do more cleaning and cooking (although they do less shopping) than in Spain. In Italy, cohabiting women do a higher share of all housework and specifically of cooking and shopping, and German cohabitators in turn do less occasional tasks.

The second specification of the dependent variable –women's dedication to tasks measured in minutes-, shows some different results. The effect of cohabitation is not significant for cleaning and occasional tasks, although it was so when the percent

contribution was analysed. This may mean that cohabiting women are not doing significantly less of these tasks but their share is fairer because their partners are doing more, as shown in Table 2. For country effects, the only difference with Model 1 is that in this case the effect for total tasks is now significant in the French case, where cohabiting women do 11 minutes less than marrieds. In spite of the size of this effect, and of the fact that French men devoted 10 minutes more to domestic tasks, the percent contribution is not affected significantly when compared to the Spanish reference. It is interesting to consider again results for occasional tasks. According to the first model, cohabiting women do higher shares of these tasks, and so do women in all countries but France. The interaction with cohabitation showed negative effects for Germany and UK. These results are symmetrical with those of men. However, coefficients only reach significance for Italy in Model 2, and also for France –where Model 1 was not significant. These divergences are difficult to interpret but might be related to the structure of the data and the distribution of the dependent variables.

The pooled models also provide information on other factors associated with men's contribution to housework: working less than full time, having college education or having a partner who is highly educated increases men's proportion of housework, whereas having a partner who works less than full time and having children have the opposite effect. On weekends, men increase their contribution to domestic work, which supports the idea that men are involved in more flexible and less time constraining tasks. Coherently, women who are highly educated, and those whose partner either is highly educated or works less than full time, as well as those who have children contribute less to housework. Women who work less than full time, however, show a positive association with more domestic work. Contrary to men, women's contribution decreases on weekends when compared to week days.

In addition to the pooled model, individual models for the total contribution to housework were run for each country separately –including a dummy for cohabitation-, whose effects appear on Table 4. Observing this table, the conclusion would be that the clearer effect of cohabitation is found in France, where cohabiting women spend less time in domestic tasks and also do lower shares, whereas the contrary effect is found for men. In Spain a similar but smaller effect is found but only if shares and not total times are examined. In Italy, cohabiting men do slightly more domestic tasks and slightly higher shares than marrieds, but no significant difference was found for women. In Germany and UK, according to this model, there would be no significant difference between cohabiting and married couples. All in all, results from the regression analysis give only partial support to the second hypothesis, because the effect of cohabitation is stronger in Spain, Italy and France, but not completely consistent.

4. Conclusions

This paper has compared the gendered allocation of household labour between married and cohabiting couples in Germany, France, UK, Italy and Spain, with time use data. The assumption was that cohabitators would show more egalitarian divisions of labour, both in terms of quantity –total time or percentage of household load- and quality – types of task performed- of that division. It was also hypothesised that, provided that cohabitation plays different roles across countries, its effect on the division of domestic work would differ too. For the first hypothesis, results show that cohabitation has a positive effect on the percentage of housework performed by men and a negative effect in case of women, thus pointing at fairer divisions. Furthermore, cohabitation is positively associated with men doing more female tasks and less male tasks than marrieds, with symmetric results for women.

In what concerns the second hypothesis, the analysis provides mixed evidence. On the one hand, interactions between country and cohabitation did not yield a coherent pattern and few cases were significant. When each country was analysed separately, the effects of cohabitation were not significant in the case of Germany and UK, but had a positive effect in France, Spain and Italy (although only for men in the latter), which were the least egalitarian countries according to the average distribution of housework. These mixed results point at intra-country differences on the effects of cohabitation that are not visible in the pooled model. The use of separate models would lead the researcher to conclude that cohabitation only has an effect on two of the countries under study, whereas the pooled model would lead to the conclusion that it has a general effect in all cases but few country-specific effects.

This mixed evidence also suggests the need of further examination of regression coefficients when different countries are pooled together. It is a well established fact that cohabitation shows very different profiles and meanings in different societies, and this variability can sometimes not be captured in-depth with a parsimonious model. A further conclusion that can be extracted from these results is the need to focus on causal mechanisms. The second section of this article speculated about the mechanisms that may render different country effects of cohabitation, some of which can lead to similar outcomes. Those mechanisms have not been tested in this article, and may be very difficult to tackle using quantitative data sources, but the results point at the interest of investigating further at the national level. At this point qualitative research could shed some light over individuals' perceptions on their partnerships, their expectations and the meanings they attribute to their relationships and actions.

The present study has many limitations that must also be acknowledged and that could be improved by better data and by further research. One of those limitations regards the

type of data. Although time use data provide researchers with rich information and more objective measures of daily activities, the measurement of housework remains problematic (Lee & Waite 2005) and in addition to this, the data analysed here are cross-sectional. In order to fully understand the effects of cohabitation –and in general, to understand changes in the allocation of domestic work-, it is essential to account for the biographical dimension (Bühlmann et al. 2010): it would be necessary to examine whether or how the allocation of housework changes when cohabitators marry, have children or form a second union. Longitudinal data production is highly problematic, and especially in this case, where respondents have to fill detailed diaries. A second limitation of this study is that it lacks information on respondents' attitudes and gender values. Time use surveys do not include this information, at least not in the harmonised version, and these variables may play an important role both in union formation and in the division of domestic work.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Partnership status by country

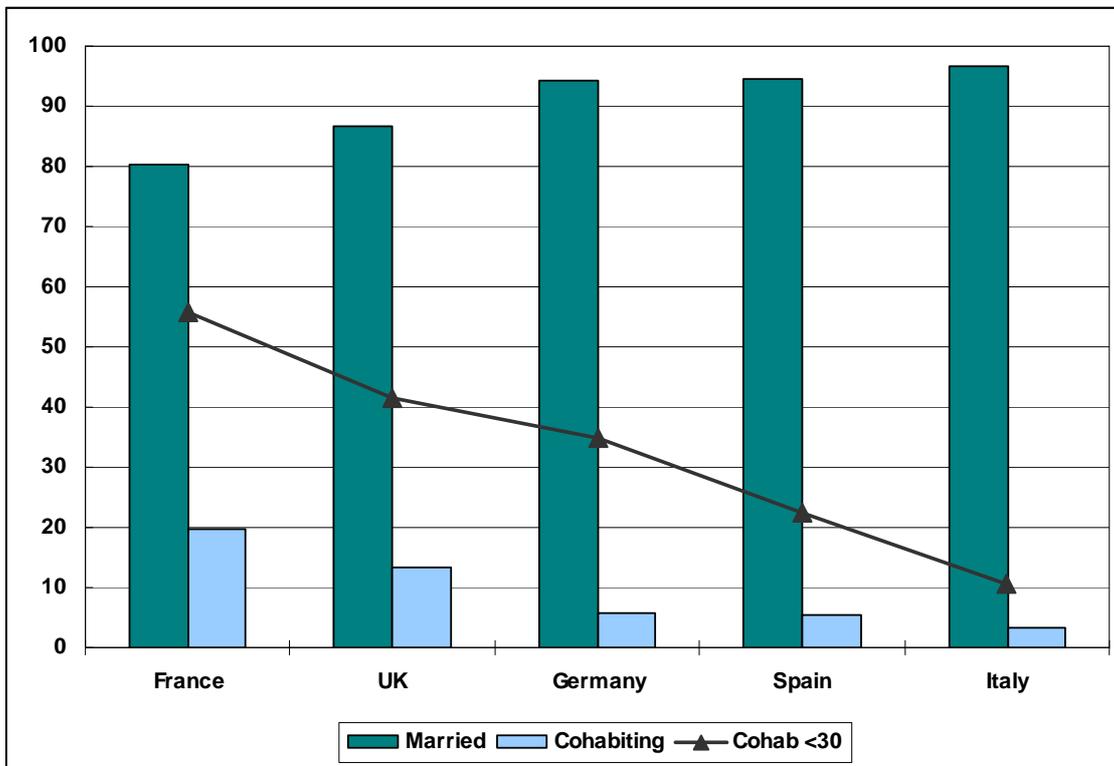


Figure 2. Percentage contribution to specific tasks, by sex, task and country.

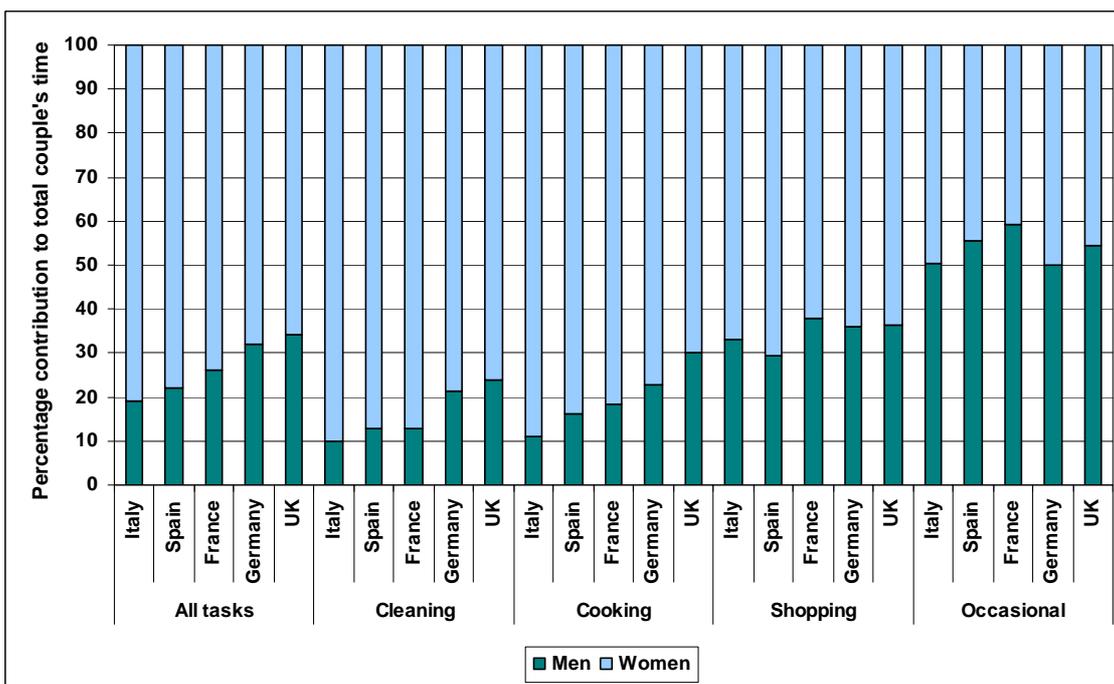


Table 1. Characteristics of the sample and division of domestic work, by sex and partnership

	Married		Cohabiting		Total	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Age	46,24	43,6	36,25	34,2	45,51	42,92
Education						
Primary	19,36	20,95	14,29	15,73	18,99	20,57
Secondary	58,58	60,53	54,32	50,81	58,27	59,83
College	21,6	18,1	30,59	32,7	22,26	19,15
Activity						
Full time	68,31	31,47	72,45	49,32	68,61	32,75
Part time	1,57	13,05	2,67	13,94	1,65	13,11
Unknown hours	11,89	8,07	10,37	6,15	11,78	7,94
Inactive	18,23	47,41	14,5	30,59	17,96	46,2
Children	54,25		43,12		51,95	
Domestic work						
Total time						
Housework	97,62	298,54	92,84	204,59	97,27	291,78
Cleaning	17,38	118,83	18,77	77,45	17,48	115,85
Cooking	20,28	117,67	24,13	78,76	20,56	114,87
Shopping	20,18	35,52	21,42	30,42	20,28	35,15
Occasional	39,77	26,51	28,5	17,94	39,94	25,89
Proportion						
Housework	23,06	76,13	29,97	70,03	23,56	76,44
Cleaning	12,93	87,16	20,35	79,65	13,43	86,57
Cooking	15,85	84,44	25,32	74,68	16,52	83,48
Shopping	32,62	67,41	37,18	62,82	32,92	67,08
Occasional	53,39	46,91	52,62	47,38	53,34	46,66

Table 2. OLS regression results for the contribution to domestic work (men)⁺⁺

	Total		Cleaning		Cooking		Shopping		Occasional	
	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (mins.)								
Cohabitation	2.08 ***	6.43 *	3.46 ***	2.6 *	4.37 ***	4.04 ***	0.86	0.41	-9.98 **	-2.68
Country										
Spain	ref	ref								
Germany	3.54 ***	36.04 ***	7.34 ***	8.19 ***	5.3 ***	6.76 ***	6.06 ***	1.6 ***	-8.05 ***	-0.61
France	1.53 ***	10.6 ***	-2.25 ***	-4.13 ***	-0.2	0.34	3.8 ***	0.88 *	2.03	4.07 ***
UK	4.3 ***	39.88 ***	8.72 ***	10.53 ***	11.31 ***	14.28 ***	2.38 *	0.71	-6.4 ***	1.22
Italy	-2.12 ***	-10.19 ***	-2.67 ***	-4.45 ***	-4.78 ***	-6.04 ***	2.48 ***	2.32 ***	-7.3 ***	2.03 ***
Interactions										
Coh*Spain	ref	ref								
Coh*Germany	1.85	-0.82	0.99	-3.01	-2.65	-9.11 ***	1.67	3.04	14.54 **	4.47
Coh*France	-0.71	-0.28	0.59	2.88	-0.27	-1.05	5.01	1.91	9.35 *	-2.17
Coh*Uk	-0.73	-20.49 ***	-4.6 ***	-8.99 ***	-7.89 ***	-11.85 ***	-4.61	-2.97	12.86 **	5
Coh*Italy	-0.79	2.16	-1.16	2.85	-2.82	-2.07	-7.32 **	0.12	1.08	0.13
R^2	0.6	0.57	0.12	0.27	0.16	0.26	0.12	0.65	0.08	0.77

* $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$

⁺⁺The model controls for educational attainment, employment status, age and age squared, number of children, age of youngest children, partner's characteristics (education and employment), day of the week (weekend or weekday) and total load of housework in the household.

Table 3. OLS regression results for the contribution to domestic work (women)⁺⁺

	Total		Cleaning		Cooking		Shopping		Occasional	
	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (mins.)								
Cohabitation	-3.25 ***	-8,62 **	-3.94 ***	-2.52	-5.17 ***	-4.92 ***	-1.92	-1.04	8.12 **	1.23
Country										
Spain	ref	ref								
Germany	-7.02 ***	-34,85 ***	-6.72 ***	-7.48 ***	-4.98 ***	-6.3 ***	-6.2 ***	-1.67 ***	7.78 ***	0.97
France	-0.98	-11,22 ***	2.24 ***	4.22 ***	-0.04	0.12	-4.22 ***	-1.05 *	-3,00	-4.49 ***
UK	-7.61 ***	-39,1 ***	-9.06 ***	-11 ***	-11.32 ***	-14.1 ***	-2.41 *	-0.56	6.02 ***	-0.74
Italy	0.81 ***	10,61 ***	2.77 ***	4.6 ***	4.55 ***	5.91 ***	-2.69 ***	-2.21	6.75 ***	-1.99 ***
Interactions										
Coh*Spain	ref	ref								
Coh*Germany	1.21	5,03	-0.74	2.94	2.88	8.27 ***	0.06	-0.92	-13.34 **	-4.67
Coh*France	0.64	3,56	-0.05	-2.74	1.07	1.72	-3.97	-1.12	-6.76	4.11
Coh*Uk	4.1 **	20,71 ***	5.61 ***	9.8 ***	7.08 ***	11.95 ***	5.67	4 **	-9.4 *	-4.39
Coh*Italy	5.2 ***	1,63	1.94	-2.34	3.71 **	2.92	7.82 **	0.59	1.83	0.85
R²	0.27	0,76	0.12	0.85	0.15	0.84	0.12	0.73	0.08	0.54

* $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$

⁺⁺The model controls for educational attainment, employment status, age and age squared, number of children, age of youngest children, partner's characteristics (education and employment), day of the week (weekend or weekday) and total load of housework in the household.

Table 4. OLS regression results for cohabitation in country-specific models, by sex⁺⁺

	Men		Women	
	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (mins.)	Model 1 (%)	Model 2 (mins.)
Spain	2.19 ***	0.49	-2.00 ***	-2.44
Germany	2.05	1.09	0.69	-0.95
France	2.7 ***	12.92 ***	-2.48 ***	-11.09 ***
UK	0.62	-2.97	0.66	1.96
Italy	2.06 ***	8.27 *	0.1	-6.29

* $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$

⁺⁺The model controls for educational attainment, employment status, age and age squared, number of children, age of youngest children, partner's characteristics (education and employment), day of the week (weekend or weekday) and total load of housework in the household.

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