

Life course, gender and participation in voluntary organizations in Italy

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Abstract This article investigates the gender differences in participation in voluntary organizations across the life course in Italy. It shows that three forms of engagement in voluntary organizations – donating money, attending meetings and doing unpaid work – may depend on some stages of the life course – leaving the parental home, forming a union and becoming a parent – as it is plausible that they may change personal resources, and pose constraints or provide opportunities for involvement. Using the household survey “ISTAT Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of daily life”, the article finds that while leaving the parental home is positively associated with both men’s and women’s involvement, forming a union and being a parent is detrimental for women’s involvement and not for men’s. This pattern indicates that gender roles may constrain more women’s than men’s probability of participation in voluntary organizations.

Key words: voluntary organizations; life course; life transitions; gender differences; Italy.

Introduction

How are the life cycle transitions associated with men's and women's involvement in voluntary organizations in Italy? The literature has extensively shown that age has a strong link with associational involvement (Wilson 2000, 2012). However, it can be an imprecise measure of how the life cycle affects participation in such organizations. Indeed, age does not allow studying how transitions occurring during the life course are related to this form of engagement (see Settersten and Mayer 1997). This article, instead of looking at age, looks at how life stages that are often linked with some events that individuals experience across the life cycle (see Marini 1984; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011) – leaving the parental home, forming a union and parenthood – as they deeply affect different domains, and the resources for engagement, such as time availability, income, job status, social networks, preferences, and so on (Musick and Wilson 2008). Furthermore, life events have different consequences for men and women. Scholars have demonstrated that women are more committed, for instance, in housework, childcare, and other household-related responsibilities than men (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002; Dotti Sani 2014). They also tend to exit the labor market when becoming mothers, losing their earning capacity (Solera 2009). Indeed, it is argued that the division of labor within the household reduces women's involvement in voluntary organizations, as the effects of life transitions on engagement are gender specific (Rotolo 2000; Nesbit 2012; Lancee and Radl 2014). Despite that, a few studies have investigated how family relations can hinder women's voluntary participation more than men's (see Wilson 2000). Studying the difference in participation between men and women is very relevant as “it could have significant implications not only for the overall supply of volunteers but also for women's opportunities to get involved in the wider society [...] civic engagement can be a privilege as well as a responsibility. Volunteering becomes a privilege when participants benefit from it in terms of human interaction, personal growth, and life enrichment”

(Taniguchi 2006, p. 84). In fact, participation in voluntary associations has beneficial effects on the individual's social capital, interpersonal trust, personal relations, self-empowerment, political participation, physical and mental health, and socioeconomic status (Musick and Wilson 2008).

This article contributes to the literature by looking at the gender differences in the association between life cycle transitions and involvement in voluntary organizations, by using a constraints-resources approach (Taniguchi 2012). Leaving the parental home increases independence and extends men's and women's social networks. Forming a union and becoming a parent could limit or favor differently men's and women's opportunities for engagement. So far, most of the empirical evidence on life cycle transitions and voluntary participation generally comes from the US. This could limit our understanding of the dynamics of participation in voluntary organizations, as country specific characteristics may affect this relationship (see Curtis et al. 1992). Therefore, this article, by using a harmonization of the "ISTAT Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of daily life", explores how life transitions are associated with men's and women's participation in voluntary organizations in Italy. This country has often been described as a case of weak "civism" (Almond and Verba 1963), with low levels of associationism, volunteerism and social capital (Curtis et al. 1992; Putnam 1993; Dekker and Van den Broek 1998; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001). In Italy, contrarily to what has been found in other countries (Wilson 2000; Piper and Schnepf 2008; Mitani 2014), women are less likely to be involved in voluntary organizations (La Valle 2006; ISTAT 2014), and their involvement decreases with age (ISTAT 2013). Thus, this pattern could be related to the different life cycle phases women go through, which may act as constraints for involvement. Indeed, Italy is an unequal society (EIGE 2010; Kan et al. 2011), where women are mostly out of the public sphere compared to other European countries (Sundström 2013), and have low levels of labor force participation rate compared to the European average (OECD 2011), given the rigidity of the labor market (Solera

2009). The welfare state, classified as “conservative”, provides limited services for families with young children (Ferrera 1996). Moreover, this country shows high levels of “familism” (Reher 1998), where traditional values on gender roles and responsibilities in the household are deeply rooted (Mencarini and Tanturri 2004; Dotti Sani 2012).

Therefore, a closer look at Italy could provide insights to understand whether life cycle transitions, in a “gendered” context, limit participation in voluntary associations, and what the possible consequences might be. In the remainder of this article, we review the literature on life course and voluntary participation, and we set up the hypotheses. Then, we illustrate data, measures and method used. Eventually, we present the results and conclude.

Life course transitions and participation in voluntary organizations

It is widely acknowledged that involvement in voluntary organizations increases as individuals grow up, reaching its peak around the midlife (Musick and Wilson 2008; Wilson 2012). Becoming adult means acquiring resources, skills, preferences, cultural and human capital, and values that stimulate participation in voluntary associations (Wilson and Musick 1997). Engagement increases during the life cycle as individuals assume adult roles, which enlarge their stake in the community (see Flanagan and Levine 2010). Furthermore, biographical transitions – leaving the parental home, forming a union and becoming a parent – also modify the resources that are factors for engagement (Rotolo 2000; Wilson 2000; Oesterle et al. 2004; Taniguchi 2012; Lancee and Radl 2014). Thus, the different stages an individual is likely to go through during the life course may be linked to the likelihood of engaging in voluntary organizations.

Leaving the parental home. Moving out of the parental home is a crucial step towards becoming an adult (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011). After this transition, the individual takes on new responsibilities, changes priorities, is more autonomous, has different resources and social

networks, which can act as stimuli for voluntary engagement. For instance, when an individual leaves the parental home the amount of time spent in work increases, as well as time spent in housework, while free time decreases (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002). Leaving the parental home also affects economic resources (Aassve et al. 2007). Moreover, it brings an increased level of stability, which corresponds to a stronger integration into the community (Flanagan and Levine 2010). Thus, leaving the parental home can be an opportunity for engagement through new social networks and the workplace (Musick and Wilson 2008).

Scholars have indeed investigated the effect of life cycle on voluntary participation, but a few have focused on the transition of leaving the parental home. A study on Belgium finds that those living with their parents do not show different levels of engagement in voluntary associations (Hooghe 2003). Conversely, a study on the Netherlands shows that when people move out of the parental home they tend to increase the time spent in informal voluntary participation, but not in formal voluntary participation (Van Ingen 2008).

Partnership. The following transition is forming a union. This step is relevant for associational involvement as it changes the way individuals look at social matters, binds individuals in the community, modifies the availability of resources and increases private responsibilities (Knoke and Thomson 1977; Stoker and Jennings 1995; Oesterle et al. 2004). On the one hand, marital status has been found to be associated with engagement in community-oriented voluntary associations (Janoski and Wilson 1995) and with general voluntary involvement (Sundeen 1990). On the other hand, scholars have found a negative effect of partnership on voluntary engagement. It has been shown that married citizens without children are less involved than singles. This is due to the conflict between family and non-family responsibilities and to the different salience the latter have when forming a union (Knoke and Thomson 1977). Moreover, partnership is found to be relevant to understand the intensity of

involvement. Singles are more likely to get involved in a larger number of voluntary organizations than the married (Hooghe 2003). Other studies, however, show that marital status does not affect involvement in voluntary organizations (Sundeen 1990; Oesterle et al. 2004).

Another stream of the literature argues, instead, that to grasp the relevance of partnership for voluntary engagement it is fundamental to look at men and women separately. It has been shown that partnered women are more likely to engage in voluntary organizations in Switzerland (Voorpostel and Coffeè 2012). Instead, it is found that marriage has a positive effect on joining and a negative effect on leaving voluntary organizations for men, while it has no effect for women in the US (Rotolo 2000). Another study shows that the transition into marriage has a negative effect on women's involvement in the US (Nesbit 2012). Women, it is argued, care more about the "private life", while men about the "public life" (Phillips 1991). Women, and women in partnership, in fact, spend more time in household chores than men (Gupta 1999; Dotti Sani 2014), even in absence of children (Coltrane 2000), because women are socialized to do so, and have more traditional values and preferences, or because there is a specialization within the household (Becker 1981; West and Zimmerman 1987; Hakim 2000).

Parenthood. Becoming a parent deeply influences the individual's preferences and resources (Elder and Greene 2012). Parents have different concerns compared to non-parents: they care about schools, public services, the neighborhood, and other issues. They have wider social networks, which are created through their children, and are more embedded in the community. Parenthood, however, does not always favor voluntary participation. In fact, parenthood has an impact on the individuals' lifestyle and resources: it reduces time availability, tightens the household finances, increases responsibilities, and weakens social relationships (Gallagher and Gerstel 2001; Nomagouchi and Milkie 2003; Oesterle et al. 2004). The empirical findings draw different conclusions about the effects of parenthood on engagement in voluntary

organizations. Children in the household have been found fostering associational involvement in a number of studies in the US (Knoke and Thomson 1977; Sundeen 1990; Janoski and Wilson 1995; Wilson and Musick 1997). The effect of parenthood on voluntary participation is, though, dependent on the age of children. The general argument is that pre-schoolers are much more in need of time and attention, which may isolate parents from the public sphere. On the contrary, school aged children and teenagers provide more opportunities for parents to be involved in voluntary associations (Sundeen 1990; Smith 1994; Rotolo 2000; Oesterle et al. 2004; Nesbit 2012).

Nevertheless, other studies show that women's voluntary involvement is affected by childbearing more than men's, and that the effect on women is more pronounced when children are under school age, while less pronounced when children go to school in the US (Sundeen 1990; Wilson and Musick 1997; Rotolo 2000) and in Switzerland (Voorpostel and Coffè 2012). Having children at home, especially pre-school aged children, has negative consequences for women's resources (Budig and England 2001; Van der Lippe et al. 2011), while positive for men's (Koslowski 2011; Gibb et al. 2014). In fact, when small children are present in the household women tend to temporarily exit the labor market or work less (Blossfeld and Drobnic 2011), and increase more than men housework and childcare (Bianchi et al. 2000).

Hypotheses on the Italian case

The previous section reviewed the empirical findings about life cycle stages and participation in voluntary organizations. No empirical evidence on this topic is available for Italy. Despite that, an examination of the effects of life transitions on some resources in this context will allow drawing hypothesis on how leaving the parental house, forming a union and being a parent are associated with men's and women' participation in voluntary organizations.

In Italy, when young adults leave the parental house labor market participation increases relevantly. Time spent in housework and unpaid work increases too, though much less. On the contrary, time in leisure declines after an individual has left the parental home. The implications of home leaving in terms of time allocation and resources may be different for men and women. Nevertheless, it has been found that leaving the parental house does not have different consequences for men and women on participation in the labor market, housework or leisure (Anxo et al. 2011; Romano et al. 2012). Therefore, it appears that this stage has a negative impact on resources. At the same time, it is known that it enlarges the chances for voluntary engagement, as the young adults are more independent and enter in contact with new environments (see Flanagan et al. 2012). Being part of the workforce as well could extend the possibilities of involvement, as the working environment can serve as a motivational stimulus (Wilson 2012). Accordingly, having left the parental household is expected to be associated positively with participation in voluntary organizations, independently of gender (Hypothesis 1).

Forming a union, in Italy, deeply modifies the allocation of time. Housework is very low when individuals live alone or with their parents, and increases when individuals are in a relationship, particularly among women (Romano et al. 2012). Labor market participation increases as the life course goes on, however slightly differently for men and women (Solera 2009; Anxo et al. 2011). In fact, men tend to work more when forming a couple, while women do not. A higher involvement in the workforce, for men, could exert a positive effect on participation in civic activities, while a lower involvement in the workforce could have a weaker effect for women (Schlozman et al. 1999). The Italian case is particularly relevant to understand the differences between men and women. Italian women spend much more time than men doing household-related activities no matter what is their employment situation, income or education level (Dotti Sani 2012). Italian women also do more housework compared to European women,

while Italian men do less housework compared to European counterparts (Aliaga 2006). This has been attributed to a mix of institutional constraints, related to the welfare state and labor market, and traditional norms of gender-appropriate behavior (Anxo et al. 2011). Therefore, being in a partnership is expected to be associated more negatively with women's participation in voluntary organizations than with men's participation in voluntary organizations (Hypothesis 2).

Similar dynamics can be found for parenthood. The time budget changes when children are present in the household. It has been shown that childcare increases for both parents, while spare time and leisure decrease (Craig and Mullan 2010; Dotti Sani 2012). Childbearing appears to be a constraint when children are small. As children grow and go to school, both partners tend to reduce time spent in housework and childcare (Romano et al. 2012). The presence of children, however, mainly affects women, as in a Mediterranean welfare state childcare is not provided by the state, while is provided by the family and done at home (Ferrera 1996; Garcia-Mainar et al. 2011). Women tend to work less and do more childcare and housework when children are small, while work more and do less childcare and housework when children are school aged and older (Anxo et al. 2011; Dotti Sani 2012; Romano et al. 2012). Therefore, being a parent is expected to be associated more negatively with women's participation in voluntary organizations than with men's participation in voluntary organizations. The negative association of parenthood, for both men and women, is stronger when children are pre-school aged, while weaker when they are school aged and older (Hypothesis 3).

Data, measures and method

Data

The hypotheses are tested using the "ISTAT Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of Daily Life". Every year since 1993, the Italian Institute of Statistics collects data on a series of topics, such as

health, family, housing, services, and others, including participation in voluntary organizations, sampling about nineteen thousands households and their members. The survey is not specifically designed to investigate participation in voluntary organizations, as some variables, which could be confounding factors, such as motivations or preferences, are not available. The survey, however, contains detailed information on the composition of the household, allowing reconstructing life course transitions, and includes other relevant control variables, such as human, cultural or social capital (see Wilson 2012). Thus, a harmonization of the available surveys yields to a pooled cross-sectional dataset with a sample size of 601617, in which 293692 are men and 307925 are women.¹

Dependent variables

This article focuses on participation in voluntary organizations. Therefore, it studies “formal” voluntary participation, as opposed to “informal” voluntary activity, which regards forms of commitment in the private sphere out of organizations, i.e. helping friends, neighbors or relatives (Musick and Wilson 2008). We use three items measuring three forms of involvement: whether the respondent has, in the previous 12 months, “donated money” to, “attended meetings” of, and “done unpaid work” for voluntary organizations. Often survey items do not allow measuring whether an individual is a simple member or if is an active member (Hooghe 2003). Indeed, the three items measure different levels of involvement, and allow distinguishing between passive and active individuals. Money contributions are a form of “checkbook” participation, which does not imply active roles (Putnam 2000). Contrarily, the other two items provide an indication about the level of commitment in voluntary organizations (see Musick and Wilson 2008).

¹ Respondents are selected between 18 and 80 years old.

Life course transitions

The hypotheses hold that biographical transitions are associated with the likelihood of involvement in voluntary organizations. Therefore, a fundamental task is to find a way to classify respondents according to the life stages they are in. As a matter of fact, the dataset employed is cross-sectional, and it does not allow following respondents across life transitions, as longitudinal datasets would (see Rotolo 2000; Oesterle et al. 2004). A possible strategy to overcome the unavailability of longitudinal data is using a classification that would allow measuring a “typical” sequence of transitions occurring during life (Marini 1984). To do so, we follow previous studies that have employed this strategy (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002; Van Ingen 2008; Anxo et al. 2011; Lancee and Radl 2014). We build a categorical variable classifying respondents according to the following individual characteristics: still living or not with the parents, having a partner and cohabiting, presence of children at home, age, age of partner, and age of children. The classification is summarized below:

1. being single and aged between 18 and 35, living with parents, not having children at home (Single, with parents);
2. being single and aged between 18 and 35, living on their own, not having children at home (Single, on their own);
3. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married) in which the partners are aged between 18 and 45, not having children at home (Couple, no children);
4. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married), with the youngest child aged 0 to 5 (pre-school age) at home (Couple, with pre-school children);
5. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married), with the youngest child aged 6 to 13 (school age) at home (Couple, with school children);

6. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married), with the youngest child aged 14 to 25 at home (Couple, with older children);
7. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married) in which both partners are between 46 and 59, with no children at home (Empty nest);
8. being in a partnership (living with a partner or being married) in which both partners are 60 or older, with no children at home (Older couple);
9. being single and 60 or older, with no children at home (Older single).

The classification, despite applied to a cross-sectional dataset, would allow testing the association between typical steps of the life cycle and engagement in voluntary organizations. For the matter of the article, we will focus on the first six stages, as later life transitions are not of our primary interest. It should be clear that this classification is an analytical tool. Given the nature of the data, this classification does not allow drawing any causal statement, but rather it allows understanding how respondents in different stages, have different probabilities of being involved in voluntary organizations. The classification assumes that the respondents go through a “typical” life course (Marini 1984). It is of course possible that the sequence of transitions follows a different order, given the “de-standardization” of the life cycle (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011). Furthermore, the classification does not include other possible statuses, such as being a single parent. Indeed, this strategy can be very fruitful when truly longitudinal data are not available, as it allows estimating the probability of engagement in voluntary organizations, for men and women, who experience some life cycle transitions. Table 1 reports the classification for the overall, the men’s and the women’s samples.

[Table 1 here]

Control variables

To control for compositional effects, we include in the models a number of variables. First of all, we control for some individual resources that are argued to be associated with involvement in organizations, which are part of an individual's "human capital" (Smith 1994; Wilson and Musick 1997; Wilson 2000). We include education attainment in categories ("Primary school or lower", as reference, "Middle school", "High school", "University or higher"); employment status in categories ("Employed", as reference, "Not employed", "Retired", "Student");² and satisfaction with personal resources ("Not satisfied", as reference, "Satisfied").³ It is argued, in fact, that citizens with higher levels of education, who are employed, and who have higher income, are more likely to be involved in voluntary organizations (Putnam 2000; Musick and Wilson 2008; Lo Presti 2013; Gesthuizen and Scheepers 2012). Then, we use a measure of social integration gauging the extent to which the respondent meets with friends ("Don't have or Never", as reference, "Sometimes a year", "Sometimes a month", "Sometimes a week", "Once a week", "Every day"). It is argued that citizens embedded in dense social networks, which share contact with others, are more likely to involve in voluntary organizations, as these individuals have higher social capital (Wilson and Musick 1997; Paik and Navarre-Jackson 2011). We include an indicator of church attendance in categories ("Never", as reference, "Sometimes a year", "Sometimes a month", "Sometimes a week", "Once a week", "Every day"). Those who more

² The category of the "Not employed" category includes unemployed, homemakers, and unable respondents. In previous analyses the variable included an additional category for homemakers. Since the homemakers category in the men's sample was very small and that the estimates are were not different from those presented here, we preferred to use a more parsimonious solution.

³ Unfortunately, the survey does not include information on neither household nor personal income, thus this variable is used as a proxy of income.

often go to church are more likely to give contributions and involve in voluntary organizations, even in those which are not religious-oriented (Wuthnow 1995; Musick and Wilson 2008; Perks and Haan 2011; Taniguchi and Thomas 2011). Then, we include a proxy of residential stability, i.e. an indicator measuring whether in the last 12 months the respondent has moved into a new house (“No”, as reference, “Yes”). The literature highlights that residing in the same community helps integration and, hence, participation in voluntary organizations (Hooghe 2003; Rotolo et al. 2010). Eventually, we include the area of residence in categories (“North-west”, as reference, “North-east”, “Centre”, “South”, “Islands”).⁴ The literature on the Italian case has shown that deep differences exist across areas in participation in voluntary organizations, in particular between northern and southern ones (Putnam 1993; La Valle 2006; ISTAT 2013, 2014). Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variable for the overall, the men’s and the women’s samples.

[Table 2 here]

Model

As seen, the harmonization of the ISTAT “Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of Daily Life” produces a dataset made of repeated cross-sectional surveys. When dealing with such data it is convenient to treat respondents as simultaneously nested in survey-years and birth cohorts (see

⁴ The NUTS1 classification is followed. North-west includes: Piemonte, Valle d’Aosta, Liguria, Lombardia; Northeast includes: Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna; Centre includes: Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio; South includes: Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria; Islands includes: Sicilia and Sardegna.

Glenn 2005). This strategy allows accounting for the effects of time and birth cohorts on voluntary participation, as several scholars have demonstrated that associational involvement varies across years and it often depends on the period of socialization (Putnam 2000; Jennings and Stoker 2004; Rotolo and Wilson 2004; Van Ingen 2008). Furthermore, it has been argued that the different life transitions may be affected by both time and birth cohorts as well, in particular in Italy (see Barbagli et al. 2003; Billari 2004; Mazzucco et al. 2006).

A model that has been proposed to simultaneously account for time and cohorts effects, along with individual characteristics, is a cross-nested mixed model (Rasbash and Browne 2008), in the form of a Hierarchical-Age-Period-Cohort model (Yang and Land 2008). For the purpose of this article, the life cycle stages variable is included instead of age.⁵ This strategy allows using all the surveys held, increasing the sample size relevantly, accounting for time and cohorts heterogeneity, and for the individual characteristics. Time and cohorts are treated as independent random-effects, while life cycle stages and other individual factors are treated as fixed-effects. Since the dependent variables are dichotomous, we use a cross-nested logistic mixed model (see Gelman and Hill 2006), run for men and women separately. The model is specified as follows:

$$y_i \sim \text{Bernoulli}(\pi_i) \tag{1}$$

$$\pi_i = \text{logit}^{-1}(\mu + \beta\mathbf{X} + \alpha_t + \delta_c) \tag{2}$$

In (1) y_i indicates a generic dependent variable, and i indicates the N respondents. The dependent variable follows a Bernoulli distribution, where π_i is the probability of success. The second equation (2) links the probability of success to the linear predictor, which is a linear

⁵ Doing so we do not encounter the “identification problem”, stemming from the dependence between age, cohorts and periods (see Glenn, 2005). Moreover, previous analyses showed that including age and its square would lead to multicollinearity.

combination of the intercept μ , the model matrix \mathbf{X} and the vector of coefficients $\boldsymbol{\beta}$. Furthermore, the linear predictor includes the year random-effects, α_t , and the cohort random-effects, δ_c , with variances σ_t^2 and σ_c^2 , where t and c indicate, respectively, the years ($t = 1, \dots, 19$) and the cohorts ($c = 1, \dots, 7$).⁶

Findings

Table 3 reports the estimates of the models predicting the probability of involvement in voluntary organizations in the men's and women's samples, including no controls. The unconditional models indicate that men are more likely to donate money, to attend meetings and to do unpaid work, even accounting for time and cohort heterogeneity. Men have a probability of donating, attending meetings and doing unpaid work of, respectively, 0.171, 0.074 and 0.094, while women of 0.154, 0.064, and 0.081.

[Table 3 here]

These preliminary findings show that women are less likely than men to donate, attend meetings or do unpaid work. This is a peculiar characteristic of the Italian case, as in many instances it has been found that women are more involved than men in voluntary organizations (Musick and Wilson 2008; Piper and Schnepf 2008; Wilson 2012; Mitani 2014). Nevertheless, it appears that as women in Italy are less involved in voluntary associations, they may have more constraints. For instance, they may have less spare time or economic resources to engage (Wilson

⁶ The birth cohorts are: “ ≤ 1930 ”, “1931 – 1940”, “1941 – 1950”, “1951 – 1950”, “1951 – 1960”, “1961 – 1970”, “1971 – 1980”, “ > 1980 ”.

2000), are more committed in the household (Taniguchi 2006), or are more involved in informal volunteering (Taniguchi 2012; Helms and McKenzie 2014). Nevertheless, does men's and women's involvement change among across the life course?

The models in Table 4 include the life cycle stages and the control variables. The different life stages are generally associated with the three forms of involvement. As men go through a "typical" life course, they donate money more likely compared to when they are single and living with their parents. Instead, the probability of attending meetings increases only when men live on their own, and when they have school aged and older children. Doing unpaid work is more likely when men live on their own, when they are in a couple, and when they have school aged and older children. The association between engagement and life cycle stages shows different patterns for women. Leaving the parental home, forming a union, and being a parent are positively associated with money contributions. If we look at more demanding forms of involvement, however, the picture changes. When women are in a partnership, are mothers of pre-school, school aged and older children the probability of attending meetings or doing unpaid work is lower compared to being single and living with parents. In later life men are not less nor more likely to attend meetings and to do unpaid work, while more likely to donate money. Women, instead, as the life cycle concludes tend to more likely donate money, but less likely to get involved in the other two forms.

[Table 4 here]

To provide a more detailed assessment of such relationships, Figure 1 plots the marginal effects of the life cycle transitions on the probability of donating money, attending meetings and

doing unpaid work.⁷ The life cycle transitions are positively associated, for both men and women, to money contributions. However, the marginal effects are stronger for men than for women, when being in a union, and parent of pre-school, school and older children. This means that the different life cycle stages provide different opportunities for donating among men and women. It could be possible that men have larger economic resources. The central panel of Figure 1 shows that men mostly do not change their probability of attending meetings when they are in different phases of the life cycle, while women do. When women are in a union, and are mothers of small and older children, the probability of attending meetings decreases, compared to being single and living with the parents. The rightmost panel, eventually, illustrates a similar pattern. Women's probabilities of doing unpaid work change as the different stages of the life cycle go on, while men's probabilities do not. In particular, women are less likely to do unpaid work when they are in a relationship, and when they are mothers.

These findings seem to confirm our expectations, yet with some caveats. Women seem to be "affected" more than men by the different the life cycle stages. In particular, being a partner and/or a mother means a reduction in the probability of attending meetings or doing unpaid work. Men, on the contrary, do not change their involvement. This evidence may indicate that women, during the life cycle, experience a modification of resources, which are factors of involvement in voluntary organizations. As seen, in Italy in particular, when women enter in a partnership, and even more so when they are mothers, the amount of domestic housework and care increases relevantly, while it does not for men. Furthermore, women tend to leave the labor market in Italy

⁷ Marginal effects are the difference in probability between each category and the reference (Long 1997), and are computed at the mean of the covariates. The confidence intervals are obtained using simulation (Gelman and Hill 2006).

when children are small, given the weak welfare state (Solera 2009). Indeed, it is well known that time budget and the working environment are precious resources to get involved in voluntary organizations. In Italy, however, only women's resources seem to be affected during the stages of the life cycle and this could explain the variation in the likelihood of involvement. An interesting point to remark is the fact that women who are mothers of older children are still less likely to involve in voluntary organizations, while men are more likely. Contrarily to our expectations, the probability of being involved does not change relevantly for women when children are school aged or older. The first form of engagement, donating money, discriminates less between men and women. Both groups do not contribute less likely as they go through the phases of the life cycle. The lack of difference between men and women, despite the marginal effects for women are significantly smaller, may mean that the resources useful for doing this activity, are less affected by biographical transitions. In fact, donations require motivation and, of course, economic resources, but not time. Moreover, it might be possible that motivated individuals, who would engage in other, yet more demanding, forms of participation if they had time, choose to donate money as a "substitutive" form of involvement. Indeed, the probability for men and women to donate money is the highest among the forms of participation, indicating that there exists a hierarchy between the three forms.

[Figure 1 here]

Figure 1, despite very clear, does not show the entire picture. In fact, it does not indicate what are the differences in probability between each stage of the life course. Instead, marginal effects only tell the differences in probability with the reference category. Therefore, Figure 2 plots the differences in probability of donating money, attending meetings and doing unpaid work

between each transition for men and women. Thus, this figure allows looking at how the different transitions “change” the probability of being involved compared to the previous transition, and provides a more “dynamic” look at the effects of the life cycle.⁸ We can see that the probability of donating money when being in couple with no children compared to being single living on their own increases significantly for men but not for women. This probability does not change for both men and women when the respondents have pre-school children compared to the previous status. However, when children are school aged women tend to more likely donate compared to when children are pre-school aged, while men do not. The following step seems not to be relevant. The central panel shows a different story. The probability of attending meetings decreases for women, less for men, when they are in a couple without children compared when they are living on their own. Women’s probability further decreases when pre-school aged children are present in the household, compared to when no children were present, while men’s do not change. Instead, when children are in school, the probability of attending meetings tend to increase with respect to when children are pre-school aged, for both men and women. The probability does not change relevantly when children are older. The last panel presents almost identical patterns to the previous.

[Figure 2 here]

The plot indicates that some life transitions are more important than others to understand how involvement changes over the life course among men and women. Forming a union and

⁸ The difference between the first the statuses, being single living with parents and being living on their own, is a marginal effect. See footnote no. 7 on the estimation method.

being parent of small children is more detrimental for women than for men, if more demanding forms are considered. This could be due to the fact that, in Italy, the burden of childcare and housework is on women's shoulders (Anxo et al. 2011; Dotti Sani 2012). Indeed, the absence policies may explain the women's higher commitment in housework and care. Only a small percentage of small children can access public childcare. The Italian labor market, being quite rigid and with a small percentage of part-time jobs, does not allow women to easily balance housework and care with employment (Del Boca et al. 2008; Naldini and Saraceno 2011). Furthermore, small children are a strain for women, as men use very rarely paternal leave (Solera 2009). When children attend school, the probability of attending meetings or doing unpaid work increases for both men and women. When children in the household are older, the amount of housework and care diminish relevantly in Italy (Romano et al. 2012), and this could explain the higher likelihood of involvement. Moreover, being a parent of older children provides more opportunities for engagement in voluntary organizations. In fact, when children attend school social ties strengthen, favoring participation (Rotolo 2000; Taniguchi 2006). The figure also shows that money contributions do not vary substantially across the life cycle and between men and women. The non-demanding nature of this type of involvement, i.e. passive, may require economic resources, not time. In fact, the probability of donating money increases when men and women have left the parental home, a step also indicating independence and a new availability of economic resources, while it does not change when they form a union or become parents.

As far as the control variables are concerned, Table 4 shows that they mostly confirm the expectations drawn by the literature. The higher educated have higher probabilities to donate money, attend meeting or do unpaid work. Those who are on the margins of society, i.e. the not employed or retired, are less likely to get involved in voluntary associations, while students are more. The frequency of church attendance and meeting with friends has also a positive

association with the three dependent variables, as well as satisfaction with resources. Differently to what anticipated, having recently moved into a new house has a positive association with the dependent variables. Eventually, living in the Center, South and in the Islands is negatively associated with the dependent variables.

Summary and conclusion

Rephrasing Wilson's words, the study of voluntary engagement has often treated the household as a unit of analysis, but it has rarely looked at how family relations, and hence life transitions, change it (Wilson 2000, p. 225). In this article we showed that the steps of the life course are associated with the probability of involvement in voluntary organizations in Italy. By taking a resources-constraints approach (Taniguchi 2012), we argued that life transitions modify the chances an individual has to engage in voluntary organizations. More importantly, the aim was to investigate the gender differences in voluntary participation across the life course in Italy. As largely indicated by the literature, gender roles, in a traditional society such as Italy, tend to constrain more women's than men's resources for involvement. In fact, women lose resources over the life course, especially when they become partners and mothers. Conversely, men's resources are mostly unaffected by life transitions.

We found that the probability of being involved in voluntary organizations is higher for those who have left the parental home, independently of gender. This is because individuals are likely to be more autonomous and enter in contact with new social networks that may stimulate engagement (Flanagan and Levine 2010). We also found, though, that women's probability of engaging in voluntary organizations decreases when forming a union compared to being single and living with the parents, while it is quite the same for men. However, the step from being single to being in a couple is negatively associated with voluntary participation for both members

of the couple, yet more for women. Being parents is also associated with the probability of being involved organizations. When small children are present in the household, women are much less likely than men to donate money, attend meetings or do unpaid work, compared to being single and living with parents. Women's probability of engagement also decreases when small children are present in the household with respect to when no children are present, while men's probability does not change. Eventually, we found that the probability of involvement when being parents of school aged and older children compared to being single and living with parents is lower for women, while higher for men. The probability, however, slightly increases for both partners compared to when small children are present in the household.

These findings highlight that biographical transitions mainly affect women's chances to engage in voluntary organizations, not men's. Thus, the Italian context tends to indirectly disfavor women's involvement, in particular when they are in a union and are mothers. Indeed, in Italy policies that might help to balance the commitments in different spheres, e.g. work and household, are almost absent (Del Boca et al. 2008; Naldini and Saraceno 2011; Dotti Sani 2012). In general, public childcare is weak, double earners households are not favored in terms of taxation, working hours are not that flexible for parents, parental leave is shorter compared to other European countries, and compensation lower (Solera 2009). Being difficult to balance the private and the public domains, given the absence of incentives to narrow the gaps within the households, most of the chores are carried out by women, who supposedly have to limit their involvement. It has been noted that women, in fact, tend to participate more than men in voluntary organizations when they are younger than 25, but less when they are older (ISTAT 2013), which exactly is when women tend to leave the parental household, form a union and become mothers (Mazzucco et al. 2006).

Studying the gender differences in voluntary participation allows understanding their

possible implications. If women are less involved in voluntary organizations, it means that the potential overall number of engaged citizens is lower. It also means that women do not take advantage of such participation, which is known to have positive consequences on the individual in terms of personal attainment and growth. It appears that a “gender gap” in voluntary participation exists and that women are disadvantaged compared to men, in particular when forming a union and becoming mothers. Thus, a question is how to enlarge the opportunities for participation in voluntary organizations for women. A possible answer could be enhancing the policies which would relief women’s burden in the household, creating incentives for engagement (see Taniguchi 2006). This study, analyzing the differences in participation among men and women in voluntary organizations, adds to the literature proposing a potential explanation to the understanding of the source of such differences, which are not simply due to an age effect, but likely to the transitions experienced during the life course and, hence, to the roles assumed across life. Another point relates to the importance of context. Studies about life course and voluntary engagement have been mostly based on data from the US. Indeed, this article showed that the contextual configuration might also play a role in defining the gender roles that, in turn, affect voluntary participation. Thus, this study contributes to the understanding of the cross-national patterns of voluntary involvement across the life course.

This article is not without limitations. The data used, being designed to collect information on households, do not contain indicators about predispositions, values, motivations or preferences for engagement (Wilson 2000). Second, the items measuring involvement in voluntary organizations do not allow differentiating between types of organizations, for instance religious or secular groups, which would provide interesting insights on the possible patterns of engagement (Musick and Wilson 2008). Third, cross-sectional data does not allow investigating the effect of transitions among the same individuals, as other studies have done (Rotolo 2000;

Nesbit 2012; Lancee and Radl 2014). However, in absence of longitudinal data, the strategy employed, i.e. building a “typical” sequence of transitions individuals may experience, provided a clear picture of how different life course events are associated with the probability of engagement. Another limitation relates to the fact that the effects of resources-constraints are only indirectly tested. Indeed, we assumed, as other studies have shown (see Anxo et al., 2011; Romano et al. 2012), that different life cycle stages correspond different resources or constraints. A better assessment of how leaving the parental home, forming a union and becoming a parent are associated with voluntary engagement should also include direct indicators of resources and constrains, if available. Of course, it could be possible that life stages do not only mean changed resources or constraints, they might also mean different motivations, feelings of obligation towards the community, interpersonal or relationship concerns, or social networks (see Omoto et al. 2000). Gender differences might also be due the contextual conditions where citizens live. In fact, it has been argued that extensive welfare state expenditures provide more resources enhancing the women’s involvement in voluntary organizations (see Van Ingen and Van der Meer 2011). Future research addressing such limitations can advance the understanding of the association between life cycle transitions and participation in voluntary organizations.

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Table 1: The distribution of the life cycle transitions

	All ^a	N	Men ^a	N	Women ^a	N
Single, with parents	0.173	133431	0.199	74039	0.150	59392
Single, on their own	0.015	11840	0.019	7200	0.012	4640
Couple, no children	0.038	29357	0.039	14582	0.037	14775
Couple, with pre-school children	0.105	81059	0.109	40500	0.102	40559
Couple, with school children	0.104	80309	0.108	40150	0.101	40159
Couple, with older children	0.216	166366	0.222	82781	0.211	83585
Empty nest	0.014	10385	0.012	4327	0.015	6058
Older couple	0.066	51079	0.055	20634	0.077	30445
Older single	0.049	37791	0.025	9479	0.071	28312
<i>Total included</i>	<i>0.782</i>	<i>601617</i>	<i>0.788</i>	<i>293692</i>	<i>0.777</i>	<i>307925</i>
Single, any age, with child	0.050	38704	0.024	8819	0.075	29885
Single, age 36-60, no children	0.032	24313	0.036	13599	0.027	10714
Others	0.136	104615	0.152	56642	0.121	47973
<i>Total excluded</i>	<i>0.218</i>	<i>167632</i>	<i>0.212</i>	<i>79060</i>	<i>0.223</i>	<i>88572</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1.000</i>	<i>769249</i>	<i>1.000</i>	<i>372752</i>	<i>1.000</i>	<i>396497</i>

Note: ^a proportion.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	All ^a	Men ^a	Women ^a	Range	
Donating money	0.179	0.191	0.168	0	1
Attending meetings	0.077	0.084	0.070	0	1
Doing unpaid work	0.097	0.106	0.089	0	1
Education:					
Primary school or lower	0.262	0.222	0.300	0	1
Middle school	0.295	0.325	0.266	0	1
High school	0.356	0.364	0.349	0	1
University or higher	0.087	0.088	0.085	0	1
Employment status:					
Not employed	0.265	0.097	0.425	0	1
Retired	0.179	0.208	0.152	0	1
Student	0.074	0.070	0.078	0	1
Employed	0.482	0.626	0.345	0	1
Church attendance:					
Never	0.150	0.197	0.105	0	1
Sometimes a year	0.335	0.401	0.271	0	1
Sometimes a month	0.179	0.162	0.196	0	1
Sometimes a week	0.249	0.189	0.305	0	1
Once a week	0.071	0.042	0.098	0	1
Everyday	0.017	0.008	0.025	0	1
Meeting with friends:					
Don't have or Never	0.035	0.027	0.042	0	1
Sometimes a year	0.065	0.057	0.073	0	1
Sometimes a month	0.162	0.145	0.178	0	1
Sometimes a week	0.212	0.205	0.218	0	1
Once a week	0.293	0.284	0.301	0	1
Everyday	0.220	0.272	0.170	0	1
Satisfied with personal resources	0.636	0.641	0.632	0	1
Recently moved	0.044	0.045	0.043	0	1
Area:					
North-west	0.209	0.208	0.211	0	1
North-east	0.204	0.204	0.204	0	1
Center	0.179	0.178	0.180	0	1
South	0.294	0.296	0.293	0	1
Islands	0.113	0.114	0.112	0	1
<i>N</i>	601617	293692	307925		

Note: ^a proportion.

Table 3: Unconditional cross-classified logistic mixed models predicting the probability of donating money, attending meetings, and doing unpaid work among men and women, in Italy

	Men			Women		
	Donating money	Attending meetings	Doing unpaid work	Donating money	Attending meetings	Doing unpaid work
	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.
Intercept	-1.572***	-2.509***	-2.239***	-1.694***	-2.663***	-2.404***
<i>Variance components:</i>						
σ^2_t	0.007	0.004	0.004	0.018	0.004	0.006
σ^2_c	0.145	0.130	0.114	0.079	0.176	0.155
AIC	281207.803	168377.535	197756.222	275940.092	154923.934	182506.929
BIC	281239.574	168409.306	197787.993	275972.005	154955.847	182538.841
<i>N</i>	293692			307925		

Note: respondents are nested in 19 years and 7 cohorts. Est. = log-odds; sig. = *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$; σ^2_t = variance of the year random-effects; σ^2_c = variance of the cohort random-effects; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

Table 4: Cross-classified logistic mixed models predicting the probability of donating money, attending meetings, and doing unpaid work among men and women, in Italy

	Men			Women		
	Donating money	Attending meetings	Doing unpaid work	Donating money	Attending meetings	Doing unpaid work
	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.	est./sig.
Intercept	-3.348***	-4.810***	-4.477***	-2.966***	-5.187***	-4.688***
Life cycle transitions (r.c. Single, with parents):						
Single, on their own	0.318***	0.157***	0.213***	0.242***	0.144**	0.202***
Couple, no children	0.463***	-0.028	0.046	0.249***	-0.276***	-0.152***
Couple, with pre-school	0.411***	0.003	0.039	0.194***	-0.576***	-0.517***
Couple, with school children	0.451***	0.167***	0.209***	0.275***	-0.229***	-0.176***
Couple, with older children	0.412***	0.203***	0.207***	0.239***	-0.140**	-0.075
Empty nest	0.416***	0.174**	0.161**	0.232***	-0.214**	-0.114
Older couple	0.328***	-0.007	-0.001	0.055	-0.349***	-0.323***
Older single	0.244***	-0.001	0.007	0.167***	-0.177**	-0.110*
Education (r.c. Primary school or lower):						
Middle school	0.374***	0.454***	0.452***	0.384***	0.642***	0.579***
High school	0.906***	0.838***	0.826***	0.912***	1.183***	1.045***
University or higher	1.365***	1.169***	1.134***	1.380***	1.634***	1.478***
Employment status (r.c. Employed):						
Not employed	-0.382***	-0.062*	-0.077**	-0.403***	-0.052**	-0.055**
Retired	-0.077***	0.184***	0.185***	-0.125***	0.171***	0.202***
Student	0.072**	0.323***	0.318***	0.099***	0.491***	0.485***
Church attendance (r.c. Never):						
Sometimes a year	0.193***	0.292***	0.287***	0.123***	0.078*	0.129***
Sometimes a month	0.278***	0.722***	0.662***	0.135***	0.414***	0.434***
Once a week	0.488***	1.160***	1.124***	0.275***	0.917***	0.943***
Sometimes a week	0.748***	1.692***	1.678***	0.677***	1.702***	1.737***
Everyday	0.836***	2.106***	2.158***	0.829***	2.264***	2.278***
Meeting with friends (r.c. Never or Don't have):						
Sometimes a year	0.380***	0.390***	0.444***	0.349***	0.712***	0.558***
Sometimes a month	0.512***	0.702***	0.723***	0.449***	0.975***	0.784***
Once a week	0.573***	0.875***	0.894***	0.518***	1.165***	0.978***
Sometimes a week	0.689***	1.098***	1.130***	0.614***	1.414***	1.212***
Everyday	0.722***	1.205***	1.241***	0.565***	1.448***	1.250***
Satisfied with personal res.	0.316***	0.153***	0.134***	0.274***	0.157***	0.161***
Recently moved	0.106***	0.066*	0.098***	0.117***	0.195***	0.187***
Area (r.c. North-west):						
North-east	0.333***	0.439***	0.444***	0.286***	0.335***	0.396***
Center	-0.079***	-0.320***	-0.344***	-0.147***	-0.330***	-0.348***
South	-0.689***	-0.759***	-0.919***	-0.880***	-0.810***	-0.944***
Islands	-0.513***	-0.560***	-0.681***	-0.629***	-0.568***	-0.685***
Variance components:						
σ_t^2	0.008	0.008	0.007	0.022	0.015	0.017
σ_c^2	0.092	0.129	0.115	0.087	0.077	0.100
AIC	261814.740	154187.933	179651.296	254422.432	138562.727	162660.171
BIC	262164.220	154537.412	180000.775	254773.473	138913.768	163011.212
<i>N</i>		293692			307925	

Note: respondents are nested in 19 years and 7 cohorts. Est. = log-odds; sig. = *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$; σ_t^2 = variance of the year random-effects; σ_c^2 = variance of the cohort random-effects; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

Figure 1: The marginal effects of the life cycle transitions on the probability of donating money, attending meetings, and doing unpaid work for voluntary associations, for men and women, with 95% confidence intervals

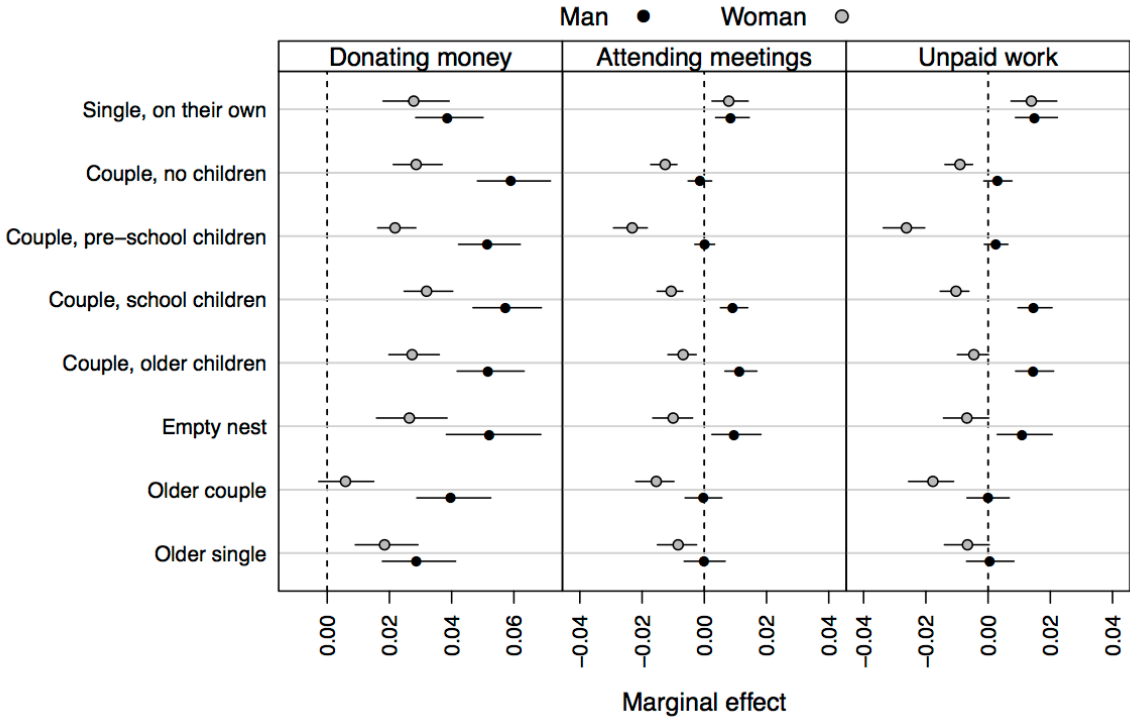


Figure 2: The differences in probability of donating money, attending meetings, and doing unpaid work for voluntary associations, between each life cycle transition and the previous one, for men and women, with 95% confidence intervals

