

# The impact of regional factors on leaving home in the context of the “latest-late” transition to adulthood: a multilevel approach

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## **Abstract**

In this paper the question of within-country heterogeneity in patterns to adulthood is addressed, focusing on the exit from the parental home in the context of the “latest-late” transition to adulthood. Census data are used to investigate the relative weight that structural-contextual and cultural factors at the provincial as well as municipal levels might have in explaining regional existing differences in the transition to independent living, by applying multilevel logistic regression on the probability of living outside the parental home versus living with parents.

## **1. Introduction**

The broad concept of the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 1987), encompassing factors such as the individualization and the emergence of post-materialistic values brought about great changes, during the last decades, in partnership formation patterns, as well as the emergence of new family models and new household types. On the same ground, structural changes in the economic development, policy system, as well as in the labour market and the educational system gradually occurred. The coexistence and interrelation of ideational and structural factors acted de-standardizing also the transition to adulthood process (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001): the young adult years have been exposed to great changes, resulting in a diversification of trajectories with respect to the traditional one. The key events marking the achievement of the adult status (i.e., finishing formal education, entering the labour market, leaving the parental home, forming a stable partnership and, eventually, becoming parent) have undergone great changes in all developed societies, even though at different speed. Indeed, heterogeneity between countries persists, partly due to institutional factors –such as the rules regulating the entrance into the labour and housing markets, the tax system, as well

as the degree of welfare provision and social protection– and partly due to the prevailing societal norm context and strength of ties with the family of origin (Reher, 1998).

The cluster of Mediterranean countries, sharing the so-called “latest-late” patterns of transition to adulthood (Billari et al., 2002), does show a less pronounced diversity of patterns to adulthood if compared to other European settings, the nest leaving process being still very much associated with marriage. The postponement of a stable union formation universally occurring in Europe in the last decades, translates, within the Southern European setting, into a longer permanence in the parental home while elsewhere in Europe young adults tend to exit anyway to live alone before getting married (see, e.g., Fernández Córdón, 1997; Rossi, 1997). At the same time, the general increase in the educational attainment and the prolongation of the studies in a welfare environment lacking of policies expressively targeted for students in higher education (see, e.g., Baizán et al., 2002), furthermore acted delaying the exit from the parental home.

Recent contributions have emphasized the increasing heterogeneity in young adults’ behavioural patterns throughout Europe, not only between countries, but also within countries: the quantum of the key events, their timing and sequencing all show an increasingly high variation (see, e.g., Elzinga and Liefbroer, 2007; Fussell et al., 2007; Billari and Wilson, 2001).

In this study the question of observed within-country variability in transition to adulthood is addressed. The aim here is to investigate whether within-country variation might be associated with macro-level characteristics of the local communities. An extract from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International is used to investigate whether and how local contextual issues could play a role in influencing home leaving by applying multilevel logistic regression on the probability of living outside the parental home versus living with parents, using the Spanish 2001 Census. The decomposition at the provincial and municipal levels are both exploited, merging individual-level characteristics with information from other national sources on the local labour and housing markets as well as indicators for the modernity of the cultural context and for the strength of ties with the family of origin.

## **2. Hypotheses and variables selection**

The Spanish context proves particularly interesting as a case study, given the great and historically documented regional diversity shaping the family formation process with respect to the timing and the quantum of home leaving (Reher, 1991). While regional variability in the Spanish case has been investigated at the provincial level (see, e.g., Holdsworth et al., 2002; Holdsworth, 1998), less so it is at a lower level of territorial aggregation (see, e.g., Billari et al., 2008, for the Italian case). However, certain local structural characteristics like the labour and housing markets' circumstances become important predictors of the home leaving process only when smaller, more homogeneous area aggregations are considered (cf., for a similar argument, Holdsworth et al., 2002: 996). Therefore, in what follows it is assumed that variability in patterns of leaving the parental home does exist between local communities both at the provincial and at the municipal level. Such observed diversity is addressed investigating which factors might impede the transition to independent living in certain areas while facilitating it in certain others. In this respect, two main assumptions are developed, the one assessing the strength of factors attaining to the structural-contextual sphere and the other underlying the importance of cultural factors.

The local labour and housing markets' conditions are considered as structural factors. Indeed, the existence of structural difficulties in entering the labour market is regarded as an important constraint acting delaying the exit of the parental home, especially in a Southern European context where the independent living is very much associated with economic independence through the achievement of a stable position on the job market. The most powerful indicator of the barriers of entry in the labour market is the unemployment rate. Moreover, a measure of labour market saturation with respect to the professional positions occupied might also be an indicator for the degree of competition for accessing white-collar occupations. As concerns the local housing market, a shortage of available residential dwellings might impede the exit from the parental home, also through the relation with housing prices, which are inversely proportional to dwellings availability. It is thus expected that the more difficult the access to the labour and housing markets, the more difficult it is to exit the parental home.

On the other hand, structural factors alone are not thought of being able to explain the whole regional variation in the transition to independent living, even more so in a complex context like the Southern European one is. The explanatory power of cultural factors is modelled through an indicator measuring the "modernity" of the community context and a measure of the strength of ties with the family of origin. A modern environment is meant as opposed to places characterized by a traditional societal norm context, where leaving home might more

frequently be perceived as an act associated with marriage, entrance into a stable occupation and home ownership. Therefore it is expected that young adults living in a relatively modern cultural context will be more likely to live outside the parental home, compared to peers who have been socialized in a more tradition-oriented environment. Finally, strong kinship ties, a peculiar characteristic of the Southern European family system (Reher, 1998), might also be contextualized in the broader concept of the social norms environment. On the one hand, strong family ties are more frequently associated with parental support during the process of leaving home and after the residential shift has taken place (see, e.g., Holdsworth, 2004). This might be thought of as a force facilitating the process of home leaving for what concerns the economics of entering independent living, the latter being a possible causal effect on poverty or lack of well-being in the absence of adequate individual or household financial resources (Aassve et al., 2007). The issue of family support is particularly important in the Mediterranean Familialistic framework, the family being the main source of welfare provision (Esping-Anderssen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996). On the other hand, in a context in which family ties are strong, the nest leaving transition might be regarded in a more traditional way, with acceptability of intergenerational obligations and a tendency, for instance, to prefer marriage to cohabitation or to adapt to societal age norms (see, e.g., Billari and Liefbroer, 2007). Under this perspective the strongest the ties with the family of origin, the latest the exit from the parental home.

The assumptions developed above have been operationalized and tested by the means of five local (i.e., provincial and municipal) variables.

The local labour market context is modelled along two dimensions: the local unemployment rate and the proportion of individuals who achieved higher education (i.e., university or higher level). The proportion of individuals who attained higher education is very much associated with the proportion of individuals having access to the highest positions in the labour market –which in turn, might easily be interpreted as a proxy indicator for social capital, prosperity and, more generally, for social status– and might therefore be interpreted per se as an indicator of the saturation of the labour market for what concerns the professional occupations since it might bring about a certain level of competition between highly skilled young adults or between different generations, the result being a slow-down in the process of entering the job market.

The local housing market is represented through the proportion of vacant dwellings. The information on the housing prices would have been more informative for the purpose of

modelling the housing market; however, such information is not (reliably) available for all the municipal communities under investigation.

In order to test the assumption on modernity, the information on the proportion of cohabiting unions, which is here treated as a synonymous of social acceptability of modern family models, is used, while the association between living with parents and strength of family ties is represented by the proportion of households with three or more generations co-residing together.

### **3. Data and Methods**

The empirical analysis relies on data from the Spanish 2001 Population and Housing Census, accessed via two different sources: the individual-level information are gathered from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International –from now on IPUMS-I–, while the community-level information, at both provincial and municipal level, are provided from the Spanish National Statistical Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE).

Despite the unavailability of retrospective/prospective information and despite the absence of information on values and preferences, census data provide an opportunity to disaggregate large samples according to the place of residence, so that the question of within-country variability in the transition to independent living could be answered by multilevel analysis, while the impact of macro-level variables on the departure from parental home can also be investigated.

IPUMS-I collects comparable and harmonized samples of individual-level data from population censuses, which are made available for public use. The individual information accessed refer to a 5% sample of the 2001 Spanish census; in the following only individuals in the age range 17-35 years are considered. The grouping of individuals into households enables the construction of the status variable co-residing with parents versus leaving independently. Individual-level variables refer to age, gender, employment status (self-employed or wage/salary worker versus inactive, unemployed or unpaid worker), educational attainment (primary or lower level versus higher levels completed) and school enrolment. Provincial and municipal information are instead taken from the whole 2001 census.

Individual- and provincial/municipal-level explanatory variables used in the empirical analyses are described in Table 1. The final sample is constituted of 379,001 young adults aged 17 to 35 years old, grouped into 52 provinces and 316 municipalities.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for explanatory variables.

	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Obs.
<b>Individual-level covariates</b>						
Age:						
17-23		0.33	0.47	0	1	379001
24-29 (ref.)		0.34	0.47	0	1	379001
30-35		0.33	0.47	0	1	379001
Gender	1=female; 0 otherwise	0.50	0.50	0	1	379001
Employed	1=employed; 0 otherwise	0.52	0.50	0	1	379001
Low Level of Education Achieved	1=primary or less completed; 0=otherwise	0.12	0.33	0	1	379001
School enrollment	1=attending school; 0 otherwise	0.30	0.46	0	1	379001
<b>Municipal-level covariates</b>						
Proportion of Vacant Dwellings		0.15	0.05	0.03	0.30	316
Unemployment Rate		0.14	0.06	0.06	0.43	316
Proportion with Higer Education		0.10	0.05	0.04	0.36	316
Proportion of Cohabiting Couples		0.06	0.03	0.02	0.23	316
Proportion of 3+ Generations Households		0.04	0.02	0.02	0.17	316
<b>Provincial-level covariates</b>						
Proportion of Vacant Dwellings		0.15	0.03	0.08	0.27	52
Unemployment Rate		0.14	0.05	0.07	0.28	52
Proportion with Higer Education		0.14	0.03	0.09	0.20	52
Proportion of Cohabiting Couples		0.04	1.50	0.02	0.12	52
Proportion of 3+ Generations Households		0.04	0.01	0.02	0.09	52

Source: Own calculations on the IPUMS-I 2001 Spanish sample and 2001 Population and Housing Census (INE)

Multilevel modelling allows investigating the nature of between-group variability, while accounting for the effect of group-level characteristics on individual outcomes, thus enabling to test the effect that structural and cultural factors might have on patterns of co-residence between young adults and their parents and disentangle their relative weight in explaining regional existing differences.

Since macro-level information are available at both the provincial- and municipal-level, in the following separate models are run for the two levels of territorial aggregation.

The probability of leaving the parental home is modelled through a two-level random intercept logistic model, which allows the intercept of the group regression lines to vary randomly across provinces(municipalities), while assuming the slope to be constant for each group. In other words, the probability of leaving home is allowed to vary across provinces(municipalities), but the effect of the individual-level covariates is assumed to be the same for each local level group. The model takes the form:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\pi_{ij}}{1-\pi_{ij}}\right) = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 x_{1ij} + \gamma x_{2j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + u_{0j}$$

with  $\pi_{ij} = \Pr(y_{ij} = 1)$ ,  $y_{ij}$  being the binary response, equals 1 if the individual  $i$  in province(municipality)  $j$  left the parental home, and 0 otherwise, while  $x_{1ij}$  and  $x_{2j}$  are vectors of individual-level and provincial(municipal)-level characteristics, respectively, while  $e_{ij}$  represents the residual variation at the individual level. The intercept term consists of a fixed component,  $\beta_0$ , constant for all groups, and a random part,  $u_{0j}$ , which is a province(municipal)-specific effect, assumed to be normally distributed with mean zero and variance  $\sigma_{u0}^2$ .

A first model (Model 1) provides an estimate of the existing between-areas variability, with the only control variable being age. In a second step (Model 2), the remaining individual-level variables are added to the model, while level-2 variables are added gradually in subsequent models (Models 3 to 6), in order to test the relative changes in the random effect they give rise to.

#### 4. Results

Results from the two-level random intercept logistic model for the provincial and municipal territorial aggregations are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

The initial between-province variation is estimated as 10% and is statistically significant (Model 1), meaning that in the sample there exists variation across provinces for what concerns the young adults' living arrangements. Individual-level variables do explain part of the overall province variability –which after the inclusion of these controls results decreased to 8.4%– and their sign and significance is as expected (Model 2): women are more likely to be living outside the parental home with respect to men because they usually marry at younger ages; being employed is positively associated with living outside the parental home, while it is more likely to co-reside with parents while being enrolled in education. Low-educated young adults are more likely to live independently, probably because they enter the job market relatively earlier than peers enrolled in secondary or higher education. In Model 3 the housing market indicator is included: the proportion of vacant dwellings in the province of residence is positively associated with living independently, even though this effect is significant only at the 10% level; the inclusion of such variable in the model causes a slight but significant decrease in the between-province variance (from 8.4% to 7.8%). Both labour market indicators, i.e., the provincial unemployment rate and the proportion highly educated, significantly and negatively affect the log odds of living outside the parental home (Model 4);

moreover, the provincial variance is decreased from 0.078 to 0.042, meaning that a consistent part of the variance in the parents and children co-residence is explained by differences in the labour market conditions across provinces. Another great reduction in the variability across provinces is due to provincial differences in the proportion of cohabiting couples (Model 5), which here are meant as an indicator of modernity. When this variable is introduced in the model, the random intercept's variance passes from 0.042 to 0.038. Moreover, a positive association between the fact of living in a relatively modern context and living independently does exist. Finally, the indicator chosen for the strength of family ties, i.e., the proportion of households with three or more co-residing generations, shows a negative association with independent living but is not significant (Model 6). The effects of individual-level variables are rather constant when including provincial-level covariates in the model, indicating the stability of the parameters estimates. After all the covariates are included, the provincial variability is reduced from 0.10 in the null model to 0.037.

Results of the multilevel model estimated grouping young adults at the municipal level are rather similar to those discussed for the provincial level. However some differences arise. The initial variability across municipalities is equal to 17%, i.e., almost twice the variability observed across provinces. Moreover, the association between living outside the parental home and both structural and cultural indicators is stronger at the municipal level than when these factors are measured at the provincial level. Indeed, the proportion of vacant dwellings keeps its positive association with home leaving also when other level-2 covariates are included in the model. The same holds for the unemployment rate: in those municipalities where unemployment is higher, it is more likely that young adults co-reside with their parents. Such association is significant at a 0.10% level when the labour market indicator is measured at the municipal level, while it is not significant at the provincial level, which is quite reasonable and in line with previous findings (Holdsworth, 2002), since provinces might be not enough homogeneous areas to test the labour and housing market's conditions. Finally, also the association between living outside the parental home and the degree of modernity of the municipality is much stronger than at the provincial level. After the inclusion of all municipal-level variables, the between-municipality variance is more than halved.



**Table 2:** Random intercept logistic model, Provinces

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 4		MODEL 5		MODEL 6	
	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.
<b>Individual-level variables</b>												
Age 17-23	-1.941 ( 0.012 ) ***		-1.662 ( 0.013 ) ***		-1.662 ( 0.013 ) ***		-1.667 ( 0.013 ) ***		-1.670 ( 0.013 ) ***		-1.670 ( 0.013 ) ***	
Age 24-29 (ref.)	1		1		1		1		1		1	
Age 30-35	1.656 ( 0.009 ) ***		1.581 ( 0.009 ) ***		1.582 ( 0.009 ) ***		1.585 ( 0.009 ) ***		1.591 ( 0.009 ) ***		1.591 ( 0.009 ) ***	
Gender			0.646 ( 0.008 ) ***		0.646 ( 0.008 ) ***		0.647 ( 0.008 ) ***		0.649 ( 0.008 ) ***		0.649 ( 0.008 ) ***	
Employed			0.251 ( 0.010 ) ***		0.251 ( 0.010 ) ***		0.251 ( 0.010 ) ***		0.252 ( 0.010 ) ***		0.252 ( 0.010 ) ***	
Low Level of Education Achieved			0.419 ( 0.013 ) ***		0.419 ( 0.013 ) ***		0.420 ( 0.013 ) ***		0.421 ( 0.013 ) ***		0.421 ( 0.013 ) ***	
School enrolment			-0.910 ( 0.011 ) ***		-0.910 ( 0.011 ) ***		-0.911 ( 0.011 ) ***		-0.913 ( 0.011 ) ***		-0.914 ( 0.011 ) ***	
<b>Provincial-level variables</b>												
Proportion of Vacant Dwellings					2.240 ( 1.232 ) †		0.511 ( 0.960 )		1.133 ( 0.955 )		1.388 ( 0.959 )	
Unemployment rate							-1.734 ( 0.710 ) *		-1.286 ( 0.705 ) †		-1.086 ( 0.709 )	
Proportion with Higher Education							-7.209 ( 1.116 ) ***		-5.931 ( 1.206 ) ***		-5.652 ( 1.204 ) ***	
Proportion of Cohabiting Couples									3.394 ( 1.511 ) *		4.102 ( 1.576 ) **	
Proportion of 3+ Generations Households											-2.666 ( 1.976 )	
<b>Random effects</b>												
Intercept	-0.598 ( 0.045 ) ***		-0.956 ( 0.042 ) ***		-1.294 ( 0.190 ) ***		0.198 ( 0.287 )		-0.325 ( 0.358 )		-0.359 ( 0.354 )	
Intercept Variance	0.10 ( 0.02 ) ***		0.084 ( 0.017 ) ***		0.078 ( 0.016 ) ***		0.042 ( 0.009 ) ***		0.038 ( 0.008 ) ***		0.037 ( 0.008 ) ***	

p-value: \*\*\* < 0.001; \*\* < 0.01; \* < 0.05; † < 0.10.

**Table 3:** Random intercept logistic model, Municipalities

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 4		MODEL 5		MODEL 6	
	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.	$\beta$	s.e.
<b>Individual-level variables</b>												
Age 17-23	-1.970 ( 0.012 )	***	-1.676 ( 0.012 )	***	-1.678 ( 0.012 )		-1.691 ( 0.012 )	***	-1.695 ( 0.012 )	***	-1.695 ( 0.012 )	***
Age 24-29 (ref.)	1		1		1		1		1		1	
Age 30-35	1.675 ( 0.009 )	***	1.575 ( 0.009 )	***	1.577 ( 0.009 )		1.595 ( 0.009 )	***	1.599 ( 0.009 )	***	1.599 ( 0.009 )	***
Gender			0.640 ( 0.008 )	***	0.641 ( 0.008 )	***	0.647 ( 0.008 )	***	0.649 ( 0.008 )	***	0.649 ( 0.008 )	***
Employed			0.239 ( 0.010 )	***	0.239 ( 0.010 )	***	0.242 ( 0.010 )	***	0.242 ( 0.010 )	***	0.242 ( 0.010 )	***
Low Level of Education Achieved			0.389 ( 0.013 )	***	0.389 ( 0.013 )	***	0.391 ( 0.013 )	***	0.391 ( 0.013 )	***	0.391 ( 0.013 )	***
School enrolment			-0.871 ( 0.011 )	***	-0.871 ( 0.011 )	***	-0.881 ( 0.011 )	***	-0.884 ( 0.011 )	***	-0.884 ( 0.011 )	***
<b>Municipal-level variables</b>												
Proportion of Vacant Dwellings					1.063 ( 0.461 )	*	0.257 ( 0.433 )		0.868 ( 0.379 )	*	0.865 ( 0.379 )	*
Unemployment rate							-1.847 ( 0.363 )	***	-1.099 ( 0.322 )	***	-1.100 ( 0.322 )	***
Proportion with Higher Education							-2.939 ( 0.384 )	***	-2.751 ( 0.332 )	***	-2.753 ( 0.331 )	***
Proportion of Cohabiting Couples									6.242 ( 0.587 )	***	6.242 ( 0.587 )	***
Proportion of 3+ Generations Households											-0.636 ( 0.883 )	
<b>Random effects</b>												
Intercept	-0.369 ( 0.024 )	***	-0.754 ( 0.024 )	***	-0.919 ( 0.075 )	***	-0.231 ( 0.109 )	*	-0.850 ( 0.111 )	***	-0.821 ( 0.118 )	***
Intercept Variance	0.17 ( 0.014 )	***	0.139 ( 0.012 )	***	0.136 ( 0.012 )	***	0.111 ( 0.010 )	***	0.080 ( 0.007 )	***	0.080 ( 0.007 )	***

p-value: \*\*\* < 0.001; \*\* < 0.01; \* < 0.05; † < 0.10.

## 5. Conclusion and further direction of research

This study aimed at shedding some new light on the latest-late transition to independent living characterizing the Spanish context, by investigating within-Spain differences in the probability of living outside the parental home. It has been shown by the means of multilevel modelling that regional variation in the young Spaniards' living arrangements does exist at the provincial, but even more so at a lower territorial aggregation level, i.e. the municipal one. Both structural and cultural factors proved to be strongly associated with the probability of living independently: a local context without difficulties in entering the housing, but especially the labour market and with a modern cultural climate is the most favourable environment for encouraging the nest leaving.

In a further step a three-level model measuring structural factors at the municipal level and cultural factors at the provincial one need to be developed, while the possibility of internal migration induced by structural constraints at the local level need to be accounted for.

Moreover, the regional diversity in the intergenerational co-residence between young adults and their parents when the former are enrolled in higher education is a dimension which requires a further investigation, for instance by adding a measure of the distance to the closest university.

Finally, the within-country variation in patterns of leaving home needs to be extended to other Southern European countries in order to get a better understanding in the identification of the common factors which act delaying the exit of the parental home.

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