

Vilnius Conference on Family History and Historical Demography  
*Cohabitation in Europe: Through Space and Time*

September 5-6, 2013, Vilnius University, Vilnius

The Gender Studies Centre at Vilnius University and Radboud University of Nijmegen, Netherlands, are organizing a conference on Family History and Historical Demography called *Cohabitation in Europe: Through Space and Time*.

The topic of the Conference came about through discussions about the reasons for and regional variations behind cohabitation that started in the 1970s and continue to this day. What are the main stimuli to cohabit? It seems cohabitation cannot be explained either solely by regional differences in socio-economic change, by different religions, nationalities, levels of education, or the varying rate of spread of contraceptive measures in Europe. How important are regional traditions and attitudes towards cohabitation? Another issue the Conference focuses on is the prospect for cohabitants to be legitimized or rejected by certain communities. Did communities develop specific terms to define cohabitation that were created with different underlying reasons? For instance, in the Russian Baltic province of Lithuania, only those cohabitants who were unable to formalize their marriages in a church were accepted by the community. Illegitimacy is another inseparable question that follows cohabitation. What are correlations between illegitimacy and cohabitation across space and time in Europe? In 1971, Shorter, Knodel and Van de Walle raised the hypothesis that in the nineteenth century, among Slavic rural communities, the understanding of marriage was different to that in Western European societies. According to these scholars, children born in unlawful but stable, consensual unions were not recognised by civil law and the Church, and were registered as illegitimates, but in a cultural perspective, they were considered as legitimate. More or less the same patterns were found in Scandinavian countries.

The organizers anticipate that one of the main outcomes of the Conference, among others, would be to outline the typology of cohabitation in Europe that would be based not only on percentages, but on the historical and socio-cultural variety of cohabitation in different regions.

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