

The diffusion of late fertility across European regions

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The rise in late fertility has emerged as a landmark trend in high-income countries in recent decades. Yet, its spread has been geographically uneven, which has largely been attributed to socioeconomic contextual factors. Our study introduces a new perspective: the role of spatial diffusion processes. We exploit the regional variation in the increase in the contribution of late fertility rates to total fertility to assess whether a region follows the behaviour of nearby regions in preceding periods. To test this, we use a comprehensive panel of 193 regions across 18 European countries and utilise a dynamic spatial Durbin model that captures both temporal and spatial interdependencies. After accounting for socioeconomic factors known to affect late fertility rates, such as the tertiarisation of education or changes in the opportunity structure of the labour market, we still find a significant association between geographic proximity and the rise of late fertility across European regions. This underlines the deep interconnectedness within and across contemporary societies. Thus, beyond socioeconomic transformations, our research provides empirical evidence that contagion diffusion processes have contributed to the spread of late births across the continent, and will likely continue to shape future fertility trends.