

THE CHOICE OF THE LOCATION OF WEDDING CEREMONY IN ITALY: FOCUS ON FOREIGN POPULATION ¹

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Abstract. The choice of the location to get married changes over time. The aim of the following work is to analyse the choice of the location of the wedding celebration in Italy. This choice is linked to various religious, social, climatic and economic factors. The objective of the work is to provide a descriptive framework on the choice of place to get married covering a long-time span (1996–2023), and provides a useful descriptive overview of geographic and temporal patterns.

1. Introduction

The choice of the location to get married changes over time. The literature and the cinema after the World War II bring us images of weddings celebrated in a simple way, in the church near home. The marriage represented a central stage in the lives of the couples and the organization of the ceremony itself was a secondary factor. From this model, we get to the nowadays couples for whom the place of celebration of the marriage takes on more and more importance and they are projected in search of increasingly complex events, looking for details that amaze.

Recently the attention of some studies has been placed on a new and promising phenomenon, namely that of weddings celebrated in places other than the usual residence of one or both spouses. Wedding tourism is taking off internationally and many destinations are positioning themselves as “perfect destinations” for this type of market, also by virtue of the possibility of hosting a wedding and honeymoon in a single “overall event”. As for Italy, it is one of the most appealing destinations at the level international and with the greatest growth potential in this specific market (Del Chiappa and Fortezza, 2016).

The choice of the location of wedding ceremony is linked to various religious, social, climatic and economic factors. The spouses choose to be married in a church to which they are bound by religious devotion or they choose trendy locations.

¹ The article is exclusively expressing the authors’ opinions. Although the paper is the result of joint work, sections are attributed as follows: paragraphs 2, 3 and 4.1 to Claudia Iaccarino and paragraphs 1, 4.2 and 5 to Maura Simone.

Climatic factors can influence the place of celebration: getting married in a seaside town in summer or in the mountains during the winter period can have a weight in the choice of brides and grooms. Organising a wedding in one locality rather than another also depends on the financial resources of the couple.

Wedding tourism is about travelling in order to be co-present with significant others and therefore can be qualified as a form of “visiting friends and relatives tourism”. It is not only about being in a new place, it is also about fulfilling family obligations and reproducing social networks. (Bertella, 2015).

This work is focused on marriages of foreign population. This work represents a first step that fits into a broader study aimed at analysing a particular aspect of nuptiality: the choice of the location of the wedding celebration in Italy. In particular, we will pay attention to the differences and/or similarities regarding their choices in the wedding planning, in two groups of couples with both foreign spouses: with at least a spouse resident in Italy and both spouses resident abroad.

Of particular interest, then, is to understand whether the detachment from traditional choices in the wedding location has affected the population as a whole or whether it has involved individuals with certain socio-demographic characteristics more than others.

In particular, the study will focus on different aspects:

- the evolution of geography of marriages over the last thirty years related to the choice of the location of the wedding celebration;
- the relationship between the choice of the location of the wedding ceremony and the spouse's residence, observed over the time.

2. The marriages with at least one foreign spouse in Italy

The data we analysed include all the celebrations that took place in Italy, regardless of the residence of the spouses. This allowed us to consider the marriages of resident and non-resident foreign citizens. It is therefore possible to distinguish two dimensions: the marital tourism of both non-resident spouses with foreign citizenship and the nuptiality of foreign citizens who have instead chosen Italy as the place to live in.

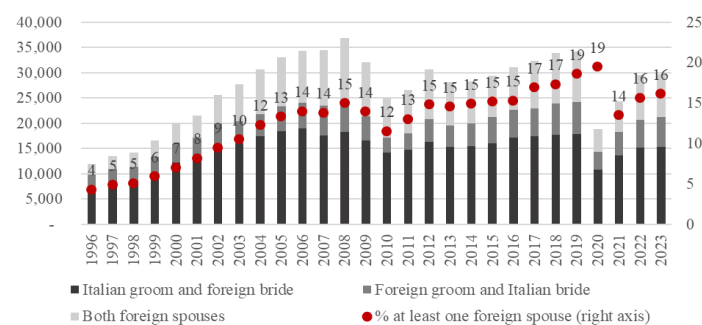
In the last decades, in Italy the phenomena of marriages with spouses with foreign background has grown. From 1996 to the beginning of the new millennium, the percentage of marriages with at least one foreign spouse on the total of marriages has almost constantly increased, from 4.3% to the peak in 2008 (15.0%). In the following two years (2009-2010) a particularly marked decrease was observed due to the collapse of foreign citizens' marriage, discouraged by legislative changes

aimed at limiting marriages of convenience.² Overcome these negative effects, from 2011 the share of marriages between foreigners starts growing again (Guarneri *et al.* 2023).

In 2023, in Italy were celebrated 29,732 marriages in Italy with at least one foreign spouse, +147.9% on 1996 when they were 11,993 (Figure 1). The increase in marriages of foreigners over time is in line with the growing degree of “maturity” of immigration in Italy. The share of marriages with at least one foreign spouse is notoriously higher in areas where the settlement of foreign communities is most entrenched. In the Centre-North, one marriage out of five involves at least one foreign spouse while in the South this type of marriage is 9.3% (ISTAT, 2024a).

Mixed marriages (in which one spouse is Italian and the other one is a foreigner) amount, in 2023, to over 21 thousand and continue to represent the largest part of marriages with at least one foreign spouse (71.3%).

Figure 1 – Marriages with at least one foreign spouse, by spouses’ citizenship. Italy, year 1996-2023 (absolute values and percentage values).



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

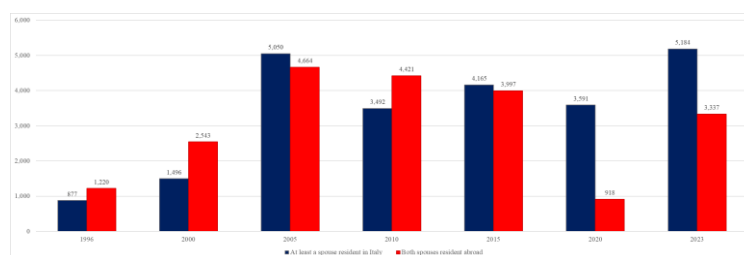
A particular aspect that characterizes our country is the so-called “matrimonial tourism”. Italy exerts a strong attraction for many citizens from abroad, especially from most developed countries, who choose Italy as a place of celebration of their marriages. The phenomenon of matrimonial tourism, often amplified by the media as a purely gossip column, represents for many areas of Italy a real source of income,

² In order to prevent the celebration of marriages of convenience the article. 1 paragraph 15 of law no. 94 of July 2009 has modified the art. 116 of the Italian Civil Code having effects not only to mixed marriages but also to marriages with both foreign spouses. In July 2011, the Constitutional Court, with sentence n. 245/2011, considered constitutionally illegitimate this reformed article, limited to the words “as well as a document attesting the regularity of the stay in the Italian territory”. The motivation was that the general prohibition of celebrating the marriage of a foreigner not regularly residing in Italy represents a disproportionate instrument, unreasonably damaging the fundamental right of every human being to contract marriage.

a good share of the local labour market. These marriages, with both foreign spouses resident abroad, pass from 1,220 in 1996 to 3,337 in 2023 (+174%).

Net of this subset, marriages with both foreign spouses and at least a resident in Italy spouse in 2023 were 5,184, five times the value recorded in 1996 (877 marriages) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Marriages with both foreign spouses. Italy, years 1996-2023 (absolute values).



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

Mixed marriages (in which one spouse is Italian and the other one is a foreigner) amount to over 18 thousand and continue to represent the largest part of marriages with at least one foreign spouse (75.1%).

3. Data

The analysis has been carried out using data collected from the Survey on Marriages, conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). The marriages' survey, conducted since 1926, provide the official data of all marriages (religious and civil) marriages celebrated in Italy by municipality of celebration.

The subject of the survey, which is individual and exhaustive, is all marriages of the present population, and makes it possible to analyse the phenomenon of nuptiality, by marriage order, in relation to the main socio-demographic characteristics of the spouses.

In this investigation, we used the microdata of all marriages celebrated from 1996 to 2023 as registered in the civil status register of the population. The availability of information on the citizenship (Italian or foreign) and the residence of spouses (in Italy or abroad) have allowed us to analyse marriages of foreign population by studying the type of couple and considering in a "dynamic way" the choice of the location of the wedding ceremony, depending on the citizenship and on the residence of the spouses. In addition, the availability of data at municipal level allows carrying out analyses on the geography of marriages celebrated in Italy, read through its evolution over time.

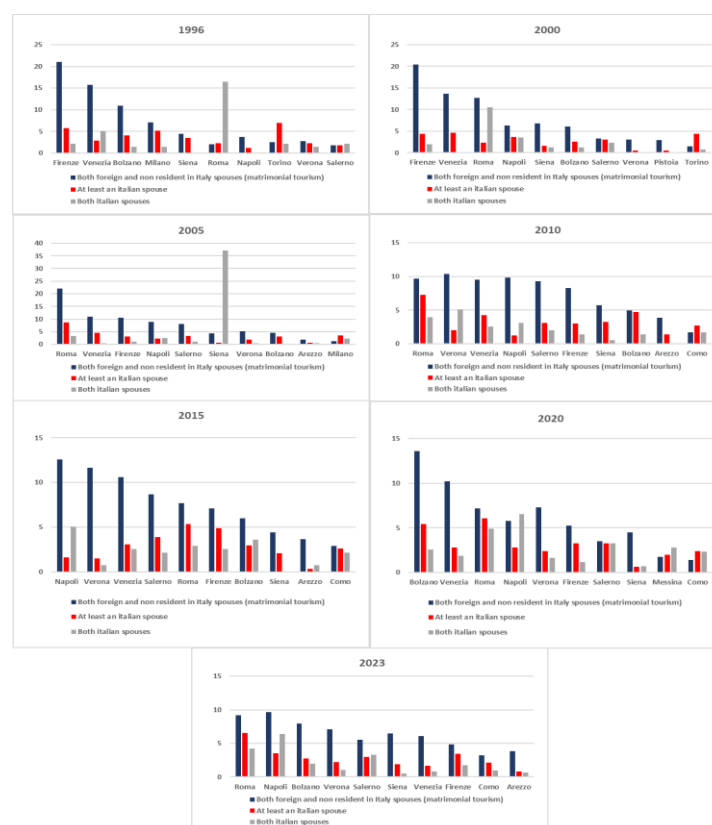
4. Main Results

4.1 Where they married

One of the analyses that have been carried out concerns the location of the marriages, in relation to the type of couple and province of celebration.

In a focus on marriages of both not resident in Italy spouses, we have analysed the place of celebration of the marriage by type of couple. By observing the ranking of the top ten provinces chosen by the spouses on the total, from 1996 to 2023, we note that both foreigner and not resident in Italy spouses (matrimonial tourism) mainly chose cities of art (Florence, Rome, Venice) (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Marriages of both not resident in Italy spouses by type of couple and province of celebration. Years: 1996, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2023 (percentage values).

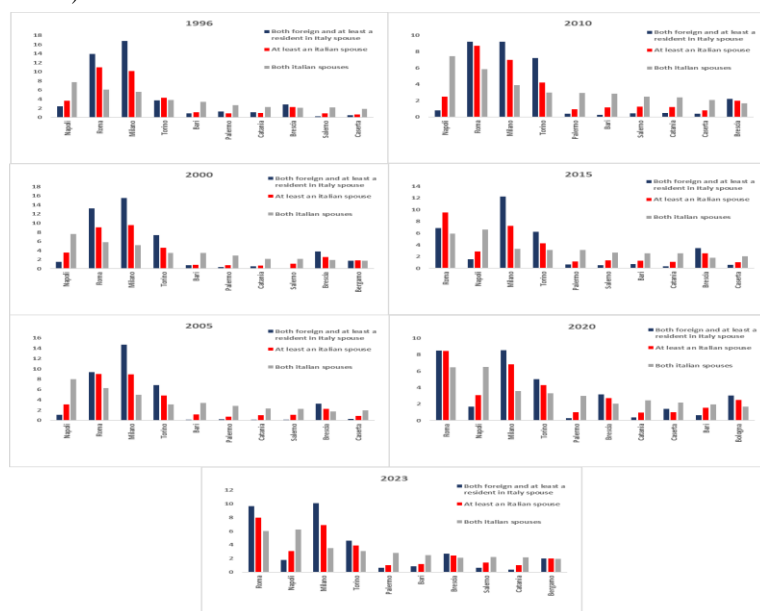


Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

However, over the years there has been a change both in the ranking of the provinces and in the percentage weight of each on the total. In fact, while until 2000 the provinces of Florence and Venice alone accounted for more than a third of matrimonial tourism, something changes in the following years: in addition to Rome, provinces such as Naples, Bolzano and Verona reach the top of the list, even if their percentage share changes and decreases over the years so much so that in 2023 the top ten provinces affected by matrimonial tourism show percentages on the total below 10% (from 9.7% of Naples to 3.2% of Como). As regards couples with at least one Italian spouse, in the 1996 in addition to the classic provinces also emerge Turin and Milan (respectively with the 6.9% and the 5.2% on the total); in 2023, the province of Rome records the highest percentage values (6.6%). Among the couples of not resident and both Italian spouses, except in a few cases, there is a greater capillarity in the choice of the place of celebration across thirty years.

Selecting marriages with at least one resident in Italy spouse (both Italian and foreigner), the ranking of the top ten provinces of celebration chosen by the spouses, from 1996 to 2023, tell us that both foreigner and at least one resident in Italy spouses chose mainly Rome and Milan: respectively the 13.9% and the 16.8% in 1996; the 9.6% and the 10.1% in 2023 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – *Marriages with at least a resident in Italy spouse by type of couple and province of celebration. Years: 1996, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2023 (percentage values).*



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

The province of Milan has a certain weight also among residents with at least one Italian spouse with almost 10% over thirty years. Among the couples of resident and both Italian spouses, particularly important is the choice of the province of Naples ranked in the top three positions.

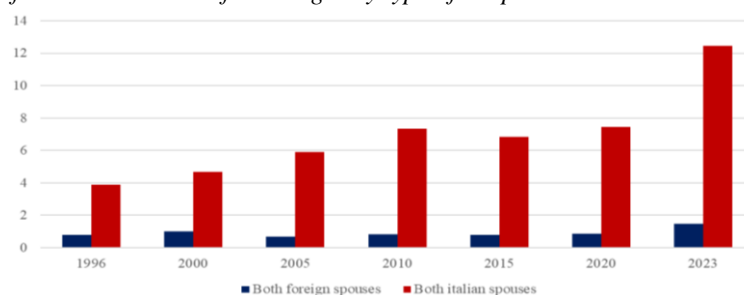
4.2 The residence in Italy

The residence in Italy is another relevant aspect to take into account in this most general framework. In recent years, there has been a substantial stabilization of the resident foreign population. Its growth has slowed down compared to the first decade of the 2000s, both because immigration has declined both because many foreigners have since acquired the Italian citizenship (ISTAT, 2023).

That's why this work will continue with a focus on resident in Italy spouses, whose choices play a crucial role in the process of family formation. In the decade 2011-2021, the total number of households with at least one component foreigner increased by about 700 thousand units (+38.3%). The observation of migration through the analysis of family size, in a perspective time, provides useful elements to detect its dynamics. On the one hand, the increase in households with four or more components can be attributed to a process of stabilization and completion of the migration project that involves a large part of the foreign presence in Italy. Over time, foreigners tend to form more or less mixed families, with children and reunited members, manifesting the intention of taking root in the country (ISTAT, 2024b).

Selecting marriages with both resident in Italy spouses, the analysis shows that more than 90% of the spouses (either both Italian and both foreigner) clearly choose the province of residence as their place of celebration. Nevertheless, Italian couples are more likely than the foreigner ones to marry in a province other than that of their residence (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Percentage of weddings of spouses (either both Italian and both foreigner) both resident in Italy celebrated in a province other than that of their residence out of the total number of marriages by type of couple.

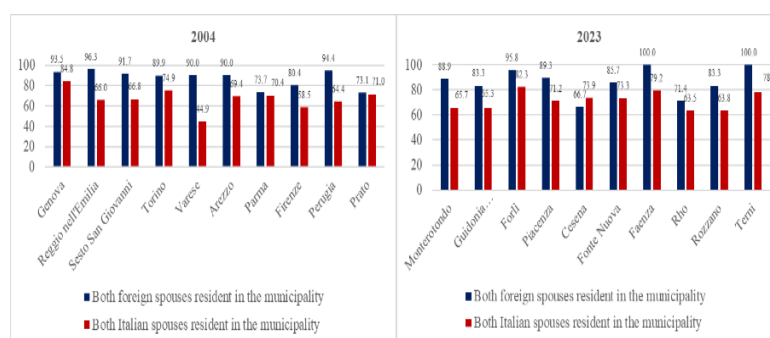


Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

The analysis continues with a focus on municipalities with more than 5,000 foreign residents in the years 2004 and 2023. Selecting the ranking of the top 10 municipalities by nuptiality rate, we studied both the evolution of the geography of the municipalities in which marriages have been celebrated and the percentage weight of marriages of both resident in those municipalities spouses by type of couple.

The observation of the first 10 municipalities by nuptiality rate shows significant geographical differences between 2004 and 2023 (Figure 6). While in 2004 mainly the large municipalities catalyse the choice of the spouses (for example Genoa, Turin and Florence), in 2023 the municipalities with the highest nuptiality rate are of medium size (at the top of the ranking Monterotondo e Guidonia Montecelio). These differences could result from the fact that over the past twenty years foreign presence has become more widespread in the national territory.

Figure 6 – *Marriages of both resident in the municipality spouses by type of couple (percentage values).*



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

Regarding the residence of the spouses, we note that most of both foreigner spouses have married in the municipality of residence (over the 80% on a national average), while this percentage, for both Italian spouses, is lower (about the 50% on a national average).

Considering the couples of foreign spouses both resident in the municipality of celebration, in 2004 the municipality with the highest percentage is Reggio nell'Emilia with 96.3%, while Prato is the one with the lowest value 73.1%. On the contrary, observing the both Italian spouses couples, Genoa takes first place, with 84.8%, Varese with 44.9%, takes the last one. In 2023, considering the same aggregates, in Terni and Faenza all marriages with both foreigner spouses concerned only resident spouses, while Cesena, with 66.7%, is at the opposite extreme. As regard the Italian couples, at the first place we find Forlì with 82.3%, at the last one, Rho (63.5%).

5. Conclusions and further steps

In the last thirty years, marriages have been progressively and continuously declining, net of short fluctuations due to cyclical factors. Despite this decline, getting married in Italy is still an important step in people's lives representing a crucial role in the process of family formation (Rosina and Fraboni, 2004).

The general idea is studying, in a longitudinal perspective, the choice of the location to get married changes over time of the foreign population in the last thirty decade.

The study has shown a variety in the geography of the places chosen for the celebration of marriages over the last thirty years, closely linked to the dynamics and stabilization of the migratory phenomenon on the national territory.

Particularly interesting is the connections between the place of celebration and the residence of the spouses. There seems to be a greater propensity by the foreign spouses to marry in place of their residence, while the Italian spouses show more mobility in the organization of the ceremony.

As further step the idea is, through descriptive and multidimensional analysis, to compare the profiles of the resident in Italy spouses over the time. In relation to Italian couples, particularly interesting could be to analyse if the spouses who choose a province other than that of their residence do it to return to their birth ones.

On the other hand as regard to foreign couples, it might be particularly interesting to observe if there is a correlation between citizenship and the choice of marrying in a different province from that of residence.

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