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SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON FAMILIES IN ITALY

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Why the family makes a difference with respect to lifestyles

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1. A Summary View

The empirical investigation conducted on the Italian population² has produced a huge amount of data, to the extent that an adequate discussion would require many volumes. In this final section, we are going to look at the summary of results with regard to our central theme, i.e., whether, in what sense, and to what degree the family is a social resource.

The original question to be answered is: do families, in one way or another, make a difference? We want to apprehend whether living in a different family environment makes a difference in the lives of individuals and for the quality of the social fabric. If it does, what are the differences? The methodological rule that guides us is: The family is known by its fruits.

Our main hypothesis is based on two points: first, we assume that there are *significant correlations* between the different socio-cultural family structures and the quality of people’s lives, their opinions, and human relations; second, we posit that these correlations indicate that the normally constituted family is a more valuable resource than the others for the social context. In short, suppose that building a family produces, in one way or another, different effects. Now, what are these effects?

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² The field survey was carried out by means of 3500 interviews with a representative sample of the entire Italian population, between ages 30 and 55, either married or not, living in a couple although not necessarily cohabiting under the same roof. The survey was conducted during the months of March-April 2011. For the different technical details (sampling, indices, etc.), see the Methodological Appendix of the Final Report (P. Donati ed., *Famiglia risorsa della società*. Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012).

As we shall see, our main hypothesis—that the normally constituted family is society’s best asset—is attested by the empirical data in a highly significant, very clear and eloquent manner.

2. The Types of Families

Let us examine, first of all, the results of the *Cluster Analysis*³ of the profile variables of the respondents (respondents means those who participated in the study with replies), through which we identify the most significant types of families in the population. Table 1 gives us a global synthesis.

Spontaneously, four different types of families emerge: single adults (alone or with children), couples without children (married or cohabiting), married couples with only one child, and married couples with two or more children. Let us consider their characteristics.

Type 1 (18.8%): Single adults (unmarried or single parents with children)

First, it is interesting to note that the *Cluster Analysis* puts the unmarried and single parents with one or more children in the same group. Their characteristics are very close. These consist in the fact that the couple is missing, and this fact strongly marks the familial status.

What are the features of this familial condition? *Predominantly*,⁴ it has the following characteristics: it is composed of young people between ages 30-35, scattered throughout the territory (with a certain concentration in the South, on the Islands and in Central Italy), who are single (unmarried), separated and divorced, widows, for the most part women, the majority of whom do not have children, although there is a minority of parents who live alone with their children and are still isolated because they cannot count on help from grandparents. Furthermore, the respondent has a high level of education (M.A. or higher), belongs to the socioeconomic upper-middle class, and reaches the end of the month with a more or less balanced budget; his/her political orientation is most often either extreme left or extreme right, and he/she has little or no religion. When he/she was a child, his/her parents were not married, but cohabiting.

Visibly, these people are not *materially poor*; on the contrary, their living standard is decent. Their poverty is essentially *relational*.

³ The *Cluster Analysis* provides us with the most significant groups of respondents for homogeneity of their characteristics, particularly family, social and cultural. The multidimensional analysis technique used was the Two-step Cluster Analysis, which finally covered a total of 2294 cases.

⁴ We emphasize that saying “predominantly” means identifying the strongest trends, from which individual cases or situations differ.

Type 2 (21.9%): The childless couples (married or cohabiting)

Even here we must note that the *Cluster Analysis* associates in one group formally married couples and those who cohabit simply because they are living together without children. Their characteristics are quite similar. This means that the childlessness has comparable effects on the sociological characteristics of the relationship in both married and unmarried cohabiting couples. They have something in common, regardless of their formal matrimonial status. If the couple, even when married, does not produce offspring, the marriage somehow loses importance. In other words, the children are the ones who qualify the relationship. Childlessness characterizes and structures the familial condition so strongly that this fact by itself reduces the couple's relationship. This must be considered as a reality that requires a specific analysis and cannot be defined only as a transitional form or a failure vis-à-vis the family with children.

Who is in this familial condition? Prevalently, the couple, is composed of young people between ages 30-35, residing primarily in central Italy, and is composed largely of separated and divorced individuals living with their partners and without children, so they are simple couples. The respondents have a high level of education (M.A. or higher), a higher socioeconomic status and are able to make savings in their family budget; they are politically inclined to the extreme left, with little or no religion. Finally, in their family of origin, the parents were only cohabiting (not married).

Table 1 - *The four most important sub-sets of Italian families from the viewpoint of the characteristics of the respondents (cluster analysis).*

Different familial types	Type 1 Single adults (<i>alone</i> and single parents with children) (18,8 %)	Type 2 Childless Couples (married or only cohabiting) (21,9 %)	Type 3 Married couples with one child (with a small number cohabiting) (28,4 %)	Type 4 Married couples with two or more children (with a small number cohabiting) (30,9 %)
Characteristics of the respondents				
Age	30-35	30-35	41-45	51-55
Geographical region of residence	Widespread (with a majority in the South-Islands-Center)	Central Italy	North East-North West	South-Islands
Marital status	Single (unmarried), separated, divorced, widows	Separated/divorced individuals living with a partner	Couples remarried one or more times	Couples married once
Composition of the family	One single adult, with or without children	Childless cohabiting or married couple	Childless married couple (97%)	Married couple with 2 or more children (97%)

Living with a partner	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of persons	1 single person (36,2%) or adult with children (63,8%)	2	3	More than 3
With children	The majority: no (but a minority: yes)	No	Yes	Yes
Education	<i>Laurea</i> or higher	<i>Laurea</i> or higher	Diploma <i>maturità</i> or <i>media inferiore</i>	Elementary or <i>media inferiore</i>
Can rely on grandparents for help	No	No	Yes	Yes
Socioeconomic class	Upper-middle	High	Middle	Low
The resources at the end of the month are (debts, equal, savings):	more or less equal	Able to make savings	Variable for one situation to the next	Obligated to indebtedness
Political tendency	Far left or the far right polarization	Far left	Center-right	Center-left
Considers himself/herself	Slightly or not at all	Slightly or not at all	Rather	Very
Parents marital status when he/she was a child	Only cohabiting	Only cohabiting	Grew up with one parent	Married parents

Legend: The first column lists the variables used for the identification of the *clusters*. The prevailing values of these variables are reported in the individual cells.

Type 3 (28.4%) married couples with one child

The third type is composed mainly of married couples with one child, although there is a small proportion of persons only living together (usually waiting to get married). What are the features of the subjects in this kind of family? Most of these people are between ages 41-45, and live mainly in the North of Italy (East and West); many are remarried one or more times, and have only one child in a 3-member family. They have an average degree (*baccalaureate* or middle school); they can rely on help from grandparents and belong to the socioeconomic middle class, with a family budget that varies from one situation to the next. Their political tendency is mostly center-right; they are rather religious, and were raised by a single parent.

As we can see, these are middle-class people, with average living standards; they believe in the family, even often after a failed marriage, they manifest attitudes that are restrictive vis-à-vis fertility, and their main guiding values are fairly ordinary.

Type 4 (30.9%): married couples with two or more children

The fourth type constitutes a relative majority and is composed mainly of married couples with two or more children. What are the characteristics of the subjects in this kind of family? Most of them are between ages 51-55; they reside mainly in the South and on the Islands, are married for the first time and live in larger families than persons in the other familial types. Their level of education is generally low (middle school and elementary); they belong to the low socioeconomic class, and usually have some debts at the end of the month. Their political tendency is center-left, they are very religious, and in their respective families of origin, their parents were married. Clearly, these are mature families in terms of the respondents' age, their stability and internal cohesion; they are very religious, with a higher degree of fertility, and they come from rather solid families. These are the normally constituted families. They can be found mainly in Southern Italy and in the most popular classes.

Table 1 is very interesting because it classes the respondents in social groups of *homogenous* families interviewed by prevalent characteristics, in such a way that it is possible to see a *linear* progression ranging from the weak and broken (type 1: 18.8%) to the more regular, stable and unified situations (type 4: 30.9%). In the center, we encounter family situations with some problems: in type 2 (21.9%), one of the fundamental pillars of the family is missing, i.e., the parental relationship (this affects mostly people who have experienced the breakdown of a previous marriage, who invest only in the couple). In type 3 (28.4%), family solidarity is precarious, either because of the experience of a failed marriage, or because the spouses are afraid of falling down the social scale and, therefore, restrict themselves to having only one child.

Generally, less than half of the Italian families (between 31 and 45%, depending on local circumstances) are normally constituted. As we shall see, however, it is precisely this group that has to bare in large part the weight of transmitting prosociability and social cohesion from one generation to the next.

3. Because the Family Makes a Difference

It's time now to see if and how these different types of families make a difference in the effects of the human and social climate, if and how they affect the internal relations within families, and if and how they affect the external relations of families with the outside world. The results are shown in Table 2.

Different familial types	Type 1 Single adults (<i>alone</i> and single parents with children) (18,8 %)	Type 2 Childless Couples (married or only cohabiting) (21,9 %)	Type 3 Married couples with one child (with a small number cohabiting) (28,4 %)	Type 4 Married couples with two or more children (with a small number cohabiting) (30,9 %)
Characteristics of the respondents				
15.1 There is trust in the family and toward the neighbors	Low	Low	Middle	High
15.2 The human climate in the family	Very pessimistic and sad	Rather pessimistic and sad	Rather optimistic and serene	Very optimistic and serene
15.3 The Rule of helping without demanding any rights or making claims on the family	Has very little importance	Has rather little importance	Has rather little importance	Is very important
15.4 In the family there are persons who help people outside the family	Few (lower than the average)	Many	Few	Rather a lot (a little above the average)

Legend: The first column lists the variables used for the identification of the *clusters*. The prevailing values of these variables are reported in the individual cells.

As can be seen from Table 2, the atmosphere within the family progressively improves as we pass from the conditions of those living alone, or of single parents, to larger, stable and normally constituted families.

As regards the internal relations:

- The climate is very pessimistic and sad in the family situations of single individuals and single parents, and it remains quite pessimistic and sad in childless couples; it becomes quite optimistic and serene in couples with one child, and is very optimistic and serene in married couples with two or more children. In short, the human climate is gradually improved as we go, *linearly*, from one type of family to the others (types 2, 3, and 4);

- The family rule *par excellence*, which is the gift (helping the family without claiming rights and credits), has very little value in type 1; its worth is relatively small in types 2 and 3. However, it is very important in type 4. This confirms the idea that normally constituted families, more than others kinds of families, are schools for the virtue of giving and generosity.

Regarding relations with the outside:

- Confidence in neighbors is low in types 1 and 2, but median and high respectively in types 3 and 4. Hence, even with regard to the creation of trust, just as in the case of the human climate, the normally constituted family is the best;

- More complex is the presence, in the family, of persons who help others outside the family; single individuals and single parents give little help, couples without children give much help (often to the elderly parents of one of the partners), and couples with one child give little help (this confirms their defensive and rather closed attitude). Married couples with two or more children do indeed help (the answer is “rather a lot” because of their higher internal work load).

In short, the family is happier and a greater source of trust and solidarity when it is composed of married parents with two or more children. In this kind of family, the atmosphere is calmer and optimistic, more trusting with respect to others, willing to help people to the extent that their loads of responsibility allow this, and in it the gift rule is very much alive.

We now want to ask: How do different family situations highlighted in Tables 1 and 2 correlate with the cultural orientations of the respondents regarding the concept of family?

We see this in Table 3. The results are very eloquent. The respondents show *opposed* cultural orientations, which go from the first to fourth type of family status with regard both to the public *vs.* private value of family and to the hetero *vs.* homo-sexual character of the couples. Individuals living alone or single parents say that the family is eminently a matter of personal choice, and also admit that the couple can be homosexual. People living in couples without children tend to favor the private rather than public value of family, and they admit that the couple can be homosexual. On the other hand, in married couples with one or more children, the orientations are reversed: in married couples with one child, the public character prevails over the private one and only the heterosexual married couple is considered truly a couple; in couples with two or more children, strong emphasis is put placed on the public value of family and only heterosexual couples are considered as such.

As for the third dimension of Table 3 (whether the education of children is a primary task of the parents or depends on society as a whole), there are no notable differences between the four types of family situations. However, while single parents and those with two or more children are a bit more inclined to consider it the primary responsibility of parents, couples without children or with only one child tend to attribute education more to the whole society. This confirms that types 2 and 3 are voluntarily more restrictive when it comes to having children and raising them (type 2 does not want them at all). It should be noted that 18% of respondents in this sampled group (412 of 2294) delegate the education of children to society.

Different familial types	Type 1 Single adults (<i>alone</i> and single parents with children) (18,8 %)	Type 2 Childless Couples (married or only cohabiting) (21,9 %)	Type 3 Married couples with one child (with a small number cohabiting) (28,4 %)	Type 4 Married couples with two or more children (with a small number cohabiting) (30,9 %)
Characteristics of the respondents				
16.1 The family is a social value or only a private affair	Only a question of personal choice	Rather a question of personal choice	Has more public than private value	Has great public value
16.2 To constitute a family the couple must be formed by a man and a woman or it can be homosexual	It can be homosexual	It can be homosexual	It must be composed of a man and a woman	It must be composed of a man and a woman
16.3 The education of the children is the primary responsibility of the parents or it must be that of society as a whole	Very slight differences (greater responsibility attributed to the parents)	Very slight differences (greater responsibility attributed to society)	Very slight differences (greater responsibility attributed to society)	Very slight differences (greater responsibility attributed to the parents)

Legend: The first column lists the variables used for the identification of the *clusters*.

The prevailing values of these variables are reported in the individual cells.

Very succinctly, we can define now the quality of the four identified family conditions (Table 4):

1) Single individuals (type 1) living in a marginal condition and depressed in the relational perspective, even though they enjoy good economic conditions (high or medium socioeconomic status, surplus of the family budget);

- 2) The childless couple (type 2) is centered on individual well-being in their totally private and horizontal shared life, with no commitment to generational turnover;
- 3) the married couple with one child (type 3) is a stable familial condition but restrictive in fertility and prosocial engagement; it tends to defend its own welfare, avoids taking risks and considers the family a resource as long as it is not too costly; and
- 4) the married couple with two or more children (type 4) is the most stable familial status, open to prosocial interaction and has a sense of its public function; it constitutes the relative majority (but only slightly) of those who see the family as a resource—especially a relational one—for themselves and for others.

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
Different familial types	Single adults (<i>alone</i> and single parents with children) (18,8 %)	Childless Couples (married or only cohabiting) (21,9 %)	Married couples with one child (with a small number cohabiting) (28,4 %)	Married couples with two or more children (with a small number cohabiting) (30,9 %)
Characteristics of the respondents				
Overall social quality of the family type	Marginal family status (depressed and anomic in private)	Family condition of good private standing of the couple	Stable family condition, but restrictive in fertility and prosocial commitment, in an unstable balance between public and private	Stable family condition, open to prosocial responsibility and with a sense of its public function
How and to what degree the family is a resource	The family is absent or weak and fragile (individuals alone and with relational poverty)	The family is centered on individual well-being within a “restrictive” couple	The family as a resource as long as it is not too costly and demanding	Relative majority of families who rely on family as a resource for oneself and for others

It is not difficult to interpret these results. They confirm the fact that, in Italy, *the family is heavily penalized*. Those who have no or few children are materially better off, but they have the worst conditions in terms of human relations. Conversely, families who bear the weight of generational turnover enjoy a better climate in the family relationships, but they pay for it with economic costs that are a challenge. If the family is hardly valued as a social resource, this is due to the fact that society (and especially the political-administrative system) does not consider it a resource. Whoever believes and invests in the family is left isolated. In this sense, we can say that *the family constantly makes a bigger difference between those who prefer human relationships and those who prefer material wealth*.

4. From Family to Family: Who Transmits Prosocial Values and Behavior?

Let's take a look at the influence of the family in the generational transmission of prosocial values and behavior. Our question is this: does the fact of having been married or only cohabiting parents have a significant correlation with the social virtues of the children who are now adults and build their family? The responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Intersection between marital status of the respondent's parents when he/she was child and the present prosocial behavior of the respondent and of his family (the sign \pm indicates a degree higher or lower than average; in brackets the average values range from 0 to 10 in each cell)

Marital status of the respondent's parents	When the respondent and his family now help people outside the family:			
	Listens and helps them with their personal problems	Helps them with their problems in the couple and the family	Cares for other people's children (housing them, helping with homework, etc.)	Takes care of elderly persons
Married	+ (6,91)	+ (6,50)	+ (5,65)	+ (5,39)
Only cohabiting	- (6,87)	+ (6,85)	+ (5,94)	- (5,25)
Respondent grew up with only one parent	- (6,24)	- (6,00)	- (4,74)	- (4,62)
Average	6,88	6,48	5,61	5,35
F (sig.)	9,41 (.000)	4,92 (.007)	9,32 (.000)	6,00 (.003)

We see that children who since the beginning grew up with married parents have greater prosocial behavior than those who grew up with just one parent or with cohabiting parents. This result affects all recorded dimensions of prosociality: listening and helping others to overcome

their personal problems; helping them with problems in their couples and families; and taking care of other children and the elderly.

As the distance from the normally constituted family (i.e., married parents with children) increases, the prosocial behavior of families in the next generation weakens. The fact of couples just cohabiting, and especially raising children alone, contributes to this generational gap. This is not meant as a personal criticism of anyone, but non-biased empirical data suggests that raising children alone does not foster their prosociality as adults.

Let us consider the transmission of moral virtues. Table 6 confirms and articulates even better the findings in Table 5.

As we see in Table 6, when the parents in the family of origin were married, there was a positive transmission of virtue in all its dimensions, i.e., honesty and respect for the law, trust and acceptance of others, as well as an ability to sacrifice for others and to help them for free. Inversely, the transmission *was very deficient when the parents were just living together* and even *completely negative for all the virtues if the respondent grew up with a single parent.* The indices of association (F) are highly significant (see Table 5). The results could not be more eloquent.

Table 6 - Intersection between marital status of the respondent's parents in his/her family of origin and the transmission of moral values to the respondent (the sign \pm indicates a degree higher or lower than average; in brackets the average values range from 0 to 10 in each cell)

	When the family of origin has transmitted to the respondent the following moral virtues:		
(d14) Marital status of the respondent's parents when he/she was a child:	(d35) Honesty and respect for the law	(d36) Trust in others, even strangers, and acceptance of others	(d37) Ability to make sacrifices for others and to help them for free
Married	+ (8,40)	+ (7,14)	+ (7,45)
Only cohabiting	- (7,25)	- (7,00)	+ (7,57)
Respondent grew up with only one parent	- (7,58)	- (6,30)	- (6,71)
Average	8,35	7,10	7,42
F (sig.)	25,90 (.000)	14,70 (.000)	13,61 (.000)

We asked respondents whether, in their view, today's family is capable of transmitting the social virtues to a greater or lesser extent than the previous generation, i.e., that of their parents. This question is answered by the results shown in Table 7. The data is clear: the weakening of the normally constituted family is accompanied by a decrease in the ability of couples to convey the

moral virtues to their children (d38). Table 7 (intersection between d38 and d14) confirms the judgments that emerged in Table 6.

The respondents whose parents were married perceive a greater trans-generational degradation, while those whose parents were cohabiting, or who grew up with only one parent, believe that the family is able to convey moral values to children to the same degree or even better than before. Interestingly, those who grew up with a single parent, and now have families of their own, say that today's family is more capable of transmitting virtues (cf. Tab. 7).

How should we interpret this result? In our view, this result can be interpreted by saying that those who come from situations of family deprivation are now in a better state because they succeeded building a more complete and stable family. This proves that, under certain conditions, *human beings have the ability to recover the values and virtues that their parents transmitted to them.*

Table 7 - Intersection between marital status of the respondent's parents in the family of origin and the ability of today's family (as perceived by the respondent) to generate the virtues, i.e. honesty, respect for others, trust, sacrifice and generosity, in Table 6 (% by row)

d38 Compared to the time of his parents, the family now is more or less capable of generating the moral virtues in people?				
Marital status of the respondent's parents when he/she was a child:	Less capable	Just as capable	More capable	Total
• Married	43,1	44,0	12,9	100,0
• Only cohabiting	40,3	49,3	10,4	100,0
• The respondent grew up with only one parent	39,3	33,1	27,6	100,0
Average total	42,9	43,6	13,5	100,0
Pearson Chi-square 27,36 df 4 sig. .000				

5. A Few Thoughts (Not Representative) Concerning Stable Homosexual Couples

Debate today is highly sensitive to the presence of gay couples and pays more attention to them. The reader might therefore ask: what about homosexual couples? How many respondents say that they live in stable homosexual couples? What are the characteristics of such couples?

The considerations that we can present here are very limited. We mention homosexual couples here essentially just to avoid being accused of ignoring the problem. In our sample, the absolute number of those who claim to be in a stable homosexual couple is 27 out of 3527 respondents, i.e., 0.77% of the total population. Not having done a representative sample in this respect, we

cannot draw any certain conclusions. However, we note that the figure does not differ much from the official statistics reported for other modernized countries:

Percentage of homosexual couples in some countries:

Country	%	Year	Sources of the statistics
Germany	0,30	2009	Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland
Australia	0,40	2006	Statistical Office of Australia
Brazil	0,15	2010	Censo Demográfico
Canada	0,60	2006	Census, Ottawa, Statistics Canada
USA	0,94	2009	American Community Survey
Italy	0,77	2011	This research

From a purely exploratory viewpoint, and more as a stimulus for further investigations, we ask: What are the profile characteristics of stable homosexual couples? In our sample, which—as already stated—is not representative of the universe of gay couples, 56% of the gay couples are couples of males partners and 44% are couples of female partners. They are mostly young adults between ages 30 and 40 (67%), considerably fewer over age forty (30%) and few indeed (4%) between ages 50 and 51 years of age. The geographical distribution is fairly even (30% in the North, 33% in the Center, and 37% in the South). Most have never been married (74%), but just over one quarter are divorced or separated (26%). The majority lives without children (56%), a good proportion living alone (37%), and a small portion (4%) with a child from a previous marriage or with other relatives (4%). They only in part live with their partners (56%), while a good proportion (44%) usually do not live under the same roof. 93% are childless, and only 7% of these people have children who are now over 15 years old (these are people who were married and then they formed a gay couple). As to the level of education, most of them have the *maturità* (52% - *general end-of-school exam for 18 year-olds*), but some have the *laurea* (*degree*) or a higher degree (18%), while others (30%) have the *licenza media inferiore* (*school education for 11 to 15 year-olds*). With respect to a profession, most are self-employed (44%), a smaller number are employed in the private sector (33%), and there is a small proportion of housewives (12%). From an economic standpoint, they are substantially wealthy: 81% are able to make some savings or break even at the end of the month, while only a minority has some debts (19%).

Still, from the perspective of knowledge at the exploratory stage, despite the unrepresentative percentage of homosexual couples in this study, we can ask about the political opinions and religious orientations of those living in stable homosexual couples. The distributions, as shall be said, are especially polarized in one direction or another.

Their political orientation is predominantly on the left (54%), with a right-wing minority (23%) and others centrist (23%). The majority of these people have little or no religion: 4% are very religious, 19% quite religious, 27% not religious, and in 50% of cases not religious at all. Among those who say that they have a religion, 77% adhere to the Catholic Church, 8% to another Christian denomination, and 15% to other religions. In most cases (about 75%), those who confess a religion say that they attend the rites of precept of the religion only on special occasions (weddings, funerals, solemnities) a few times a year.

By comparison with heterosexual couples, what can we say about the conditions of their family life and the intergenerational transmission of moral virtues in homosexual couples?

Generally speaking, it seems that the lives of homosexuals are more problematic and the generational transmission of moral virtues more critical than for others. Let us look at Table 8 (with its four sections: a, b, c, and d).

a) Let us first consider the characteristics of the living conditions. In homosexual couples, in comparison to heterosexual couples, the respondents say they trust their neighbors less; the human climate is sadder and more pessimistic in the couple; they look towards the family members to claim credits and rights rather than with the sense that they should help them; and they give less aid to strangers and participate less in associative activities.

b) With regard to the views and value orientations on the family, we note that respondents in homosexual couples prevalently want much more privacy (family as an exclusively personal choice); it is strongly denied that the couple should be between a man and a woman, while the education of children is always considered a primary task of the parents.

c) What was the cultural transmission of moral virtue from the family of origin like? In general, we see that homosexuals express a significantly poorer transmission of moral virtue from their parents: they received less education in honesty and respect for the law, less capacity to trust others, and less capacity to sacrifice for others and freely help those in need.

d) In the answers to the question about the family's ability to convey the moral virtues, today in comparison with the past, it is interesting to note that homosexuals tend to have more extreme views of the media. They perceive today's family partly as less capable and, in part, as more capable of conveying moral virtues, while those who perceive today's family as equally capable decrease dramatically.

<i>a) Characteristics of the cohabitation in which the respondent lives (average scores from 0 to 10):</i>			
	Homo- sexual	Hetero- sexual	Hetero-homo difference (average scores)
Trust in the neighbor	5,93	7,01	+ 1,08 (7,00)
The climate is more optimistic and serene than pessimistic and sad	6,89	7,59	+ 0,70 (7,58)
The persons feel that that should help others rather than demand credits and rights from them	6,15	7,32	+ 1,17 (7,31)
There are persons in the family who give time to help others outside	5,04	6,04	+ 1,00 (6,03)
There are persons who take part in associative activities (social, cultural, political, religious)	4,19	4,98	+ 0,79 (4,97)
<i>b) Respondent's opinions about the family (in % of the homosexual and heterosexual total):</i>			
	Homo- sexual	Hetero- sexual	% of the sample total
The family is only a question of personal choice	73,1	59,0	-14,1 (59,1)
A family must be composed of a man and a woman	33,3	74,9	+41,6 (74,6)
The education of the children if the primary responsibility of the parents (rather than that of society as a whole)	76,0	80,0	+4,0 (80,0)
<i>c) The cultural transmission of the family of origin (average scores from 0 to 10)</i>			
	Homosexual 1	Heterosexual 1	Difference (average scores)
To what extent his/her family of origin taught honesty and respect for the law	7,67	8,35	+0,68 (8,35)
To what extent the family of origin was able to transmit trust in others	5,67	7,11	+1,44 (7,10)
To what extent the family of origin was able to transmit the capacity to make sacrifices for others and to help the needy for free	6,15	7,43	+1,28 (7,42)
<i>d) Comparison with the past (% of the sample total)</i>			
	%	%	Difference (average %)
Compared to the time of his/her parents, today the family is less able to convey the moral virtues	56,5	42,8	-13,7 (42,9)
Compared to the time of his parents, today the family is just as capable	26,1	43,7	+17,6 (43,6)
Compared to the time of his parents, today the family is better able to convey the moral virtues	17,4	13,5	-3,9 (13,5)

The marital status of parents is a factor that does not significantly differ between homosexuals and heterosexuals. In fact, the percentage of people who grew up with married parents is almost the same (92% for homosexuals and 94% for heterosexuals). It may be noted that among those who grew up with only one parent, the percentage of homosexuals is a bit higher (8%) than heterosexuals (4%), but the smallness of the sample does not allow us to make generalizations.

6. When the Family is a Social Resource

An analysis of empirical data conducted through the technique of *multidimensional scaling*⁵ reveals that the positively most decisive variables on the effects of the family's ability to be a resource for people and society are, in order: 1) the family size, 2) the number of children, 3) the willingness to care for the elderly, and 4) child care.

As families become smaller, more fragmented, and have fewer children, *in the socio-cultural transmission, the willingness to take care of the elderly and children unrelated to one's family is lost. The predominant attitude is the desire for self-realization, privatized and centered in the individual couple. The family ceases to have social value and, thus, loses its value as a resource for individuals and for society.* Certainly those who live in conditions other than the normally constituted family can have prosocial values and behavior. In fact, there is a certain portion of respondents of this kind who take care of others. However, the difference is that this action is oriented more to sharing problems, deficiencies, critical situations, and/or social pathologies, than the pursuit of a successful project. The weakness and fragmentation of the family culture is shared, but this does not produce *more family*. What binds together and connects the four factors just evoked that characterize the family's ability to be a social resource? The comparative analysis of different family forms shows that the factor that gives strength and cohesion to the family is *marriage*. Of course, its value does not, per se, come from the commitment to a formal contract, be it religious and/or civil, but comes from the spiritual and moral content that substantiate it. We can see this in Table 9, which crosses the marital status of respondents with the prosocial moral virtues, lived in their family.

It appears that only families in which the partners are married (not divorced or separated and non-celibate/unmarried) show above-average positive values. The other family members all show little (below average) interest in the problems of others and trying to help them. A special case is represented by widows, who have higher than average values only in the care for the elderly. No table could more eloquently explain the value of social capital that exists in marriage, which is the point/moment when the social fabric among the people is bound and gives life to those conditions that alone permit the generation of children and cultural transmission of moral virtue, but also promote solidarity in local social networks. This does not mean, of course, that all marriages are equal or have the same value merely because they are formalized.

⁵ This is a technique that allows us to analyze the strength of connections between variables close to each other and, so, to identify groupings of significant variables.

We could present many other tables that compare the family types with one another and show their differences.

Table 9 - *The quality of family forms according to the marital status of respondents (averages scores from 0 to 10)*

d1 Respondent's Marital status	d40.1 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to overcome their personal problems	d40.2 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to overcome their family problems	d40.3 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to care for their children	d40.4 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to care for the elderly
Single	6,89	6,45	5,24	5,16
Married for the first time	6,97	6,57	5,88	5,51
Remarried (one or more times)	6,73	6,36	5,92	5,61
Separated / divorced and living alone	6,41	6,02	4,76	4,74
Separated / divorced and living with another partner	6,53	6,38	5,28	4,91
Widow	6,70	6,09	5,20	5,54
Average Total	6,88	6,48	5,61	5,35
F (sig.)	5,10 (.000)	2,87 (.000)	12,66 (.000)	5,54 (.000)

It may be that, in the eyes of some, these results say little. It may seem like a truism. This is, however, not the case in today's cultural climate. We know that to a great extent public opinion has different views and other beliefs. We hope that our analysis, based on the objective reality of the facts, i.e., the social effects that are produced in one way or another by the family, will not be rejected for purely ideological reasons.

7. An Annotation about the Survey on Religiosity

People's religiosity is one of the most significant and discriminating variables, if not the most important (as is evidenced by the associative indices F and their significance). In this overview, it will suffice to consider how the variable of religiosity affects the prosocial moral virtues of families.

In Table 10, we observe a result of exceptional clarity. All, and only, the families of (very or fairly) religious people show above-average positive values in the scores relative to the prosocial virtues of the families themselves. By contrast, the scores of families with few or no religious people are below average. The associative indices (F) are very high, and all are significant with the highest

probability (.000). An even more striking fact is the tendency of prosocial virtues to decrease when religion decreases; this trend is surprisingly regular and linear.

A cell-by-cell commentary of Table 10 would reveal many things, but our space is limited.

Many other tables could show that the religiosity of the people is the basis of the most significant differences between the familial forms. This research confirms what has been noted by the *European Values Survey* about the positive correlation between the degree of people's religiosity (measured on this basis of membership declared by the respondent and his attendance at the rites) and their happiness (measured with indicators of feelings of serenity and satisfaction in life).⁶ People who are married and believers have higher levels of happiness and satisfaction in life than the others.

This, hence, confirms that *there is a close tie between marriage and religion, and that this relationship makes the human qualities flourish*. Moreover, our investigation has shown in detail how and why religion is a source of social cohesion and social capital, precisely through the mediation of the normally constituted family.

	d40.1 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to overcome their personal problems	d40.2 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to overcome their family problems	d40.3 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to care for their children	d40.4 Extent to which he/she and the family help people outside to care for the elderly
d11 Degree of the respondent's religiosity:				
Very religious	7,67	7,26	6,70	6,45
Rather religious	7,17	6,74	5,97	5,74
Not very religious	6,62	6,30	5,31	4,97
Not religious at all	6,20	5,70	4,71	4,49
Average Total	6,89	6,48	5,63	5,36
F (sig.)	65,38 (.000)	50,88 (.000)	57,28 (.000)	57,73 (.000)

8. Open Problems Relative to the Culture of the Family in Italy: There is a Large Lack of Reflexivity

⁶ Cf. E. Williams, L. Francis and A. Village, "Marriage, Religion and Human Flourishing: How Sustainable is the Classic Durkheim Thesis in Contemporary Europe?," in *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, vol. 13, n. 1, 2010.

To demonstrate the validity of our analysis, with regard to cultural traits of the Italian family and the problems it manifests in reflexive connection with the various dimensions of family life, we present a *multidimensional scaling* diagram (Figure 1). This diagram shows four polarities along the two horizontal axes (dimension 2) and two vertical axes (dimension 1), which identify four latent variables.⁷

(i) Let us look at the central axis.

(G) Center right polarity: there are the variables relative to the number of children (D4C), the public value of the family (d16.1), the amplitude of the family (d3), and the index of religiosity; this cluster of factors identifies the *objective* sense, the concrete, physical weight, so to speak, of the family, which is strongly associated with the religious sense and the sense of the family's public value.

(L) Center left polarity: the variables are related to the virtues transmitted by the respondent's family of origin (honesty and respect for the law (d35), trust in others (d36), capacity for sacrifice and freely helping others (d37)), and also related to the life-style within the family (trust in neighbors(d15.1), a more optimistic and serene climate (d15.2), and the capacity for mutual gifting (d15.3), together with the value of family as an institution for the development of the country (d39.6). This latter cluster identifies the family's ethical sense, its *ethos* in the life-world. It is very interesting to note that this group identifies latent variable factors entirely separate from the family's physical dimension and public weight, situated completely at the opposite end of the horizontal axis. This means that having a large family with several children and being very religious does *not necessarily* accompany the ethical sense of the family. Certainly, these two dimensions can also be combined (and this does happen in a number of cases), but in principle the characteristics are entirely distinct in their nature.

(ii) Let us look at the vertical axis.

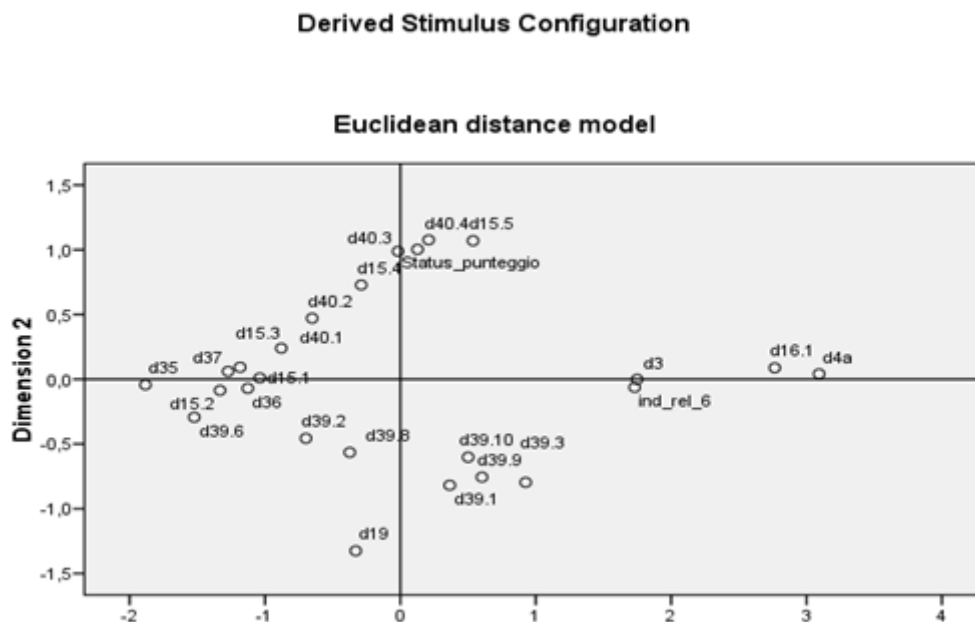
(A) Upper vertical polarity: here we find the variables related to social status (higher education and employment), the care of children (d40.3) and of the elderly (d40.4) unrelated to the family, the help given by family members to people outside the nucleus (d15.4), and the participation of

⁷ This is a note for the reader familiar with relational sociology. The symbols G, L, A, and I identify the latent variables that we can understand as dimensions of the relational schema AGIL (G = realization of the family as a set objective; L = ethical sense of the family; A = adaptation outside; and I = internal normativity of the family). Note that, among the many observations that could be made, the internal normativity is linked to the external normativity (sense of the institutions), which is distinguished by the degree of religiosity, which, in turn, is distinct from the family's sense of the moral virtues. A thousand considerations could be presented here, in terms of culture and family education, because the normally constituted family shows itself to be not only a formal fact, but also a substantial one, i.e., a form that encourages humanizing relationships.

family members in associative (social, cultural, religious, political) activities (d15.5). This cluster of variables identifies the opening of the family to the outside world, in the public sphere, especially in wealthy families. Listening and offering help to unrelated persons, to help them overcome their personal (d40.1) or family (d40.2) problems, are placed between poles L and A.

(I) Lower vertical polarity: first, we find the variable indicating the importance of being married rather than cohabiting (d19) and then a series of variables that are related to the importance attributed to certain institutions, primarily: the Church (d39. 1), the government (d39.10), the media (d39.9), the political system (d39.3), schools (d39.2), and the police force (d39.8) in the middle between polarities L and I. This cluster identifies the normativity of the family (its being based on marriage) that accompanies the sense of social institutions and their importance in society. We see then that the family's institutional sense is "taken for granted," i.e., it is a latent dimension quite distinct from the other latent dimensions (the family's "physical" weight, the family ethos, the involvement and participation of the family in the public sphere).

Figure 1 (multidimensional scaling)

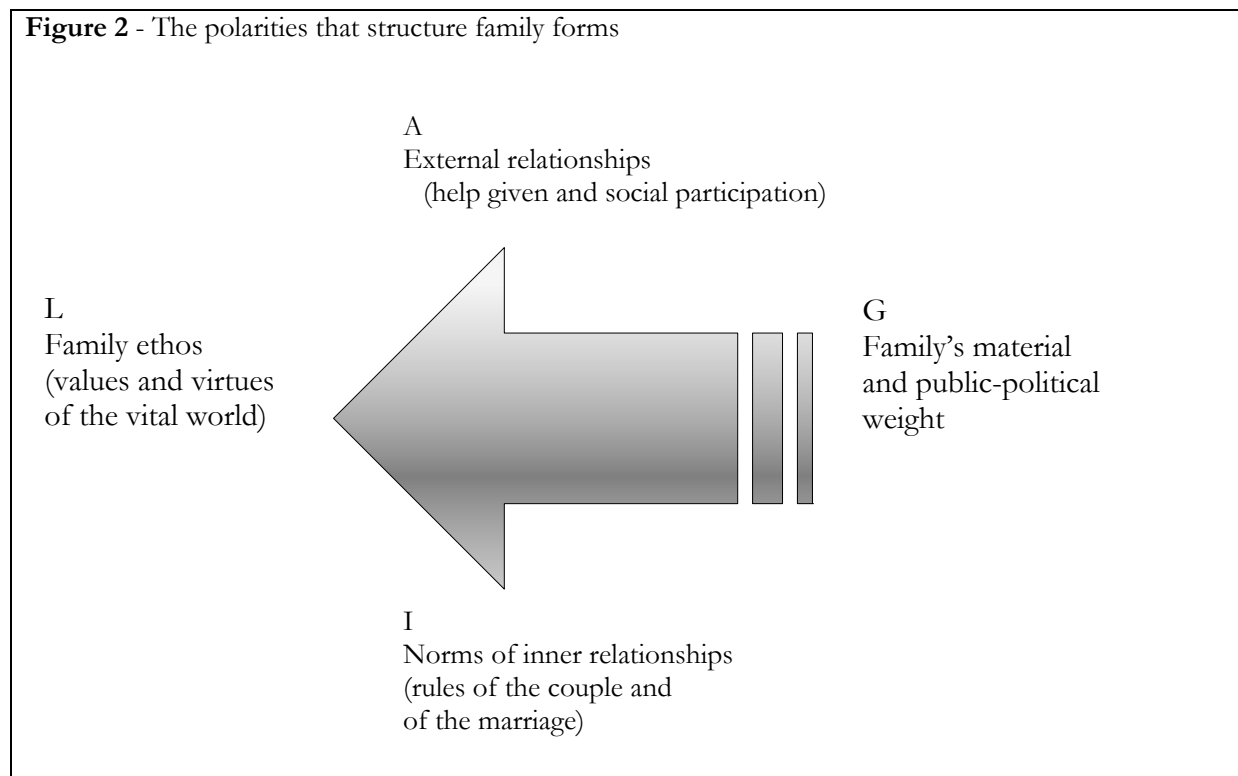


Note: S-Stress = 0,166; Rsq = 0,919. n=3.198

It will be noted that Figure 1 has the structure of an arrow \rightarrow with the tip pointing from right to left on the horizontal axis, that is, the right central polarity (G) to the left central polarity (L) and with two wings, namely the lower vertical polarity of the institutional sense of family (I) and

upper vertical polarity of its participation in the outer, public sphere (A). This is shown in Diagram 2.

Since these four poles are clearly distinct from each other, it can be deduced that: (i) the family springs from a sense of the inter-subjectivity of relationships of a life world (L, ethos), (ii) may be more or less open to the outside, in terms of aid and other social participation (A), (iii) may adhere to a more or less institutional normative order with regard to the rules of marriage and the life of the couple (I), and (iv) in order to be generative, and to materialize a concrete project, it needs a strong religious sentiment and a greater awareness of its public functions, which leads it to a normally constituted form. These dimensions always have problems of integration because they do not necessarily converge with each other.



In short, the direction of the arrow indicates that the Italians tend (this is a majority tendency) to feel, represent and live the family as a private reality, of affective, intimate relationships, keeping it separate from its public value, and also from religion (which, therefore, shows a predominantly intimate and ritual, though private, character). That the family may be more or less institutionalized in marriage, and more or less involved in networks of solidarity and social participation, is an idea and a fact that has little to do with thinking that it has public and religious foundations. This possibility exists, but is enacted only for a minority.

In sociological terms, this means that the Italians have a low degree of inner reflectivity and of socio-cultural reflexivity with regard to family life. This consideration should not be underestimated. The normally constituted family with children turns out to be a much greater social resource than other family forms, but we must not fail to mention the fact that it has a basically defensive character and is protective of its members, i.e., it has a strong reproductive character, but is hardly open to what is new, rather unwilling to imagine and pursue new horizons that do not appeal to the affections and interests of the small group.

The normally constituted family has the advantages of virtue and shows them, but this does not mean that all is well there, and that, by the mere fact of normality, it always produces positive external effects. Even in the normally constituted family, there are major difficulties in linking together internal solidarity and active participation in society. Reconciling internal and external good requires mature reflection, and Italian families show that they reflect very little, and, indeed, less and less in proportion to the processes of fragmentation of the family. The connection between internal and external solidarity, as well as private virtues and public virtues, is limited to a few families. This is where the religious factor plays a role, because it is visibly the largest and best religion that fosters the capacity to live the internal bonds in a transcendent way, i.e., it knows how to capture the social value that internal solidarity has for the “Others,” for the external society. However, only a few have such a lifestyle.

In particular, Italian families greatly lack the capacity of relating public/private qualities, religious /non-religious qualities, subjective/objective qualities, and so on, with the family. For those who think it worthwhile investing in the family as a social resource, the most urgent cultural task is to increase the reflexivity of individuals, couples and families, by clarifying and strengthening the capacity to connect the polar dimensions of the family (summarized in Figure 2).⁸

9. Responses to the Postmodern Theory

In Chapter 1, Section 2.3, we listed the assumptions of postmodern culture on the progress of the family. We will now briefly comment on them in light of the empirical results.

(a) *The hypothesis of a radical change of what is expected from the family* is not proven, except by a minority of the population. The majority would like to get married when young, have children, and live permanently with their spouse. If this does not happen, it is because the opportunities

⁸ Cf. Pierpaolo Donati, *Sociologia della riflessività. Come si entra nel dopo-moderno*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011, Part I, ch. 3.

are not offered by society, and these opportunities are lacking mainly because the material weight of the family is ignored in the public and political life.

(b) *The hypothesis of a deinstitutionalization of the couple's love* is also hardly verified, given that the (heterosexual) couple remains an ideal and an alternative model-guide to building the family in any other way.

(c) *The hypothesis that the woman's role tends to be more central, driving the innovation in family life*, was empirically confirmed with respect to the family forms that deviate from the normally constituted family. In other words, the feminine *gender* becomes an increasingly important factor in classifying the familial forms; however, the woman assumes a more central role, especially when the family breaks down, falls apart or is socially weak. Her centrality does not imply better living conditions, but often means carrying more responsibility in the most unfavorable conditions of life.

(d) *The hypothesis of couples negotiating more and more* is not particularly significant in the Italian context, precisely because the couple's relationship is experienced primarily in sentimental and emotional terms, far from rational and contractual calculations.

(e) *The hypothesis of an explosion of family structures* is partially verified, since a pluralization of the family forms has indeed emerged that challenges the centrality of the cohabiting, heterosexual married couple. The latter still occupies a central position from a statistical and regulatory point of view or as a life-style. However, other structures are growing strongly. These latter structures, nevertheless, did not demonstrate the same validity in constituting resources for society.

10. The Future Scenario: Considerations of the Maximum

The empirical findings of this research have revealed tremendous fragmentation and great weakening weighing down on Italian families. These trends were well known. This is not news. It was not our primary purpose to pause in order to make this observation, but to go well beyond it. We wanted to determine whether, in the context of social change, the normally constituted family is no longer necessary because other life-styles can replace the social virtues, or if what could be more virtuous in society still rather depends on the family, which is based on marriage and filiation.

The end result says that the normally constituted family is still the primary force in the country, although it is becoming a minority. So we can say that a minority of strong families must bear the burden of social cohesion, which is thrown into a crisis by tendencies of individualism and privatism supported by the political administrative system, and, of course, by the market. Viewed as a whole, the Italian couples appear to be very restrictive with respect to fertility and the

problems related to generational transmission. Religion still has the task of supporting the prosocial moral virtues of persons and of the family, but for how long? Moreover, are people still willing to refer to religion as a spiritual and cultural reference that, more than any other (as the empirical data revealed), gives a sense of life and meaningful content to the family?

The answers to these questions need to be placed in the scenario of the morphogenetic society that is coming in leaps and bounds. Morphogenetic society means the advent of a social fabric that tends to change constantly and to produce ever new relationships, new family forms and new life-styles.

In a morphogenetic society, the variability (life-style, possible options, etc.) is expected to increase. Consequently, individuals and institutions will be confronted with increasing demands to make choices, i.e., to select among alternatives. Obviously, they can also decide not to choose, i.e., to adopt a position of indifference toward different possibilities; but this will create an even more uncertain and risky condition, with greater likelihood of negative outcomes in terms of needs to be fulfilled and of a happy life. The fact is that, in terms of morphogenesis in society, we all must confront a new reflexive imperative: we must become more reflective and learn to handle more complex situations that require new forms of reflexivity,⁹ if we want to improve rather than worsen our quality of life. People must make more choices than before, and the choices become more difficult because the conditions imply greater uncertainty and risk. This also happens for the public institutions that must make decisions about standards and social rules that legitimize certain behaviors and family forms, hence, necessarily though not intentionally, favoring some and disadvantaging others.

This research is intended to contribute to science-based knowledge so that the public and private decisions can take account of the fact that the various family structures contribute differentially to the humanization of people and of the social fabric. In other words, the results of this survey should be read and interpreted as broad indications of the different outcomes that every choice involves. As we have seen, the normally constituted family still has value as a social resource that other more or less family-like forms do not. We believe that this has been fully demonstrated. Simultaneously, we tried to highlight what leads to choosing a certain type of family rather than another (we refer to the types 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Table 1, with the underlying sub-types, which, for reasons of space, we could not comment upon at length here).

Thus, we have provided the elements for a judgment on the future scenario, which will inevitably be marked by a huge variety of family forms. Many people do not know how to give precise value

⁹ Cf. P. Donati, *Sociologia della riflessività*, op. cit., Part II, chapters 5, 6 and 7.

judgments to these trends, because they cannot say whether this is historical and socio-cultural progress or regression.

On the basis of a large representative sample of the Italian population, we believe we have demonstrated that the overall trend is regressive; but there are also forces working in the opposite direction. It is not so much that the strength of the traditional family is emphasized, but the data suggests that even in the post-modern climate and coming from troubled families, without wishing to return to an impossible past, it is possible to create a truly new family relationality. We found that people, from deprived family situations, are able to start a family with unexpected positive social and moral values. We have identified that groups of families, facing the challenges of the *liquid society*, are capable of taking the decision to go towards a new culture of the family as a basic resource and value of the society.

There are two issues that this research indicates as decisive for the future: the fecundity of the couple and the specificity of marriage as a social relationship.

(I) The number of children was found to be the most decisive discriminating factor for the existence of a strong family. Families are resources for the individual and for society, if and to the extent that they are open to life and have children. The humanization of the person will be more and more accomplished through the experience of filiation. The cohesion of the social fabric will depend on the human and social capital of families, and this capital depends in turn mainly on the number of children. We confirm, therefore, that household wealth is dependent upon the children, beyond having one child. The present study shows that this wealth comes from the relationships that the children create. In fact, the relationships are greater and different from simple cognitive skills because they indicate the ability to give and receive confidence; we can cooperate with others, as well as learn and practice the rules of the gift and reciprocity, which are the social virtues on which the life of society reposes. Of course, the children have a cost: it is necessary to devote materials and time to their care. However, their presence creates relational goods, not otherwise obtainable, that exceed the costs. This does not imply, as many economists argue, just investing in young people for the reasons of utility to society.¹⁰ As this research shows,

¹⁰ This is the argument mainly of North American economists. For example, J. J. Heckman and D. Masterov (cfr. “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children,” in: *Review of Agricultural Economics*, 29, 2007, pp. 446-493) proposed the equation: “+ investment in educational resources for families, especially those disadvantaged = + support to development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills of children = + long term gain of the society, because it allows having more capable and productive citizens.” This approach, apart from its obvious utilitarian character, does not highlight the real wealth created by children, which is the relational climate that emerges within the family and in the family’s surroundings.

the very substance of the family is at stake in the presence/absence of children. The family's wealth lies in its structure and dynamic relationships. When the family is normally constituted, the goods which it creates do not limit their effects to its immediate field, but are poured into society. (II) Marriage proved to be the second most discriminating factor of how the family is and can become a social resource. This is so not only because marriage is, in most cases, the necessary complement of that which is subsidiary. Marriage is a decision strongly related to whether people want children, but also because marriage is *authenticated* in the children, i.e., it becomes true and authentic with their children. An only child narrows the potential of the marriage relationship; it reduces the wealth. The childless couple tends to withdraw in on itself and runs the risk of individualistic narcissism. Of course, there are many couples who are wealthy because they are childless, precisely because they have time to devote to participation in the public sphere. However, as the *multidimensional scaling analysis* revealed, these pairs are generally poor in primary relationships and what it reflects is the potential of humanity.

Special attention should be paid to (the first) marriage because of the tendency to put it off to increasingly advanced ages, not only for youth, but also for older people. This is a phenomenon of enormous scope because it implies that marriage is seen not as the relationship (the meaningful bond) that founds the family, but as the byproduct of a situation that already exists. This trend reflects long-term influences, which are bound to spread, such as the uncertainties concerning youth, a sense of immaturity and lack of preparation for marriage, and seeing marriage as the consecration of a commitment already lived.

All of this means that *marriage is taking on more and more the character of a family transition*. One might say, it is no longer an *a priori* and punctual choice, accomplished at a certain time, but rather it becomes the fruit of a long process of maturation, in many cases increasingly slow and uncertain. This process will be better understood in the future. Marriage should be a kind of project, but one that requires a social context that permits it. The project must have its means, rules and ultimate values. Clarifying these issues—in a world that is becoming increasingly unstable, contingent and risky—is the task awaiting the person who knows or feels that the family is society's primary resource. But the favorable environment will not emerge unless it is activated by a new quality in the reflective capacity of individuals, couples, local communities, and religious communities. Reflexivity must leave behind individualistic subjectivism, which today is everywhere, in order to become reflexive about good relations. Blessed is the couple that gets married not only because there is a feeling of mutual love, but because the partners are able to thematize and maintain the good relationship that they want to generate and what it entails. For this, the adoption of the relational reflexivity is necessary.

Fortunate are those who do not get married because they have fallen prey to infatuation, or because they have to arrange things for children, but because they seek the good of their relationship and do not invest in themselves, as individuals, but in the good relationship that transcends them. Basically, this criterion makes all the difference between the family and all other forms of primary relationships. Furthermore, the future depends on this criterion. The family is a resource because it creates relational goods that no other form of life can create; it is this power and quality that will make an ever greater difference. The genome of the family does not cease to exist, but rather, it precisely produces what is most humanizing in society.