

Does Family System in Romania Follow the Path of Southern European Countries?

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Introduction

The prime sources of welfare production are the state, the market and the family and European welfare states consists of combinations of these three elements in different weights. For Southern European countries family has been the traditional provider of welfare for the individuals. The situation of Romania, and other Eastern European countries, is twofold: during the socialist regime the state took over the main role but after the change of the regime the family regained its importance as the state retrenched its role. The increased role of the family in the individual's wellbeing in Romania makes us question whether the family system takes the form of the Southern European "strong family ties".

Our paper is organized along the concept of intergenerational relationships, on six sections that focus on family in the social context, household structure and patterns of leaving parental home, family connected demographic behaviours (fertility, marriage, cohabitation, non-marital births and divorce), values and attitudes toward the family and ending with support for family members in later life stages, each section addressing the comparison between Romania and Italy.

In our attempt we use macro and micro-level data, published data from censuses and data from various national surveys: *Demography and Lifestyle of Romanian Women* and *Reproductive Health Survey* for Romania, both conducted in 2004, and *Multipurpose Family and Social Subjects Survey*, 2003 for Italy. In addition, we rely on published results from other surveys, such as *Gender and Generations*, Romania 2005, *Population Policy Acceptance* (2003), *First European Quality of Life Survey* (2003) and *Fertility and Family Survey* country reports.

Family in the social context of Romania and Italy

Young adults who experienced their life course events during communist period in Romania had highly predictable and standardized life paths: most of them originated from rural areas (in 1960, 67.9% of Romanian inhabitants were living in rural areas), left parental homes for entering in (secondary or tertiary) education, and after graduation they received jobs and housing (often to share with persons of similar social status). Marriage and births of first child granted the right to an individual dwelling. In such cases, the transition to adulthood was smoothed by the regime with less need of family involvement. Early leaving parental home and independent living were not necessarily a personal choice for independence, but rather a route facilitated by the social context and sometimes imposed, as graduates were forced to take certain jobs positions.

The socialist regime modified profoundly family relationships, by imposing standardised life-paths. Several phenomena contributed to this: first of all the industrialisation (the creation of a large industry sector), secondly, the nationalization of the agriculture (who turned the farmers into wage earners) and thirdly: the process of urbanization (in 1960, 67.9% of Romanian inhabitants were living in rural areas while in 1990 the share was 48%).

Moreover, a certain educational path leads to specific career. For the majority of the population with secondary education, the graduation was quickly followed by hiring. Education was seen by the regime as the tool to provide industrial workforce, so most of the high-school graduates were employed in industrial areas, which were located in/near urban areas. For individuals coming

from the rural areas, it meant the chance of changing the residence area. A share of the rural youth remained in their native regions, choosing a life-course that closely resembled their parents': they became wage earners in agriculture and unlike their urban (or emigrational) counterparts they needed the family support, especially for housing. These situations are reminders of the Romanian traditional families: the pre-modern rural families consisted of neo-local residence for the newly formed conjugal couple: the new families went to live in a separate household. Persons who chose to follow university education were sustained by different policies (tax-free education, scholarships etc.). Graduates entered quickly the labour force, most of them being distributed in places other than their native ones, often in rural area, and this meant a form of severance of their family ties. The outcome of such (forced) internal migration of the youth was the creation of a physical distance between young adults and their parents, so that the family support was both unnecessary and difficult to provide. It was unnecessary because the welfare supply was mainly the state concern, which ensured the quasi-total absorption of young graduates into the working force, as employment was responsible for the rest of the social benefits (mainly housing).

The creation of a large network of children-care institutions meant that mothers could return quickly to the work force and no longer were the grandparents needed for childrearing. Still, family ties played an important part: grandparents remained providers of childcare, due largely to the low quality and, in some areas, to the scarcity of such facilities.

In what elderly were concerned, the establishment of a pay-as-you-go pension system and the increase of the activity rates, after the installation of the socialist regime, had the effect of creating a large mass of pension receivers. Thus, the financial benefits reduced elderly poverty and the immediate need of elderly for support from their families. As a consequence, we saw a rearrangement of the family relationships: families were freed from the responsibilities of elderly care. But the system completely forgot to cover the situation of special needs: sickness and old age disabilities were ignored; during that time the state support was practically inexistent, the number of elderly care institutions was very small (such institutions were popularly called "asylums" and their image was highly negative), so the elderly care was almost exclusively the family's concern.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the life course of young people became less predictable due to economical and social changes, as the state retrenched its support: the emergence of labour market began in conjunction with the spread of unemployment so that graduation no longer meant secure jobs and housing. In the face of such changes, the employment rates dropped 20 percent: women left the labour market and oriented themselves toward the family care, thus becoming available to support their children, adult children and parents.

Childcare leave, inexistent in the previous regime, is introduced. As a result, the crèches almost disappeared, the number of kindergartens decreased, and the family support, especially after the end of childcare leave, becomes more important. In 2002, only 70% of all children aged 3 to 6 years attended pre-school, the rest being in the care of the family. Private childcare services have emerged, too, owing to the insufficiency of public provision, yet for the majority of the Romanian population, the costs are prohibitive.

Youngsters stay now longer in their parents' household due to socio-economic insecurity. Family support became more visible and most important now: the unemployment rates for the youth (under 25) continued to raise, thereby the entrance on the labour market becoming more difficult and done later than before. Individuals that choose higher education have similar problems: the education is no longer tax-free, approximately one half of the students pay taxes, and for the rest there are fewer and smaller scholarships and after the graduation the transition to employment is harder. The family must extend the period of support for their children, so that "leaving the nest" becomes highly desired, as the parents perceived it as an important accomplishment on the path to adulthood.

At the end of the socialist regime the pension represented 60% of the mean salary but the transition saw a drop to 36% in 2007 and in such conditions its main purposes, to prevent poverty and to maintain the living standard, cannot be accomplished. Institutions for elderly care appeared in this period, but their number was still small and their image was still negative, so the elderly care remains a concern for the family. The Family Code states that the descendents have care obligations (that can be satisfied in kind or in cash) for their parents, this measure being valid since 1953.

One should not believe that strong family ties developed in Romania only after the fall of the previous regime, as a strategy to overcome the challenges the transition imposed on individuals and families. Rather, we should consider that family ties were less visible, due mainly to the independency that system granted to the youngsters.

In Italy, children delay leaving their parental home, generally until they get married. In these, they differentiate from youngsters of northern and central European countries, who leave home earlier and live alone, or with friends or partner. This difference can be explained by many factors such as unemployment, scarcity of available housing at reasonable renting rates, lack of policies to support independent living arrangements of youth (Livi Bacci 2001, Kohler et al. 2002). However, many documents and data show that this specificity is rooted into the past (Barbagli et al. 2003). The late leaving of the parental home was connected with the patrilocal residential rule at marriage: the new families went to live within the husband's parental household. The role of material constraints will be further discussed, but it seems important to underline here that in this context late leaving home could be seen as a means for ascending social mobility.

The simplification of family structure and the strong reduction of extended families that characterize all European countries do not mark the end of ties between generations in Italy. Data from Istat (2005) show that in the last twenty years, 34% of Italian families gave a kind of free help to non-cohabiting persons (in the four weeks before the interview). In the same period, the proportion of families receiving some kind of help decreased from 23% to 17%, but this can be explained by the improvement of health and economic conditions. Moreover, even if the proportion of married couples living within the parental home has decreased (from 46% of marriages celebrated before 1947 to 12% for marriages of the end of the 20th century), residential proximity is very stable: 60-65% of marriages celebrated after 1950 live within 1 km from the family of one of the spouses (the proportion becomes 81-87% for families in the same municipality). Co-residential family transformed into a system of proximate families (Barbagli et al. 2003).

Often, lack of social and family policies is considered the cause of the permanence of traditional behaviours. Lack of childrearing services in Italy may explain the low female labour market participation; lack of housing policies may explain the low residential autonomy of youngsters; lack of allowances for children may explain low fertility; lack of elderly services may explain the strong involvement of families in elderly care. However, it is difficult to identify the cause and effect direction: in a society where parental family historically played a central role in the first stages of family life, it may have modelled a society with weak family policies.

Household structure and leaving parental home in Romania and Italy

Households and social networks (relatives) have a great economic, social and cultural importance in the Romanian and Italian societies in many ways. They produce income (through small family business in Italy and through familial agriculture in rural Romania); they support social investments through raising and educating their children; and they share their financial resources, supporting their needy members such as the sick and unemployed (De Sandre et al. 2000)

As in other countries, long time series available from censuses are the main source of descriptive work in household demography. In Romania, results of the 2002 Census have revealed that almost 4/5 of the households were familial, over 90% being formed by a single family nucleus. The most frequent model was that of the couple with one child. Single parent families represented 12.9% from the total of the households containing a single family nucleus (compared to 10.6% in 1992). Among the non-family households, 91.5% were composed by a single person, and 8.5% (representing 1.7% of the total of households) were formed by more than one person, especially in the combination of young people living together in order to share the household expenses, due to the impossibility to sustain the costs alone (Muresan, Rotariu 2000).

In regard with the household size in Romania, the data collected through the last four censuses indicate a slight reduction: from 3.2 persons in 1966 to 2.9 persons in 2002. This tendency is mainly attributable to the more pronounced decrease of the household size in rural areas (Table 1).

Table 1. Average number of persons per household, by census years

Year	Urban	Rural	Total
1966	2.9	3.5	3.2
1977	2.9	3.3	3.2
1992	3.0	3.1	3.1
2002	2.8	3.0	2.9

Source: Romanian National Institute of Statistics

The decrease of the average size of Romanian household and, on the other side, the increase with 0.42% of the total number of households in the period 1992-2002, reflect the tendency towards the reduction of the extended families and of those with many children and also towards the widespread of new and diverse living arrangements, different from the traditional nuclear form of family, such as cohabitation and the one-person household. These changes can also be explained by aging of the population: as life is longer, period of widowhood for aged women is longer. Consequently, the number of one person families or single parental families may increase.

Although the diminution of the family size could indicate *stricto sensu* a diminution of the family ties, in fact it could be interpreted as a response of the families to the socio-economic realities, especially the economic crisis. Things look different for urban and rural areas: in towns, on the one hand, young people tend to postpone their marriage, so that children live longer in their parental family, and, on the other hand, fertility is much lower than in rural areas, where young couples leave parental home for earlier marriage. In urban areas, the effects of the two phenomena combine each other so that after the fall of the socialist regime the average household size diminished more in urban than in rural areas (Table 1). Internal migration (rural-urban) also had an effect on the different household size: the process of urbanization that lasted until 1996 contributed to the diminution of the household size in rural areas, while in the period from 1997 till today the process has been reversed, therefore accentuating the decrease of the urban household size.

A look over the structure of the Romanian households shows that the nuclear family is the most common form of living arrangements (Table 2). The second common situation, met in one out of five households, is that of living alone. Almost one out of five households (19.2%) is formed by a married couple. The percentage of households composed by a single parent family is not negligible: 8.5%. This fact is not surprising taking into account the high number of non-marital births recorded in Romania in the last years. Almost 4% of the households are made by cohabiting partners with or without children. This could be only an underestimation, taking into account that this situation has been recorded at the last census for the first time. Only a minority of the households contain extended families: three generations, meaning partner, children and parents, compose only one out of 100 households. We should be cautious about over interpreting these findings, as it is quite possible for families to live separately, but to be engaged in a wide variety of mutual support activities, including the sharing of resources.

In Italy, from 1951 to 1991, the population grew by almost 21%, while the number of households increased by 69% leading to an overall reduction in the size of households, on the basis of fertility decline, while the number of people living alone doubled (De Sandre et al. 2000).

Table 2. *Composition of households in Romania, 2002*

The head of the household is living	% from the total of households
alone	20.6
with husband/wife	19.2
with partner	1.6
with husband/wife and children	35.8
with partner and children	2.3
with children	8.5
with parents	0.6
with husband/wife and parents	0.3
with partner and parents	0.0
with children and parents	0.3
with husband/wife, children, and parents	1.2
with partner, children, and parents	0.1
with other relatives	9.4
Total of households	100

Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from the 2002 Census

Data from the census can only give us a general picture about the household composition of people of all ages. In order to take a further look at the household structure by age we will use data of the *Demography and Lifestyle of Romanian Women* survey, carried out in 2004.

Table 3 shows that almost a third of Romanian women aged 18-24 years report living in the same household with their parents, without husband/partner or children (32.9%). Even if this is the most common living arrangement for this age, the value is under the level attained for their counterparts in Italy (89.1%, as shown in Table 4). This leads to another difference: the weight of young people who live alone is bigger than in Italy. This trend does not mean that the intergenerational exchanges are weaker than in Italy; it is more likely a cultural difference. In Romania, even if the young people are living alone, the exchanges with the family of origin continue to exist (parents are helping with food, financial support).

For the next age group (25-34), the most common living arrangement for Romanian women is living with husband/partner and children, for more than half of respondents (52%). In Italy the similar proportion is lower (35.9%), because of later leaving the parental home and higher ages at first marriage.

The nuclear model of family remains the dominant living arrangement of women for the next two age groups in both countries. For Italy, the shares of women aged 35-44 and 45-54 living with husband/partner and children are 69.5% and respectively 66.1%. For the same age groups, the situation in Romania is more diverse: with husband/partner and children live 58.1% and respectively 48.5%, with parents, with husband/partner and/or children live 13.4% of age group 35-44 and 6.1% of age group 45-54. In the Romanian society, young families remain with their parents in a great extent until later ages not because of a predisposition to the multigenerational families, but because of financial constraints related especially with the impossibility to achieve a dwelling in order to live separately and independently. These aspects will be later addressed in the paper.

Women living only with husband/partner show higher proportions for Romania: 26.7% for 45-54 age group, compared with 11.3% for Italy. The proportion for Romanian women becomes even higher for ages above 55¹: 43.6%. These differences are connected with the later ages at leaving the parental home in Italy.

Almost one out of ten respondents is a lone mother with children in Romania, a higher percentage than in Italy. Romanian young lone mothers with children are supported by the family of origin in a greater extent at younger ages of mother (most lone mothers in 18-34 age group live with parents, while for later ages they most live without parents), which is an indicator of the persistence

¹ The sample contains women aged 18-84 years. Nevertheless, the age group 55 and over contains mainly women aged 55-60, the share of the older women being very small (7.2% from the age group 55 and over).

of strong family ties in a context marked by the difficulty to have a separate dwelling and the necessary supply to raise children alone.

Table 3. Romanian women by age groups, according to the household type (%), 2004

Living arrangement	Age group					
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 and over	Total
Alone (with no other person in the household)	8.3	2.5	1.5	3.9	15.4	5.4
With parents, without husband/partner or children	32.9	6.3	2.2	1.8	1.3	6.5
With husband/partner	16.2	13.8	10.4	26.7	43.6	21.3
With husband/partner and children	12.7	52	58.1	48.5	23.8	43.5
With parents, husband/partner and/or children	14.5	18.3	13.4	6.1	2.8	11.2
Lone mother with/without parents	3.5	4.6	12.1	11.5	10.6	8.9
Without partner, children or parents, but with other relatives or non-relatives	11.8	2.3	2.2	1.6	2.5	3.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from *Demography and lifestyles of Romanian women, 2004*

Table 4. Italian women by age groups, according to the household type (%), 2003

Living arrangement	Age group				
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	Total (15-54)
Alone (with no other person in the household)	1.5	6.4	5.9	7.0	5.5
With parents, without husband/partner and children	89.1	35.2	6.8	2.3	29.1
With husband/partner	2.4	14.9	8.3	11.3	9.7
With husband/partner and children	3.0	35.9	69.5	66.1	46.8
Lone mother with/without parents	0.2	2.4	6.3	9.7	4.9
Other	3.8	5.2	3.2	16.4	7.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Rosina 2007, Table 2.4

In Italy, late leaving parental home can be explained by at least two factors: job or housing constraints, on one side, and cultural context, on the other. Job instability could contribute to delay leaving parental home, however in recent years unemployment decreased. Moreover, in 1998 and 2003 a sample of never married people aged 20-34 living in the parental home were interviewed about their living arrangement. The proportion that indicated job problems as cause of not leaving home did not change (they were 17%). On the other side, the proportion that indicated house constraints increased from 18% to 24%. Nevertheless, material constraints do not explain totally the long permanence in the parental home: 43% of young people in 2003 answered “I am well, I keep my freedom”, although the same proportion dropped since 1998 (it was 50%). Consequently, staying in the parental home is not perceived by children as a weakness of their own wellbeing.

Starting from the 1980s a higher level of education is now reached, particularly by women. As students generally study locally, families strive to ensure their children reach the highest level of education possible, by encouraging their prolonged permanence at home (De Sandre et al. 2000, p. 6-7). Young adults choose to stay in the family home even after employment, especially in the North.

The strong ties between parents and children in Italy have a main part also in the formation of the children family unit. Parents are extremely influential and powerful in their ability to conduct

their children towards marital behaviours which are in line with their expectations. Not only do they use moral pressure – facilitated moreover by life together – but they can also adopt more concrete tools of persuasion, such as considerable monetary help for constructing or buying a home. Indeed, more than 50% of couples in Italy who married in the 1990s received this sort of aid from their parents (Barbagli et al. 2003, cap.4). And the strong intergenerational relationships are one of the main explanations of the late diffusion of cohabitation in Italy: innovative behaviour of the younger generations can spread only if it is not obstructed by the parents (Rosina 2001). In order to become widespread, the practice of cohabitation had to wait for a generation of parents who were accepting it (Rosina, Fraboni 2004, Schroder 2006, Di Giulio, Rosina 2007).

In Romania, earlier leaving from parental home and having an independent dwelling is a behaviour inherited from the parents' generation. What is different nowadays is the new situation in the housing market, which characterizes the ex-socialist countries: home-owning has become predominant, the rental sector is almost totally absent and municipal housing has become severely marginalised (Speder 2005). In order to live independently of their parents, young people must afford to buy an extremely expensive apartment (especially in big urban areas) or to afford to pay an equally high monthly rent for an apartment from the market. Parents with financial resources help their children to buy a dwelling, but their financial help is usually connected with the moment of marriage of their child. We can see this as a mean to impose a certain life pattern or as a mean to maximize the financial help, in connection with the financial help from the in-laws. Young professionals with high income afford to rent a dwelling and to live separately from their parents before enter a marriage, but the rest usually stay into parental home until marriage, even after entering the labour market. This feature is similar with Italy, but the reason behind it is different: it is rather the housing situation that maintains young people in their parents' home rather than strong family ties. Nevertheless, the strong family ties are visible, as separate housing does not mean completely independent living: parents continue to provide support for their married children, mainly in form of childcare, but also help with the domestic chores (cooking) or financial support.

In Romanian culture, the neo-local family formation is encouraged and the specific of wedding celebration illustrate this aspect: the guests contribute with money in order to help the young couple to achieve a dwelling. This financial help is a form of intergenerational support: the same help will be returned (usually to the guest's children). 95% of the Romanian households are privately owned and this is as much a cultural preference as it is economically recommended: the poverty rate is 28.7% for individuals living in rented dwellings and only 17.8% for individual living in owned dwellings.

The share of young married couples living with their parents (see Table 3) is a result of the housing situation, rather than a cultural model of extended family. Results from Speder (2005) support this idea: in former socialist countries, the share of young people living alone with their parents is half compared with Southern Europe, due also to the earlier ages at marriage in the first group of countries, but the share of young people living together with their parents and their partner and/or child is much higher in former socialist countries. These are probably people who do not have the means or whose families could not provide them with the necessary capital in order to achieve a dwelling.

Table 5. Young adults' living arrangements: living with and without parents, alone or with partner and/or child, ages 25-34, in 2003

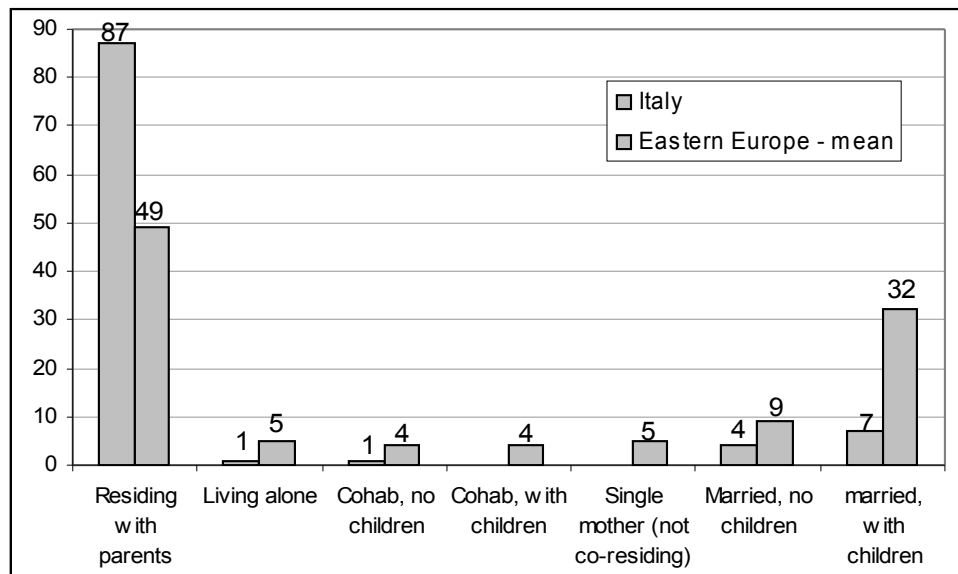
Country groups	Without parents		With parents	
	Alone	With partner and/or child	Alone	With partner and/or child
Southern Europe	10.4%	63.1%	22.0%	4.5%
Former state- socialist countries	6.7%	63.5%	11.2%	15.6%

Source: Speder, 2005, p.14

A common feature between Romania and Italy is the limited spread of intermediate living arrangements between co-residing with parents and marriage (Figure 1), but in Romania we find an earlier departure from parental home and movement towards marriage. Results from the national survey *Demography and lifestyle of Romanian Women 2004* indicate that still today marriage is

more attractive to Romanian women than cohabitation: among women who have a non-resident partner, 40% wish to marry within the next two years, compared to 29% who wish to enter cohabitation.

Figure 1. Household position of women aged 20-24, data from Fertility and Family Survey 1990s (%)



Source: Data taken from Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000

A very recent analysis of data from Gender and Generations Survey in Romania, 2004, realised by Muresan (2007) brings more light on patterns of leaving parental home in Romania. In her article, the author shows that cumulative percentage of persons ever leaving parental home (by age 40) decreased at every age for the period of 1996-2005, compared with 1980-1989, for both men and women: for the earlier period, 86% of men and 95% of women left parental home by the age of 40, while for the later period, only 81% of men and 91% of women experienced this event. From one period to another the percentage of men and women who leave parental home before forming a first union (in order to live independently, with persons of the same age) drops by 5%. The most frequent pattern is leaving from parents' house when forming a union (marriage or cohabitation): 34% of men and 59% of women in 1980-1989, and 31% of men and 60% of women in 1996-2005. Forming a union before leaving parental home is less popular pattern for both periods, for both genders: 23% of men, 13% of women in 1980-1989, and 28% of men and 13-14% of women in 1996-2005. Interesting findings of the quoted author are that women mostly prefer to leave when they form a first union and they least prefer to form a union in their parents' home. For men the situation is different: in recent period (1996-2005) fewer men leave parental home for reasons not connected with union formation, and more men form a first union in their parents' home.

Muresan observes that in recent years "the youth are not independents in a greater percentage nor earlier in life" (p.17), and we can link this statement with the description of life-course transition of people in socialist times, when the youth independence was facilitated and supported by the state, things that are no longer present after the fall of the communist regime. Without this support, with the increased difficulty in achieving a separate dwelling and worsening economic situation, the youth chose to prolong their stay in parental home until forming a marriage, when the new couple will receive the (financial) support of their families, relatives or friends (the wedding guests) to purchase a dwelling.

A special category of youth is those who chose higher education in a different city: they do not live any more with their parents, but nor they live independently. They are financially sustained by their parents and visit them on a regular basis (when the distance permit it), and if after graduating they do not find a job in the city they studied, they return to parental home. When parents can not sustain the costs of studying in a different place, the youngsters take a job and sustain themselves, the support from the parents being rather in forms of different goods. The

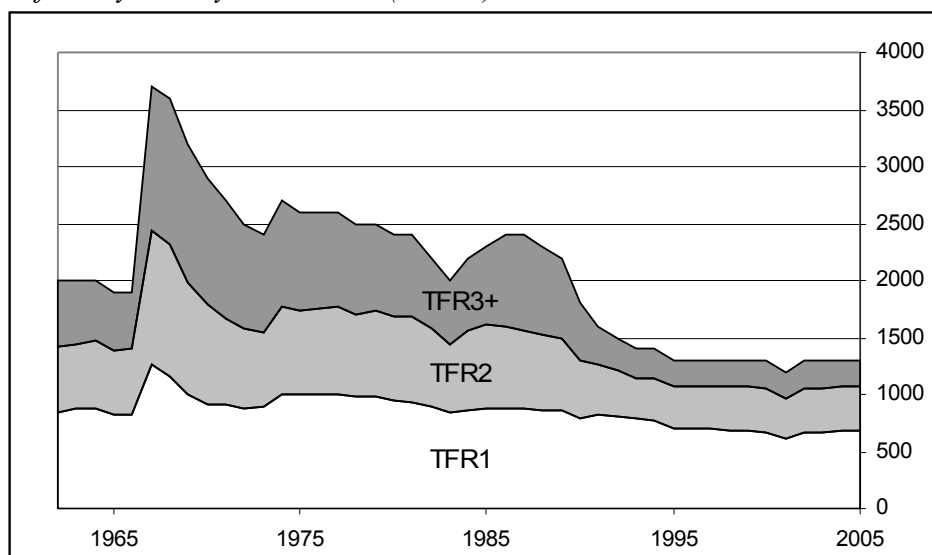
situation differs from the previous regime, when the state assisted young people in accomplishing their studies (through scholarships that covered living expenses).

Compared with Italy, Romanians leave parental home earlier, but as we have mentioned, this is not an indicator of weak family ties, but rather hides the influence of the life-course pattern of their parents, with the direct transition to marriage, marriage itself being characterized by a much earlier tempo than in Italy. Exchanges and support offered by parents to their married children indicate strong family ties, even in the case of separate housing. Results from Quality of Life Survey (Böhnke 2005) indicate very frequent contacts with parents: 52% of people said they have contacts with mother and father more than once a day/everyday or almost everyday (in the case of Italy the percentage is 44%). The share of people with very seldom contacts with their parents (several times a year or less often) is similar for Romania and Italy: 14%.

Fertility

Fertility in Romania has undergone the same pattern of decline as in other European societies, but the process of decline was masked by the coercive pronatalist policy of the socialist regime. Although the fertility increase was obvious at times when supplementary coercive measures were applied, the phenomenon was shortly taking its descendent path. After the fall of the socialist regime, fertility decline accentuated. Nevertheless, the persistent low level of fertility is not due to significant increase in childlessness, but to massive reduction of second and higher order births, as we can see in Figure 2.

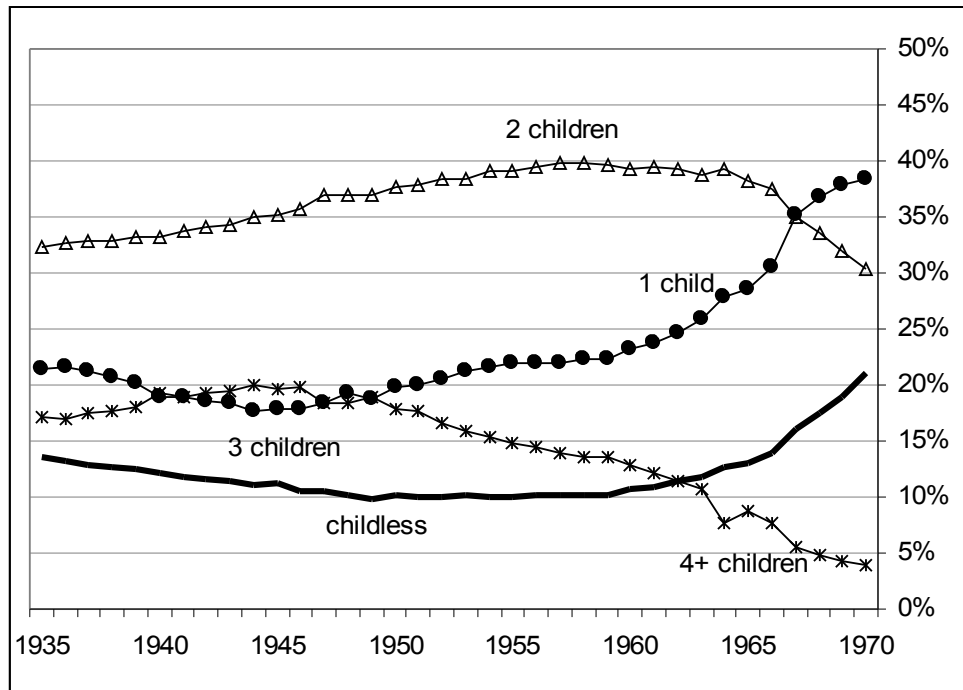
Figure 2. Total fertility rate by birth order (x 1000), 1962-2005, Romania



Source: National Institute of Statistics

Figure 3 allow us to notice that the share of women with only one child increases on the expense of those with more children. Still, we have to keep in mind that younger cohorts are still in their reproductive age.

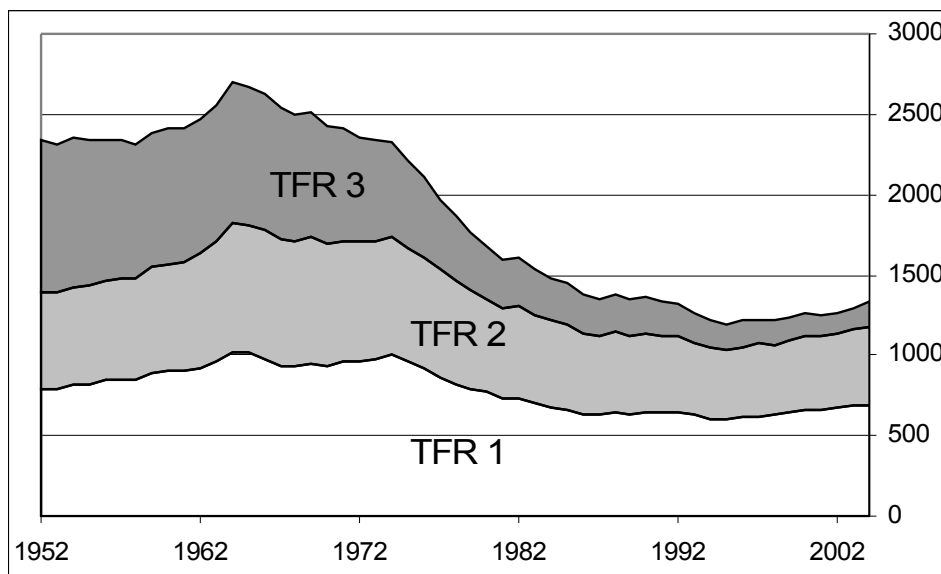
Figure 3. Romanian women by parity, 1935-1970 cohorts



Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from NIS 2005

In Italy, the fertility decline observed since the seventies occurred also because of the decline of third or higher order births (Figure 4). The proportion of marriages celebrated in the second half of the 1900 with at least one child is constant, around 90-95% of marriages (Barbagli et al. 2003).

Figure 4. Total fertility rate by birth order (x 1000), 1952-2004, Italy



Source: National Institute of Statistics

For both countries, fertility decline was not characterized by the diffusion of the childless women model, and it has been explained for Italy within the framework of the strong family ties, where parents want offer the best living conditions and opportunities to their child/children. (Dalla Zuanna 2001). We can approach the reduction of second and higher order births in Romania in the same context of strong family relations: without the state support on the life course transitions of their children, in a time when life course became less and less predictable, the Romanians, as people from other Southern European countries, choose to have less children and to invest in their quality.

Marriage, cohabitation, non-marital births and divorce

The Romanian marriage pattern is still characterized by a relatively high level of marriage, a rapid pace of and low ultimate celibacy, relative precocity and stability of couples (a low divorce rate and a very low share of higher-order divorce), manifestations that support the idea of strong family ties. Nevertheless, as in other societies, marriage rates decreased during the last decades, declining from 7.1‰ in 1985 to 5.9‰ in 2002; the year 2004, however, witnessed an increase to 6.6%. The total female first-marriage rate (below age 50) also fell, from 0.89 in 1985 to 0.66 in 2002, however rising to 0.74 in 2004.

The female mean age at first marriage increased from 21.9 years in 1985 to 25.2 years in 2005, but in spite of this and despite an increase in the age at first birth (from 22.6 in 1985 to 24.9 years in 2004), Romania continues to be characterized by early marriage and early fertility patterns.

Alternative living arrangements such as cohabitation show low level both in Romania and Italy, with slightly higher levels in Romania (the specific of cohabitation here will be further discussed), but the striking difference is between the shares of young single people, especially in the case of men.

Table 6. Division of women and men aged 25-34 living alone or in a partnership, and the rate of people living in cohabitation within all partner relationships, years 2000-2001

Country	Women			Men		
	Single	Living in partnership	Cohabitation within all partner relationships	Single	Living in partnership	Cohabitation within all partner relationships
Romania	22.29	77.71	9.4	32.20	67.80	12.0
Italy	43.61	56.39	7.8	61.44	38.56	9.3

Source: Speder 2005, p.8, 43

Italians' transition from the parental home is mainly towards direct marriage, similar with Romanians', but at much higher ages and this explains the 20-30% difference in those living in partnership (and respectively living alone) at ages 25-34. In Europe, individuals postpone entering the first partnership while an increasing share choose to stay single for longer. However, the institution of marriage is still held in high regard by all ages in both countries, contradicting the general pattern of many other Western societies (De Sandre et al. 2000).

Today, Romania is characterized by a combination of a high share of non-marital births and a very low level of cohabitation. Non-marital births increased from 4% in 1985 to almost 30% in 2004, whereas the number of cohabiting people among those older than 15 years reached less than 5% in 2002 (when in the history of the Romanian census cohabitation was recorded for the first time). The level of cohabitation is surely underestimated, but we can get more insight into the phenomenon if we look at the characteristics of people who cohabit. According to *Reproductive Health Survey 2004* data (Table 1 in the Annex), cohabitation is more spread among women with a lower education (31% of those having primary education² cohabit compared to 2% of those women who have a university degree), among unemployed women (7%, compared to 4% of employed women), among women with a lower socio-economic status (11% compared to 2% of those women enjoying a high socio-economic status), and among women from rural areas (7% compared to 4% among urban areas). This trend holds for all age groups. As regards ethnicity, 36% of Roma cohabit, compared to 4% of Romanians and 11% of Hungarians³. The share of Roma women in the sample is very small (slightly less than 2%), however, these women tend to be inactive as far as employment situation is concerned. In addition, they usually have a lower educational and socio-economic status, independent on their living arrangement (marriage or informal union).

² Table 1 in Annex shows data for primary and lower secondary education level, that is why the percentage in the table is only 9.8%.

³ The sample is representative to the whole Romanian population above age 18. According to the 2002 census the distribution of ethnic groups among the Romanian population is composed as follows: 89.8% Romanians, 6.9% Hungarians, 1.8% Romas, and 1.5% other minorities.

Based on the above data, we can say that in Romania cohabitation as a new, fashionable type of relationship is only in its early stages, whereas cohabitation as a “working class phenomenon” (Speder 2005, p.9) is more spread. Our statement is sustained by figures in Table 7: the share of cohabiting couples with children is higher than the share of childless cohabiting couples, and the mean number of children in cohabitation is higher than the mean number in a married couple. Data in Table 2 from the Annex will further support this interpretation.

Table 7. Household types and mean number of children

	% of all households consisting of one nucleus	Mean number of children per household
Childless couple (married)	29%	-
Childless couple (cohabitation)	2.4%	-
Couple with children (married)	52.7%	1.72
Couple with children (cohabitation)	3.4%	1.97
Single mother	10.7%	1.42
Single father	1.9%	1.46

Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from the 2002 Census

In Italy, the diffusion of cohabitation is relatively recent, and characterizes particularly regions of the Centre-North: cohabitations were less than 10% of the first unions of women born in the fifties, more than 25% among women born in the seventies (in the South of Italy they are respectively less than 5% and around 10% - Rosina 2007). As seen above, the late diffusion of cohabitation can be explained by the slow acceptance by parents: young couples had to feel the agreement of their family and friends network. Consequently, the choice to cohabit is not a breakdown from older cohorts, since opinion surveys confirm the persistence of the value of marriage. Out-of wedlock births are few but raising, reaching 8% of total births in 1996. Most of these are from consensual unions, as indicated by the legal acknowledgement of these births by both parents (17% in 1971 growing to 70% in the 1990s) (De Sandre et al. 2000, p. xii).

If we look comparatively at shares of children living with cohabiting parents (Table 8) in Romania and Italy, we notice significantly higher percentages in the first country. For children living with single parents the differences are not equally high.

Table 8. Division of children aged 0-14 according to parental situation, 2000-2001

Country	Two parents		Single parent	Two parents		Single parent	Two parents		Single parent
	Marriage	Cohab.		Marriage	Cohab.		Marriage	Cohab.	
	0-4 years			5-9 years			10-14 years		
Romania	77.58	13.34	9.08	81.01	8.54	10.45	80.35	6.40	13.26
Italy	87.02	4.76	8.22	88.36	2.67	8.97	87.41	2.12	10.47

Source: Speder 2005, p.17

These data do not indicate that Romanians try to elude the institution of marriage, as a second demographic transition type of behaviour, because those who have children in a cohabiting context are among the more disadvantaged categories of population.

Data from the *Reproductive Health Survey 2004* allow us a deeper insight into this issue. If we look at the distribution of cohabiting women (which count for 241 cases, representing 5.4% of the total sample) by different socio-economic characteristics and age groups, we discover that the childless cohabiting women are among those with higher education and socio-economic level, and from urban areas, in each age group (with the exception of the one of 35-49 years). Figures in Table 2 from the Annex indicate that the pattern of childbearing outside the marital context does not account for a post-modern behaviour, as it characterizes rather the more disadvantaged persons. We are aware these data account for the present marital situation, and not for the one at the moment of childbirth (RHS data did not permit the differentiation between marriage and cohabitation at the moment of childbirth), but we think that the information are valuable in our discourse. Women previously married formed a separate category, so they are not included in the cohabiting women described here.

According to Reher (2004, p.61), “societies with strong families tend to have greater social cohesion”: low incidence of divorce, number of non-married couples cohabiting and extra-marital pregnancy. Cohabitation and non-marital fertility in Romania have levels higher than in Italy. If we are to look at non-marital fertility alone, we would say that it’s high level indicate weak family ties. But if we look deeper, we find that in Romania, cohabitation and childbearing outside the marital context are no alternative to marriage as described by the second demographic transition theory. The large proportion of non-marital births rather shows that there is room for improvement in contraceptive education. Modern contraceptive methods might have been used insufficiently and inefficiently, as the Synthetic Report from the Reproductive Health Survey 2004 shows that only 43.5% of women who had at least one pregnancy in the period 2002-2004 declare that the respective pregnancy was planned. 7.6% declared the pregnancy unplanned and 48.7% declared it unwanted (most of them ended by induced abortion), these under conditions of 41.9% of women not using any method of contraception in 2004.

Although since 1989 we observe changes in marriage patterns; for divorce the situation is entirely different. Not only that the (crude) divorce rate is low compared to other European countries (1.54‰ in 2005), but we also find no tendency to increase after the fall of the communist regime, meaning after a radical change in legislation pertaining to divorce has been introduced. With some minor annual oscillations, the divorce rate has been around 1.5‰ since 1980. This does not mean that Romanian family is stronger than in other societies, but in general it is argued that several characteristics of Romanian society discourage people to decide for divorce (Rotariu 2000, 2003): the housing crisis and the economic situation of Romania make it difficult to decide for divorce. Moreover, Romanians face higher psychological costs of divorce than people in other European countries, as “not being married (anymore)” is viewed as negative in society. Couples living in rural areas witness a 2-3 times lower divorce rate than couples living in urban areas: the specific way of living causes several constraints that complicate the decision for divorce in rural areas.

The number of divorces to the number of marriages has been 23-24% for the last decade, much under the values in other European countries, again with noticeable differences among urban and rural areas (percentages with more than 10 points higher in urban areas, even if in the last couple of years this difference is reducing).

Marriage dissolutions in Italy are more diffused, and are accelerating after 1995. Divorces in Italy are not a good indicator of marriage breakdown because in Italy the dissolution process starts with legal separation, not always followed by divorce. Estimations of the proportion of marriages dissolved by legal separation before their 20th wedding anniversary will rise from 8% for marriages celebrated in 1974-78 to 25% for those celebrated in 1994-98 (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna 2007). These data witness a greater fragility of Italian families. However, they do not entirely translate into weakness of family ties, because separated spouses frequently receive support from their own parental families, such as hospitality, child rearing and other economic support.

Values and attitudes toward the family

A look at women’s views and attitudes on family, marriage and children could shed more light on the strength of family ties in Romania, as the national survey *Demography and lifestyle of Romanian women 2004* contains data on these issues.

Family life, children and couple relationship play an important role in Romanian women life; marriage is not an outdated institution and more accent on family life would be welcome. Having a successful couple relationship is the most important aspect in life for the majority of women (around 90%), but less for those younger than 25 years and for those still in education (this category is included in the previous one) or with a tertiary degree. It is important for women to build a good relationship with the partner, even if this limits their opportunities for fulfilling other personal goals, although here percentage of agreement is slightly lower (70-80%). Again women below 25 years, still in education and with tertiary education have the lowest level of agreement

(60-70%). Here we notice differences among urban and rural regions: women from big cities show 70% agreement, while women from rural areas show over 80% agreement.

Although women do not see marriage as an outdated institution, about 40% see advantages of cohabitation over marriage (such as personal freedom, happiness, and having different friendships). Rotariu (2006) assumes that the positive attitude towards cohabitation does not result in a change of family formation behaviour, but rather represents tolerance of women for various situations in life.

Women's contribution in household income is seen as a necessity for 90% of women, no matter age, education level or area of residency. Women's autonomy is not a result of value change during the socialist regime, but was imposed by the former regime, through a significant increase of women's participation in the labour market. Romanian women do not think that being housewife or working for money give the same feeling of self-fulfilment: the level of disagreement increase with education level and decrease as age increases. "Having a job is not a problem, but what most women wish is a house and children" is an item toward which the level of agreement decreases as the size of place of residence and the education level increase. Younger women also show lesser agreement.

Agreement toward the necessity of having children increases together with age, decreases as education level increases and is stronger in rural regions. Acceptability of births in other context than marriage is higher for women with higher education, from urban areas and for younger ages, although differences according to age are small. When asked about parents' responsibilities towards children, the big majority of women (over 85%) consider that it is parents' duty to do their best for their children, even at the expense of their own well-being. Very young women (18-24 years), who are still in education and live in big urban areas, have slightly lower percentages, but still close to 80%.

We notice, based on the same data, that women want more from the couple relationship as they are younger, better educated and live in big urban areas: they tend to consider in higher percentages that various reasons are sufficient for splitting up (such as partner drinks too much, lack of love or aggressive behaviour from partner, unfaithful behaviour by partner, personality clashes, unsatisfactory division of household tasks, unsatisfactory sexual relationship or inability to have children with partner).

We have seen that Romanian women held high value on family and family life. Rotariu (2006) appreciates that they tend to regard childbearing as both a moral duty and a means of personal fulfilment; the traditional two parents family is seen as the proper environment to raise children, and the moderate level of acceptability toward non-marital childbearing is not, again, a behavioural choice, but manifestation of tolerance toward single mothers. Some authors (Voicu 2001) argue that the material insecurity enhanced the importance of family life and support, in order to counter the existential risk that emerged after the fall of the socialist regime.

From a comparative perspective in what concerns the values on marriage and family, Romania can be framed in the Southern European group of countries, and is particularly similar to Italy (Table 9).

Table 9. Distribution of women according to different values on marriage and family across Europe

Italy	Spain	Greece	Austria	Bulgaria	Hungary	Poland	Romania	W. Germany	E. Germany
Disagree with: "Marriage is an outdated institution"									
83.6	77.3	87.2	-	68.8	79.9	81.4	84.5	69.4	72.4
Agree with: "It would be a good thing if in the future more emphasis was placed on family life"									
93.1	90.2	96.4	89.2	70.8	92.5	77.6	94.2	76.4	85.7
Agree with: "It is the parents' duty to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being"									
77.4	83.4	-	-	59.6	66.5	50.5	87	28.9	49.8

Sources: *Fertility and Family Survey* Standard Country tables; *Demography and lifestyle of Romanian women 2004*

Items on marriage and family (first and second) do not show strong differences within Europe. The levels of agreement are the highest in Italy and Greece, followed by Romania. Spain is in an intermediate position. In Italy, as well as in Romania, marriage still retains its high fundamental value.

The item on parents' duty towards their children (third) identifies very clearly three areas in Europe: Southern, Eastern and Central. Romania, as seen above, is strictly in line with Southern countries (more than 85% of agreement). This indicator is very interesting, as it witnesses the strength of ties between generations. The majority of people from Italy and Romania agree with the statement, favouring the intergenerational support. "The lowest level of consensus regarding what may be considered as a spirit of sacrifice towards children can be found among younger people (who have had least experience in practice)" (De Sandre et al. 2000, p. 55) but this changes with the age.

Relationship with the elderly

Family ties can be measured through the relationships between generations, such as exchanges between elderly and adults. Southern European countries are characterized by very frequent contacts between older people and the family (Table 10). And yet, despite the fact that over 60% of old people resident in these countries see their family members every day, they feel lonely more often (Table 11) which is a sign that expectations on family relationships are higher: in southern European countries, and particularly in Italy, people not only live very strong relationships, but also feel them as very important.

Table 10. Contacts of older people with family in some European countries

	Every day	Two or more times a week
Italy	70.7	14.4
Greece	64.8	9.7
Spain	60.7	15.5
Portugal	59.8	9.6
Ireland	50.1	19.3
Germany	46.5	15.6
Luxembourg	38.0	21.1
Belgium	35.8	22.0
France	34.2	16.2
United Kingdom	21.9	28.3
The Netherlands	19.2	26.6
Denmark	13.8	26.0

Source: Commission of the European Communities (1993)

Table 11. Loneliness of older people in EC countries

Proportion of older people who often feel lonely	EC countries
< 5 %	Denmark
5-9 %	Germany, The Netherlands, UK
10-14 %	Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain
15-19 %	Italy
> 20 %	Portugal, Greece (36%)

Source: Commission of the European Communities (1993)

The importance of family relationships in Italy and the conviction that familiar environment is the best living environment for the elderly explain the low proportion of institutionalized people in Italy. Among people aged 70+, only 1.1% of males and 2.3% of females were institutionalized in 1991. The phenomenon of "badanti" (foreign women living with aged people) is a recent answer to

the increasing request for elderly care on one hand, and job and family duties for the couples: it allows families to maintain elderly in their own home, with frequent contacts with relatives and friends.

As we know, the population of old people's homes is strongly selected. It consists mainly of women and of the very elderly. But a very strong selection also seems to take place on the basis of kin availability. Indeed, data from the Italian 1991 Census show that marital status and the existence of relatives are two very important variables in determining institutionalisation. Standardising by age, the percentages of institutionalisation for males are the following: never married 3.9%; separated and divorced 2.3%; widowers 1.4%; married 0.1%. For women: never married 3.6%; separated and divorced 1.3%; widows 1.1%; married 0.1%. It would appear natural to attribute these differences to the differing number and strength of family ties: these are much more contained for never married, looser among separated and divorced persons, who probably have fewer children due to the early break-up of their unions, greater and stronger among widowed, and very strong among those with living spouses.

The importance of relatives as a resource for avoiding institutionalisation is also evident from the composition of elderly people living in homes by existence of relatives (Table 12). Overall, 44% of male residents are without relatives, and 16% only have siblings (presumably no longer young). For women, the percentages are 47% and 13% respectively. So, about 60% of elderly people living in homes are deficient in family resources. These percentages are particularly high for the younger ages. This is indicative of the importance of the lack of relatives in determining early entry into an old people's home. Elderly people with close relatives (spouse and/or children) are more numerous at the more advanced ages, suggesting that the decision, or need, to enter the home is determined in the main by serious health problems.

Table 12. Institutionalised old people by sex, age and presence of living relatives (column percentages). Italy, 1991

Living arrangement	Age group			
	60-69	70-79	80+	Total
Males				
Wife and children	6.8	8.1	7.5	7.5
Wife	3.9	5.9	5.4	5.2
Children	9.4	23.0	38.8	27.1
Only sisters or/and brothers	25.6	17.9	10.0	16.0
No relatives	54.2	45.1	38.3	44.0
Total	100	100	100	100
Females				
Husband and children	4.0	3.4	1.9	2.5
Husband	3.5	2.9	2.1	2.4
Children	18.5	33.0	38.0	35.0
Only sisters or/and brothers	23.9	16.3	10.9	13.4
No relatives	50.1	44.4	47.1	46.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Bonarini (2002) on Census data

On the other hand, living arrangements of old people living in households is strongly connected with the life course of other family members (Table 13). This explains the increasing proportion of old men living only with their wife and the decreasing proportion living with wife and children: the "empty nest" phase in Italy begins late because of the long staying in the parental home of children, and men benefits of the long life of wives. On the contrary, women in old ages more frequently become widows.

Table 13. Old people living in household by sex, age and cohabiting relatives (column percentages). Italy, 2003

Living arrangement	Age group		
	60-69	70+	Total
Males			
Wife only	37.3	54.8	46
Partner only	0.7	0.7	0.7
Children only	2.7	2.3	2.5
Parent	0.7	0.1	0.4
Wife and children	39.3	16.2	27.9
Alone	9.4	15.3	12.3
Other	9.8	10.6	10.2
Total	100	100	100
Females			
Husband only	37.5	25.9	30.9
Partner only	0.4	0.2	0.3
Children only	9.3	7.8	8.5
Parent	0.1	0.0	0.0
Husband and children	24.2	5.7	13.6
Alone	18.3	44.5	33.3
Other	10.1	15.9	13.4
Total	100	100	100

Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from the *Multipurpose Family and Social Subjects Survey*, 2003

Unfortunately, we do not have comparable data for Italy and Romania neither in what concerns the situation of the institutionalised old people, nor about the living arrangements of the old people in multigenerational households. We only know that a very small number of elderly persons live in institutions: 10,126 persons (0.3%) from a total of 3,043,261 people aged 65 and over. The only issue about relatives we can compare at some extent with the Italian elderly population is the distribution of the Romanian elderly who live in households, by the presence of cohabiting relatives.

Data from the last census reveal significant differences by age and sex, going in the same direction as in Italy. The majority of the old people aged 60 and over rely on their partner, but the percent is much higher for men and for the younger ages (Table 14). More old women than old men in Romania (8.2% compared to 2.3%) live only with children, and that is also true for Italy. The second widespread situation for the old people in Romania is to live alone or with non-nuclear members. This situation increases at older ages and it is more than twice higher for women than for men (46.5% compared to 17.3%). These differences between genders are given by the common known fact that women live longer than men and usually in a partnership the man is older.

If we do not consider the proportion of elderly living with wife or husband and children (strongly linked to the late living parental home in Italy), the percentages for living alone and with non nuclear families are very similar in Romania and Italy. Most of these elderly are widowed and they continue to live in their own household after the death of their partners. In Romania, they do not move in with their children, as residential independence is considered important. Moreover, we do not have to forget that the children of the elderly have lived in a regime that encouraged the independently living, by housing policies and other facilities provided for family and children. This cultural model did not stop the family exchanges, as we have discussed in the first section of the paper.

Table 14. Old people living in household by sex, age and the presence of cohabiting relatives, in 2002 (column percentages). Romania, 2002

Living arrangement	Age group		
	60-69	70 +	Total
Males			
Wife	82.8	71.2	77.7
Partner	2.8	2.0	2.4
Children	2.1	2.6	2.3
Parent	0.4	0.0	0.2
Alone or with non-nuclear members	11.9	24.2	17.3
Total	100	100	100
Females			
Husband	57.0	29.5	43.6
Partner	1.9	0.9	1.4
Children	7.9	8.4	8.2
Parent	0.6	0.0	0.4
Alone or with non-nuclear members	32.6	61.1	46.5
Total	100	100	100

Source: Calculations of the authors, based on data from the 2002 Census

What we can see from Table 15 is that a higher proportion of Romanian performs some care-giving role: 22.1% compare to 12.8% of the Italians. Much of this difference is owned to the lack of paid care in Romania and to its relatively high affordability in Italy (one should consider that many of the “badanti” providing paid care in Italy are Romanian migrants), although the exact proportion of elderly receiving this type of care is hard to assess due to the “grey market” in which such ‘contracts’ take place (Da Roit 2007). The prevalence of informal care toward the members of the household and the low percentage of informal care provided towards individual outside the household is interpreted by Alber and Köhler (2004) as a sign of “amoral familism” in the case of Eastern European countries. In the same direction, De Sandre and collaborators (2000) consider that the importance of the Italian family for social and economic support contrasts with a generally poor sense of communal responsibility and national identity.

We can further see that occupational status has the same effects in both countries: the retreat from the labour market (through unemployment or retirement) raises the share of those providing informal care. The gender difference is in the same direction in both countries: informal care is seen (and it is) mainly women’s responsibility. Interesting, age has different effect: in Italy the percentage of the individuals aged 15-34 advocating extended family responsibilities is lower than the percentage of older individuals, while in Romania this difference is zero. This can be interpreted as a possible source of conflicts in the future in the case of Italy and a stronger intergenerational bond in Romania.

Table 15. Attitudes toward informal care activities, Italy and Romania, 2002

Types of informal care activities (% giving informal care of the indicated type)				
Countries	Within the family	Outside the family	For elderly people (60+)	For children
Italy	12,8	5,8	13,5	1
Romania	22,1	5	19,3	3,3

Perception of future family responsibilities for elderly care by economic activity
(percentage point difference between those advocating and those rejecting extended family responsibilities by employment status)

	total	Retired	Working	Unemployed
Italy	75,6	80,8	73,9	80,8
Romania	82,7	86,2	77,1	83,9

Perception of future family responsibilities for elderly care by gender (percentage point difference between those advocating and those rejecting extended family responsibilities by gender)

Countries	Total	Women	Men	Balance-Women–Men
Italy	75,5	76,2	74,7	1,5
Romania	82,6	84,1	80,8	3,4

Perception of future family responsibilities for elderly care by age (percentage point difference between those advocating and those rejecting extended family responsibilities by age)

Countries	Total	15-34	35-59	60+
Italy	75,5	74,5	69,8	85,5
Romania	82,4	83,4	81	83,4

Source: Alber, Köhler 2004

More insight into relationship with the elderly and their preferred living arrangement is gained based on the results from Population Policy Acceptance Survey, that show that Romanians positively value the relationship with people in old age. They think that children should take care of their parents (87.4 % agreement, much higher than in other European countries) and they show the highest level of agreement (85.9%) with the statement “I would like my aged parents to live with me”. Romanians place great responsibility on the children to take care of the elderly, but less on the other relatives: 64% of agreement with the duty of the relatives to take care of the elderly. If one can no longer manage the household in old age, then people would still like to remain at home with regular assistance, but support should be primarily provided by the children or the family: 53% opted for this living arrangement (a higher level - 60.2% - was registered only in Poland). Other situations preferred all involve family participation: “at home, but with regular professional help and help from children and other relatives” gathers 12.6%, and “at home, but with one of children or other relatives moving in with me” 10%. The role of elderly persons in society is valued positively (their knowledge and experience, maintaining traditions), but they are considered to take away economic resources from the society (19.3% agreement, second highest after Germany). In connection to this opinion, Romanians name the possibility to work during retirement (not *de jure* but *de facto*) as the most preferred measure for elderly people.

The elderly wish for support from their children and the youngsters appears to be willing to provide the help that is wanted. Institutional assistance is accepted only when there is nobody from the family to take care of them (57% agreement, compared with only 5.3% agreement with the statement “old people should live in an old people’s home”).

Further analysis on the data provided by Alber and Köhler (2004) shows us that European countries cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Simple classification analysis⁴ shows that the first group of countries are the Scandinavian countries, characterized by a preference toward institutional care (high agreement among the population on formal care, higher than the agreement on the extended family responsibilities). A second group of countries, which can be identified as the Southern European countries, prefer the family models (higher agreement with the extended family responsibilities compared to the formal care). The position of the rest of the countries – the continental Europe – is somewhere in between.

⁴ A K-means cluster analysis was run with several variables: types of informal care activities (% giving informal care within and outside the family), % giving informal care for elderly and the difference between population advocating and those rejecting extended family responsibilities (counting also the gender differences).

This situation can be easily interpreted using the welfare regimes concept of Esping-Andersen (1990), but more important, the result is consistent with Liebfried's (1992), and Ferrera's (1996) assertions about the existence of another welfare regime that can be called the Latin rim or the Mediterranean regime. But what is important for our topic is the positioning of some Eastern European countries in this group: Romania, Hungary, and Poland, and to a lesser extent Bulgaria, Lithuania and Latvia, while the rest of the Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia) converge on the "conservative", "continental" or "Bismarckian" welfare regime.

Conclusion

We have discovered many similarities between the two countries in what family connected behaviours are concerned: low spread of intermediate living arrangements such as cohabitation or living alone, leaving the parental home especially for marriage, increasing number of families with only one child, low divorce rates. In Romania, housing situation plays an important part in discouraging cohabitation. Compared with Italians, young Romanians leave their parents' homes earlier but our assessment is that behind this lie not weaker family ties, but a cultural model that insist that the youngsters should start their "real life" as soon as possible and the most important aspect here is the separate housing, which is possible to be achieved usually in connection with the moment of marriage, when the families of the spouses unite their financial efforts. Living separately from their parents does not necessarily mean living independently, as the exchanges and support from the parents continue to manifest throughout their lives. People who experienced their life course transitions during the communist regime – the parents of today's youth – wish for their children similar smooth transitions in life; the support they received from the state at that time (especially in housing issue) is now offered by the family to their children. In this respect, family ties became more important in the period after the fall of the socialist regime.

A difference from Italy is the high share of non-marital births, which, as we have discussed in the paper, does not indicate the weakening of family ties or the loosening importance of the family context, but rather it is connected with the more recent experience of Romanians with modern contraception. We have discussed that the two parents family is seen as the proper environment to raise children, and the moderate acceptance of alternative living arrangements is not a behavioural choice, but rather understanding for various situations in life.

In what concerns the household structure, a common trait for both countries is the large widespread of the nuclear model of family. The weight of this living arrangement varies between the two countries across the age-groups, due to the differences in the patterns of living parental home and the formation of their own family, that are shaped at their turn by cultural, economical and social norms.

The situation of the elderly is very similar between Romania and Italy: the social policies place the responsibility for care on the family, as the number of old people living in institutions is very small. In Romania we can speak about the underdevelopment of elderly care institutions, which have a negative image in society and are used as a last resort.

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Annex

Table 1. Distribution of women according to marital status and different socio-economic characteristics, by age groups (P=partner)

Age group	Socio-economic characteristics		Marital status				Total	
			Married	Cohabitation	Previously married	Without P / non-resident P		
All ages (15-49 years)	Residency	Urban	58.4%	4.0%	7.8%	29.8%	100%	
		Rural	72.6%	7.3%	4.3%	15.8%	100%	
	Socio-economic level	Low	65.4%	10.7%	6.1%	17.9%	100%	
		Medium	64.3%	3.7%	7.4%	24.6%	100%	
		High	64.4%	2.0%	5.1%	28.5%	100%	
	Education level	Primary and lower secondary	53.0%	9.8%	3.7%	33.4%	100%	
		Upper secondary	74.1%	3.0%	7.3%	15.6%	100%	
		Post-secondary	60.7%	2.2%	9.7%	27.4%	100%	
	Activity status	Active	72.1%	4.1%	8.0%	15.9%	100%	
		Inactive	55.0%	7.2%	4.0%	33.8%	100%	
		Total	64.7%	5.4%	6.3%	23.6%	100%	
	Residency	Urban	10.6%	5.8%	2.3%	81.3%	100%	
		Rural	29.5%	12.8%	2.4%	55.3%	100%	
		Low	26.8%	16.1%	2.1%	55.0%	100%	
	Socio-economic level	Medium	17.0%	6.4%	2.9%	73.7%	100%	
High		10.7%	3.1%	2.0%	84.2%	100%		
Primary and lower secondary		14.8%	10.4%	1.1%	73.6%	100%		
Education level	Upper secondary	24.4%	6.0%	3.7%	65.8%	100%		
	Post-secondary	23.8%	3.2%	7.9%	65.1%	100%		
	Active	31.6%	9.1%	4.6%	54.7%	100%		
Activity status	Inactive	12.8%	8.4%	1.4%	77.4%	100%		
	Total	18.3%	8.6%	2.3%	70.7%	100%		
	15-24 years	Residency	Urban	71.1%	4.4%	6.5%	18.0%	100%
Rural			85.6%	6.7%	3.8%	3.9%	100%	
Socio-economic level		Low	78.1%	10.9%	5.7%	5.2%	100%	
		Medium	79.1%	3.3%	4.6%	13.1%	100%	
		High	77.5%	1.7%	5.2%	15.5%	100%	
Education level		Primary and lower secondary	79.3%	12.6%	5.0%	3.1%	100%	
		Upper secondary	82.9%	2.8%	4.8%	9.5%	100%	
		Post-secondary	60.8%	1.7%	6.6%	30.8%	100%	
Activity status		Active	75.6%	3.9%	5.6%	14.9%	100%	
		Inactive	82.8%	8.2%	4.5%	4.5%	100%	
		Total	78.3%	5.5%	5.2%	11.1%	100%	
25-34 years		Residency	Urban	79.9%	2.4%	12.9%	4.8%	100%
			Rural	85.7%	4.1%	6.3%	3.8%	100%
		Socio-economic level	Low	80.6%	5.7%	9.9%	3.8%	100%
			Medium	78.5%	2.4%	13.3%	5.7%	100%
	High		87.9%	1.5%	7.1%	3.5%	100%	
	Education level	Primary and lower secondary	84.5%	5.5%	6.4%	3.6%	100%	
		Upper secondary	83.3%	2.1%	11.1%	3.5%	100%	
		Post-secondary	72.2%	2.5%	14.6%	10.6%	100%	
	Activity status	Active	80.8%	2.6%	11.6%	4.9%	100%	
		Inactive	85.2%	4.0%	7.4%	3.4%	100%	
		Total	82.2%	3.1%	10.3%	4.4%	100%	
	35-49 years	Residency	Urban	79.9%	2.4%	12.9%	4.8%	100%
			Rural	85.7%	4.1%	6.3%	3.8%	100%
		Socio-economic level	Low	80.6%	5.7%	9.9%	3.8%	100%
			Medium	78.5%	2.4%	13.3%	5.7%	100%
High			87.9%	1.5%	7.1%	3.5%	100%	
Education level		Primary and lower secondary	84.5%	5.5%	6.4%	3.6%	100%	
		Upper secondary	83.3%	2.1%	11.1%	3.5%	100%	
		Post-secondary	72.2%	2.5%	14.6%	10.6%	100%	
Activity status		Active	80.8%	2.6%	11.6%	4.9%	100%	
		Inactive	85.2%	4.0%	7.4%	3.4%	100%	
		Total	82.2%	3.1%	10.3%	4.4%	100%	

Source: Calculations of the authors based on data from *Reproductive Health Survey, 2004*

Table 2. Distribution of cohabiting women according to the number of children born and different socio-economic characteristics, by age groups

Age group	Socio-economic characteristics		Number of children born			
			Childless	1 child	2 or more children	Total
15-24 years	Education level	Primary and lower secondary	34.2%	42.5%	23.3%	100%
		Upper secondary	71.4%	28.6%	0.0%	100%
		Post-secondary	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
		Total	43.8%	38.5%	17.7%	100%
	Residency	Urban	60.5%	26.3%	13.2%	100%
		Rural	32.8%	46.6%	20.7%	100%
		Total	43.8%	38.5%	17.7%	100%
	Socio-economic level	Low	27.9%	45.9%	26.2%	100%
		Medium	66.7%	29.2%	4.2%	100%
		High	81.8%	18.2%	0.0%	100%
		Total	43.8%	38.5%	8.3%	100%
	25-34 years	Education level	Primary and lower secondary	12.3%	32.3%	55.4%
Upper secondary			33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100%
Post-secondary			80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100%
Total			21.6%	32.0%	46.4%	100%
Residency		Urban	33.3%	25.6%	41.0%	100%
		Rural	13.8%	36.2%	50.0%	100%
		Total	21.6%	32.0%	46.4%	100%
Socio-economic level		Low	13.4%	32.8%	53.7%	100%
		Medium	23.8%	33.3%	42.9%	100%
		High	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	100%
		Total	21.6%	32.0%	46.4%	100%
35-49 years		Education level	Primary and lower secondary	8.7%	17.4%	73.9%
	Upper secondary		20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	100%
	Post-secondary		40.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100%
	Total		16.7%	29.2%	54.2%	100%
	Residency	Urban	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	100%
		Rural	7.7%	15.4%	76.9%	100%
		Total	16.7%	29.2%	54.2%	100%
	Socio-economic level	Low	7.7%	15.4%	76.9%	100%
		Medium	35.7%	28.6%	35.7%	100%
		High	12.5%	75.0%	12.5%	100%
		Total	16.7%	29.2%	54.2%	100%

Source: Calculations of the authors based on data from *Reproductive Health Survey*, 2004