

## Families in Italy in the face of the crisis of 'Mediterranean' welfare *Michele Bertani\**

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# *Families in Italy in the face of the crisis of 'Mediterranean' welfare*

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## **Abstract**

National welfare regimes in Europe are rapidly evolving and diversifying. Changes are influenced by not always well defined elements, depending by dynamics that are both internal and external to the system, making it difficult to define the characters of the new scenario. The Italian welfare regime is strongly connected within this process, posing new challenges in a country where the intervention of the state in the welfare sphere is limited, and the family has always played an important role in the care work.

Based on the national and international debate on this topic, this article explores the factors that characterize the Italian welfare regime, and the challenges posed by globalization. With reference to the category of familialism, it will be discussed the typical Italian attitude “to do all-at-home” in relation to the care work. Using empirical evidence, it will be analyzed if this typical Italian attitude is the result of the persistence of a traditional and rural model of orientation, or the consequence of complex social dynamics, in which causes and effects influence each other.

Findings suggest a changing scenario in the way Italian families organize and perceive their care work, giving the idea that a profound structural process, activated by economic and cultural factors, is going through this social institution.

Keywords: welfare, family, parental work, reconciliation policies, Italy, cross-national comparison.

## **Introduction**

The *welfare system*, intended as a new project of social cohesion that takes shape in the second half of the last century, and the *welfare state*, which are the concrete measures by which national governments activate the tools to ensure the material well-being of citizens through the instrument of redistribution of resources, are facing new local and global challenges. A core point is the essence of the *welfare system* itself. The current economic, political, demographic, cultural and social debate is questioning its ability to be still a proponent of *social cohesion*.

In the last thirty years, population's ageing and declining fertility are well known phenomena in European countries which have inevitably triggered profound changes in family and social behavior. Some examples may be considered: the progressive increasing rates of marital conflict, the new family forms, the participation of women in the labor market, and the organization of care work within families.

What are the consequences of these profound economic, social and cultural changes in the Italian family? Are the Italian families involved in this changing that is transforming them from a social institution based on marriage to a primary group which may take various forms and structures, depending on the biographies and life choices of its members?

Compared to other European countries, historically Italy has a tradition of strong and supportive family which has taken on all the duties of family care, but due to this peculiar trait as ‘private good’, little support was provided by public policies and welfare system.

The aim of this article is to evaluate how the Italian family acts and reacts in the face of current challenges, originated by uncertainty and vulnerability related to the global economic recession. Being aware of the complexity that characterize these dynamics at multiple levels, the focus will be on the

aspects of care work, intended as a connection between care, attention and support, and the topic of de-familialisation, intended as the possibility to transfer out household production of goods and services which it incorporates.

The hypothesis to be verified in this paper is that the alleged 'family values' of the Italian family, the tendency to play as much as possible the tasks of welfare inside the family network and delegating as little as possible by to the other two pillars of the welfare state – Market and State (not excluding the third sector's role) – are the outcome of complex social dynamics, in which causes and effects influence each other, giving rise to patterns of action that do not enroll in a linear logic, and are affected by several variables. Is then put into question the hypothesis that the attitude to familialism strategies to reconcile work and family in Southern European countries, particularly Italy, is the result of the persistence of a cultural model that suggests the traditional family is the best place to take care of children or elderly not self-sufficient parents. In other words, it will be analyzed whether 'will' or 'have to' do it all 'in house', depends not only on the characteristics of the profile of the social actors (gender, age, education level, employment status), but also on their level of trust in political institutions, in the declared quality of the public services used, in the level of differentiation inside the family structures of belonging and the perceived strength - weakness of structural condition. To reach this objective a cognitive processing on this research topics has been arranged with SPSS software databases for the data process on Eurobarometer and Eurostat database. The paper critically analyses the first results of the still in progress research project " 'Mediterranean' Welfare and passive subsidiarity: the role of Italian family as a producer of care' that started in 2012 by Tesis Department of the University of Verona, directed by Prof. Paola Di Nicola, . The research aims to analyze the empirically detectable connections between the best orientations considered by families to address and manage the problems related to the performance of care work, the expectations of the responsibilities of the State, of the Market and not-for-profit organizations (the third sector) for the solution of social problems, and the perception of the risk of experiencing a reduction of economic and relational resources.

In the first part of this paper themes and terms related to the core research, such as the classification of the different welfare regimes and the debate between the different positions on family and welfare policies will be introduced, The second part, presents an in depth analysis of second-level data related to national and European surveys, conducted since 2007 on relevant issues for this research, in order to discuss the hypothesis presented above.

## 1. The classifications of welfare systems

Starting with the obvious assumption that the principles adopted by each country to build and 'run' the system of the *welfare state* may be very different, the first step to try to shed light on this topic is addressing the issue of the classification of welfare regimes. Furthermore the focus is on the debate that revolves around the possibility of identifying specific types that can distinguish with high accuracy the social policies of each countries.

Classify clearly defined patterns for the different welfare systems does not yet seem a simple task. A first reference can not ignore the typology of Esping-Andersen (1990) presented in *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, which among other things, had the merit to resume and expand the debate after the pioneering work of Tittmuss (1958, trans. it. 1984). Focusing on European countries, Esping-Andersen argues that people face social risks relying on three resources: the market, the family, the state (government). How is it possible to explain the lack of homogeneity in social policies in European countries and the various activities planned by governments to deal with the same topics? Esping-Andersen's answer is that in European countries different combinations of these three resources may be identified. These combinations are the result of different cultural values and solidarity, and the different modes of organization of social policies. Specifically, Esping-Andersen distinguishes three *welfare state models*: the *liberal welfare system*, located in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the market is the prevailing mechanism of regulation in a strongly individualistic and competitive social system. In these contexts, State's intervention is limited to residual forms, activated only when the market and the family are no longer able to allocate resources. The second model is the *social-welfare system*, geographically located in the Scandinavian countries: in this case the state is the main actor in socializing social risks, while in other systems, this role is left to the market and/or to the family and to

the actors of subsidiarity. Social services and cash benefits contribute to the reduction of social inequalities, reducing dependence on the market. Finally, the *conservative-corporatist* welfare system, geographically located in continental and southern Europe, activate policies that provide for the collectivization of social risks on the basis of socio-economic and labor status of citizens. In this welfare regime there are forms of active and passive subsidiarity, mainly characterized by generous cash monetary transfers for social needs.

The Italian welfare system is placed by Esping-Andersen into the category of *conservative models*, referring to the countries of continental Europe, including in addition to Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands but also Finland. The author points out how the *conservative-corporatist* adjective has no negative connotation, but rather aims at to emphasizing the political orientation that guided their construction. It is pointed out as both liberalism and social-democratic parties, at least until the fifties of the last century, have had a marginal political role if not totally non-existent in most continental European countries. Thus it is shown as the first social policies in Germany, Austria and France were inspired by monarchy, while in other countries such as Italy a core role was played by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless even in the transition from the original forms of the welfare state to those of the second half of the twentieth century, government coalitions were led mainly Christian Democratic or conservative (Esping-Andersen, 1999, trans. it 2000: 140). The essence of the *conservative-corporatist regime* is its combination of differentiations for status and familism<sup>1</sup>. The first combination refers to the way in which the system organizes the socialization of risks for certain groups according to the status, for instance through privileged treatment to employees of the public administration. These are schemes in which the production of private welfare does not have much space, and is set to very small groups, such as high-income entrepreneurs who can buy health insurance policies for their family, and unionized workers that activate supplementary pension funds with private companies. Or if the private individual sector produces welfare services for a large portion of the population, this is thanks to voluntary non-profit organization (for example Caritas, and NGOs managed by the Italian Catholic Church) or social cooperatives to which national or regional institutions outsource the services of care and assistance. The other combination that characterizes especially the Italian welfare system, and more specifically those of southern Europe, is the orientation of family-based social policies. This is based on the model of the male breadwinner and on the family intended as independent social group that is able to take care of its members autonomously and the State, following the principle of subsidiarity, is not going to interfere with this except in the cases of emergency or extreme poverty.

The classifications of Esping-Andersen met both positive and negative criticism, from theoretical, methodological and empirical positions. Among the different critical views, one that affects more closely the Italian case is related to the proposal to include a fourth type (a "Mediterranean regime", referred to the countries of southern Europe) next to the three originally proposed by Esping-Andersen, the "liberal", "social democratic" and "conservative-corporatist". Although Esping-Andersen acknowledges that Southern European countries have important characteristics in common - a long Catholic tradition and strong familistic social policies - according to his analysis, they must be placed in the *continental-corporatist* type of welfare. There are scholars who assume positions close to Esping-Andersen, arguing that the southern European countries can not form a separate group, but possibly a subcategory originated from a certain 'immaturity' of social protection systems and the

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian word *familismo* can be used both for familism and familialism. The term 'familism' was used for the first time in the fifties of the last century by Banfield to describe the attitudes of families in a rural area of Southern Italy. Banfield (1958, trans. it. 1976) talks of familism in that particular social reality to describe a situation in which the individual pursues only the interest of their own nuclear family, and not of the community which need trust and cooperation between people not belonging to the family primary network. The term familism has become part of common language to describe social realities characterized by backwardness and lack of civic participation. More recently in the debate within the social sciences there are less rigid and more descriptive meanings, as argued by in Alesina and Ichino (2009), when they read the tendency of Italian families to manage careworking 'everything at home', as the result of complex social dynamics and not a merely adherence to the traditional model argued by Banfield. If Alesina and Ichino dwell on the complex dynamics at the micro level, Esping-Andersen at the macro level in his analysis of welfare systems uses the term 'familialism' in a neutral way to describe the welfare regimes that support primarily family caretaking (Esping-Andersen, 1999, trans. it. 2000: 83), while the term defamilization is associated to social policies that reduce the dependence of individuals from the family (*ibid.*).

similarity of family structures (Katrougalos 1996). Other authors take more radical positions, affirming the need to identify a new grouping, to be attached to the first three.

Due to the core differences with continental Europe countries, many authors proposed to provide a specific label for the southern European countries (Bonoli 1997, Castles, Ferrera 1996, Leibfried 1992 Kazepov 2009, Zanatta 1998). According to these authors' vision, the Mediterranean welfare label, should be applied to those welfare regimes which produce public goods and services for the community, whose operation is made possible by low levels of de-familiarization of care, namely that model however who consider acquired the prevailing traditional function of social reproduction carried out by the family. This model is relatively strong on the side of social security (especially for the retirement component and for the unemployment support in the short term), and is characterized and based on an assumption that still considers the family as a selection of stable life, where the husband-father is the main *breadwinner* and often the only income earner, and the wife-mother is more easily housewife, or if she works, it is more likely with part time jobs, so that she can carry out the task of working care and rearing of children, but also provide assistance to the weak members of the family, such as elderly parents. It is now a widespread tendency in the literature (Castles 1995, 2009, Katrougalos 1996, Ferrera 1996, Kazepov 2009, Zanatta 1998, Zoli 2004) to consider the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, included Italy, such as welfare systems in itself, characterized by low levels of spending on welfare and social safety and by the role assigned to the family as primary social security cushion, where the production of welfare is based on the principle of passive subsidiarity.

It is generally recognized as in these countries the bonds of family solidarity are stronger than the northern European countries and continental Europe, involving not only the members of the nuclear family but also the network of kinship. It is expected that families support each other, and that those who find themselves in a situation of need should find primarily support from the social primary network. These are countries where there is a strong sense of family privacy, with the assumption that policies should not intervene except in extreme cases of hardship and marginalization, while individual autonomy is not located between the main objectives of these policies (Millar, Warman 1996).

The existence and maintenance of strong relationships of mutual dependency with regard to the economic support and care work are in some ways an expected feature of Italian families, and are considered quite typical by some right-handed and conservative politicians and governments as it is for example evidenced by the words used by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies (Government Berlusconi IV, XVI Legislature) in the *White Paper on the future of the social model (2009)*: "The family is also a fundamental economic cell, a centre for redistribution of income and annuities, and it is especially the primary nucleus of any Welfare, able to protect the pushover and exchange protection and care, as the family is a system of relations, in which subjects are not only bearers of needs, but also of solutions, ideas and innovations. "<sup>2</sup>

Words thought for a society based on the model of a nuclear indissoluble family, which is not likely to decompose due to separations and divorces, with fertility rates adjusted to the generational change, where the man-worker is considered to be the main source of family income while the woman should preferably not be so busy to engage full-time in the work of family care. Structural changes of Italian families in the last thirty years<sup>3</sup> have been underlined, evidencing that nowadays not so many families are in this ideal condition referred mainly to the past decades. Furthermore, it is also important to consider the family lifestyles' and the quality of primary relationships: all represent good indicators of change that have taken place in the economic and social arenas of Italy (Di Nicola, Stanzani, Tronca 2008). The model of the male breadwinner in Europe is now replaced by the bi-symmetric model of the family income, also known as dual-earner or dual career, but several Italian policy-makers still have some difficulties to become aware of this.

And again, how is it nowadays possible that in Italy the weight of welfare policies still falls back on families and primary networks, considering that over the last decades the family itself was a key player of profound changes?

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policy (2009), *White Paper on the future of the social model*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> The censuses of the last thirty years show a slow and steady decrease in percentage of the nuclear family, today around 50 per cent of total household types and are instead reported large increases in single-person households, with values close to 30 per cent (mostly over 65) and couples without children, with values of around 15 percent. Values less consistent, but also important especially for economic and social difficulties of this typology, the single-parent families (2011 Census, Istat-Italian National Institute for Statistic).

One explanation may be related to the fact that the family in Italy, as a strong social institution historically consolidated, took charge of all the duties of modernization, thus creating the conditions for ripening an 'aristocrat' attitude of the political and intellectual class, promoting a substantial disregard for the family, which has been considered a non-priority aspect of social policies (Di Nicola, 1998: 15). An idealized vision of the family considered as a stable unit (married couple, male breadwinner, female are mainly involved in care duties, birth of children that ensure generational replacement), linked to a historical period that ended since the seventies of the last century, and therefore no longer corresponds to the present time is still rooted in a certain politics class, but also in a part of the public opinion.

The representation of the family that emerges from the *White Paper on the future of the social model* (2009) of the center-right oriented government led by Berlusconi is fully rooted in this idealized vision, but as the Italian families are changing, it is much more difficult than in the past producing and activating, forms of "to-do-all-at home" welfare. It seems that the editors of the *White Paper on the future of the social model* have escaped the profound changes related to the ways of doing and being family in Italy nowadays. But also the increase of its complexity and its problematic issues: the decline of generativity, the increase in marital conflict, the weak inter-generational transmission, the difficulties of reconciling professional commitment and family care (Di Nicola 2008).

The consequences of a welfare regime projected in this way (the family as primary core of any Welfare) are easy to predict: limited public resources, low redistributive capacity, few offer of services. At the European Union level, Italy is among the countries presenting the lowest proportion of resources allocated to welfare policy, more specifically the portion of resources allocated for children caretaking is particularly low<sup>4</sup>.

In this context, families are forced to improvise a sort of private welfare<sup>5</sup> and it is not surprising that some scholars refers to forms of *forced familialism* (Saraceno 2002) and family solidarity obligation (Zanatta 1998). As it is easy to predict, women are the main actors of children caretaking. In Southern European countries, women are the mainstay of the informal network of support among families, but today these networks are more and more reduced. Given the decreasing of *care giver*, the work of caring for children becomes more and more challenging and expensive. In Italy, but also in other Mediterranean countries, demographic trends show that the number of those who need help for living a decent life is increasing, while the proportion of those within the family network who may respond to these requests are falling. The constant increasing of the indicators related to welfare needs and to the quote of population dependent on the welfare services - such as the reduction of the average family composition, a longer life expectancy, lower fertility rates, trend to a single-child, increase of the female employment rates - are visible to everyone, even the ordinary citizen, without the need for elaborate analysis of demographic tables.

According to Istat analyses<sup>6</sup> in Italy are emerging critical unmet needs for nearly two million people, the highest share (37.6 per cent) living in the South.

An important element to consider in this analysis, not only for the Italian case, is that of territorial differences and processes of decentralization of welfare policies.

The data on unmet needs presented by Istat highlight the differentiation of social dynamics and the outcomes produced by different welfare systems within the same national territory. In Europe, since the eighties of the last century, is it possible to note an increase in the importance of the local dimension of social policies, which is beginning to be recognized only in the late nineties (Kazepov 2009, Andreotti, Mingione, Polizzi 2012). The variables that affect the local welfare systems may be characterized by the growth of local economy, the density of relational networks and social generalized

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<sup>4</sup> The percentage of GDP that Italy assigns to 'family/children' - as a support for the costs of pregnancy, childbirth, child care and care of other family members - is among the lowest in the Eurostat data.

<sup>5</sup> The reference is to a typical Italian phenomenon for the elderly care, mainly charged to foreign caretakers, known as *badanti*. Its part of an informal strategy from below, since the public or private facilities are not easily accessible and require much higher cost (the monthly fees for a residential home starts at 1,800 Euros) compared to those for *badanti* (the monthly average cost is 1.300/1.500 euro with regular contract, but it can be much lower, up to 700/800 Euros if in the absence of regular contract).

<sup>6</sup> CNEL II° COMMISSIONE – Stati Generali su Il Lavoro delle Donne in Italia, *Il lavoro femminile in tempo di crisi*, report by Linda Laura Sabbadini, Head of Department for Social Statistics, ISTAT, Rome, 2 February 2012.

capital<sup>7</sup>, by the history of local social policies and health service, by the characteristics of the third sector and the emergence of an organizational culture by public actors and stakeholders. From the literature is now emerging in the comparison of welfare systems a trend that consider simplistic the use of the national dimension. According to Bertin (2012: 64), it is now difficult for the Italian case to recognize a *national* welfare system, due to the sharp differentiation present in regional welfare systems.<sup>8</sup>

These data presented by Istat confirm how in Italy the social context and the territorial dimension have a central importance and the fact that the models of *governance* in Southern European countries, within the same national territory, can range from extreme forms of dependence to forms of active participation or managerialism (Bertin 2012, 2013, Bertin, Robertson, 2013, Kazepov 2009). With reference to the Italian case, Ferrera (1996) sees in the pervasive exploitation of social benefits a target used by the local political class to maintain control on voters, through the distribution of pensions for disabled people (even if without the specific requisites) and jobs in the public sector.

## 2. The family in Italy and the role of the welfare system

Demographic crisis and risk of widespread poverty seem to be the two biggest problems that families are facing in Europe, especially in the Mediterranean countries. Is there a possible answer to this issue? The proposal of Esping-Andersen, now addressed in more concrete terms, puts the attention on the socialization of family care (de-familialisation), in other words the transfer outside the family of the production of goods and services that it still incorporates, as a proposal to revive the family and the welfare state as a whole. In essence, the following direction is indicated: higher levels of outsourcing of caring work for children means greater opportunities for women to access the labor market. In this perspective, the State must be the promoter of a whole series of social policies to reduce as much as possible the care duties by the family, in order to facilitate the realization of the economic model of double-earner. This, in practical terms, would increase the economic well-being of the family and reduce the burden of domestic work load most notoriously to female components, but it can be also considered a directly and indirectly support for the whole economic system thanks to taxes paid by the firms.

De-familialisation of care has been proposed and supported especially by those scholars who faced the problem of the evaluation of the welfare system from the gender perspective (Saraceno, Naldini 2001), while other, more sensitive to the issue of non-interference of the state in family dynamics, criticized this proposal considered antithetical to the principle of subsidiarity, both vertical and horizontal, which was spreading in the debates on the reform of welfare systems (Donati 2002).

These perspectives originated in Italy divergent ideas on how to create reconciliation policies as a strategy to overcome the crisis, both for the welfare and for the family.

On the one hand, there are scholars who see in reconciliation policies between reproductive work (care work done mainly by women in households) and productive work (which is done predominantly by males for the market outside the family) an instrument through which introducing instruments for income support on universalistic basis and not just on the basis of social security. But also this approach may result in the raising female employment rates and increasing personal services' production both by the public sphere, the market and the social economy (Saraceno, Naldini, 2001; Zanatta 1998). Reconciliation policies should strengthen the structural position of men and women, regardless to their respective positions within the family, making them less dependent subjects, giving everyone the chance to choose the best service for managing the family care. On the same front an in-depth analysis in the direction of increasing poverty of women and their children has been developed, where the participation of mothers in the labor market is seen as the only strategy to keep away single-parent families from poverty and from selective and stigmatizing welfare interventions (Saraceno 2002). On this aspect of anti-poverty policies, Esping Andersen sees also in the increasing employment rates of mothers and especially in the planning of basic universal service for care of children, an opportunity to break the transmission of inequalities played by the family.

<sup>7</sup> For a deeper analysis on the different level of social capital in Italy, see : Di Nicola P. Stanzani S., Tronca L., (2008), "Reti di prossimità e capitale sociale in Italia", Franco Angeli, Milano.

<sup>8</sup> The research of Bertin on regional welfare in Italy (2012), identifies seven types of local welfare systems. The cluster groups highlight strong territorial differences between northern and southern regions. In particular, see the section "Which regional welfare systems?", P. 61-82.

On the other hand, there is the position of those who see in reconciliation policies the tool through which to build a model of social welfare, based mainly on horizontal subsidiarity (Donati 2002; Donati, Colozzi 2005). Reconciliation becomes the instrument through which, at the local and at the community level, creating a useful agreement between companies, workers (especially women) in order to assure positive working conditions to reconcile productive work and care responsibilities (Donati, Prandini 2010). Regarding the tools for reconciliation, the public services are not as much strategic as the third sector's services (private companies, Ngo's) which are supposed to be more flexible (compared to the public ones) and less expensive, because they are provided by organizations who have no-profit purposes. In this case, the reform of the welfare system should develop a strong vertical subsidiarity (with the relative weakening of the role of the central state), emphasize the decentralization of public services at the local level, promote a solid and differentiated no-profit service system (social economy, third sector, associations, voluntary work) (Donati, Colozzi 2004).

A third position aims to reverse the widespread perception that considers domestic work and care work invisible in society, seen mostly as activities that fall in the *privacy* of the home, where everything that happens within the walls of family members is somehow disconnected from broader social spheres. Care work, according to this position, began to get out of the hierarchy of status and becomes subject to a process of disavowal from the large transformation brought about by modernity, in particular by the creation of the modern enterprise that changes the relationship between production and reproduction in the family. It is from this moment that slowly emerges the image of woman only connected with the roles of wife and mother, and of man who deserves respect and honor when he is able to work tenaciously, answering to the whole family's needs (Di Nicola 2013). In this way, reproductive work (housework and care work) and marital status are strongly welded, generating over time a substantial dependence of women by men. The area of care has begun to be something invisible, confined within the home and not socially productive. This position is maintained even in the current logic of de-familialisation, because the aim is not to enhance the care duties but only to reduce the individual and social costs, and, above all, leave the families alone to face the turbulence of the market (*ibid.*).

From these assumptions, the proposal is for strong social innovation, where care work could be recognized as work of 'public utility', not because families have more children, but because it is central for the growing of human capital and social development of a community (Di Nicola 2013). And the consequences resulting from a lack of 'social' are of great importance not only for the issues that are discussed here, but in the wider scenario of the current crisis. The financial and economic recovery will not happen without a reconstruction of social ties that globalization and crisis have greatly weakened (Sgritta 2012). Returning to the subject of de-familialisation, this should enter into a broader political and cultural project that including the other two pillars that are the foundation of modern nations: the state and the market. Care work, in its various aspects, should be no longer only female duty and responsibility, but must be divided among the various social and institutional actors, considering it not as a burden but as the 'ability' that allow men and women to exercise greater control over their own biographies of life, already too de-institutionalized and flexible (Di Nicola, 2013: 60). To generate good citizens, as noted by Nussbaum (2011, trans. it. 2012) democracies should assure them decent living conditions, because only persons who are recognized in their dignity can support positively the society political and cultural building.

The growth of new family forms, the changes in the geography of poverty, which today sees at a risk especially single-income families with dependent children, the lack of explicit social policies for families, has reopened the debate on the role and scope of structural and cultural reproductive function still centered on the family.

In a recent article, for example, two Italian economists (Ichino, Alesina 2009), suggest that the massive presence of the Italian family as a producer of services and as center for the circulation of resources and opportunities, is a slowdown factor both for country's economic development and overall for the social mobility of young people. The economic and private strong presence of the family (as a producer of goods and services) has many consequences: - has helped in keeping wages low (in Italy the average wages are at the lowest level in Europe); - did not support the growth of public services; - prevented the development of a competitive market with private facilities (so far in Italy the cost of services such as childcare and elderly care, both public and private, are extremely high); - has limited the movement in the labor market.



Other authors (Del Boca, Rosina 2009; Di Nicola, 1998, 2008) have shown how the demographic changes that have affected the Italian family and the society as a whole (ageing population, crisis of marriage and fertility) are the effect of the lack of social policies aimed at supporting the work of care. These social and cultural trends will be certainly accentuated by the current economic crisis<sup>9</sup>.

After these considerations, a strategic point is trying to understand whether the central role of the family in Italy is the result of pure strategies of adaptation (forced choice) or if it is originated by intentional choices, that are part of a larger cultural system of action orientation and behaviors that is widely accepted at the social level.

Nowadays the various proposals for the modernization of the welfare state have to face a number of structural problems that at this time tend to increase, in particular:

- Rising of unemployment rates, especially among young people;
- Increase in underemployment;
- Presence of undeclared and irregular work
- Economic downturn;
- Precariousness of life biographies of both men and women;
- Increased marital conflict;
- Growth of the population in need (elderly people).

As a result of these processes, which have had a profound effect on the population structure and its social composition, the family strategies are now characterized by diversity and differentiation, not only based on individual preferences, but also on the basis of the multiplicity of factors that are connected to the social scene.

### 3. Research objectives and hypotheses

The research aim is to analyze the empirically detectable connections between the orientations of the family about the 'optimal' resolution of problems related to the performance of care work, the expectations about the role of the State, the responsibilities of market and non-profit organizations for the solution of social problems, the perception of risk of falling below the poverty line or to experience a reduction of economic resources.

The assumption that will be checked is that the supposed familialism of the Italian family, are not the result of the persistence of a traditional and rural model of orientation, but the consequence of complex social dynamics, in which causes and effects influence each other, giving rise to patterns of action that do not enroll in a precise pattern.

The starting question is if the so-called 'Italian familialism' is a forced familialism (imposed by the structure, where according to this perspective, the family suffers passively decisions - or rather non-decisions – by the political class and government and therefore it must find her own resources to generate a 'do-it-yourself or is it a *familialism* in any way expected and accepted (considered by Italian families the best model for the management of family policies)?

In other words, this work will be focused how the 'will' or the need 'to have to do it all at home' is influenced not only by the profile characteristics of the social actors (gender, age, level of education, employment status), but also by their level of trust in political institutions, in the perceived quality level

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis on the effects of the economic crisis in Italy, see the special issue of the *Italian Sociological Review*. The TeSIS (Time, Space, Image, Society) Department at the University of Verona, along with the SWG Research company, established an Observatory for analysis and monitoring of consumer spending. Starting in 2009, data were gathered from a sample of 2008 Italian families annually. At present, data for three years are available, the analysis of which was published in *Italian Sociological Review*, n. 3, 2012. In the three years under investigation, a percentage of families cut expenses, especially on goods not related to primary needs (including clothing, house furnishings, technology), while there is a less consistent decline on spending for food (given its essential nature at a certain threshold). Families have developed strategies of "survival" with the aim of maintaining a certain standard of life, in the face of reduced income available: nevertheless, in these three years more families started savings strategies and a reduction in all types of expenses, and a number of families were able to maintain a certain level of spending through making shrewd purchases and making sure of getting good quality for the price (Secondulfo 2012).

of services used, by the level of differentiation of personal family structures and the perceived strength/weakness of structural condition.

#### 4. Methodology

For the achievement of the cognitive objectives of the research and the testing of hypotheses, it will be proposed an analysis of second level data, relating to a European survey conducted on various issues relevant to the research in question.

In particular, the main reference is to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2010 in all 27 EU member states.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of the research, it will be analyzed the data for Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. The decision followed the criterion to identify a group European countries, in order to evaluate possible differences in the responses and attitudes of the respondents on the topics covered by the survey: Sweden and Denmark for Northern Europe, France and Germany for Continental Europe and Spain and Italy for Southern Europe. In the typology of Esping-Andersen (1990), this group of countries stands for Denmark and Sweden in the *social democratic* welfare regimes, and France, Germany, Spain, Italy in the *conservative* model. The data analysis will also assess whether Spain and Italy take on empirical evidence to require separate classification compared to continental European countries (France and Germany in this case), such as emerge from the current debate, which places them in the group of countries belonging to the Mediterranean welfare regimes.

The Eurostat survey as a whole has involved the following aspects:

1. Profile variables of the respondents;
2. Family structure (standard families, stepfamilies, presence of elderly and/or children and adolescents, single);
3. Level of satisfaction with their standard of living and evaluation of the adequacy of resources available to the family;
4. Care solutions considered 'optimal' or preferable for children, the elderly and people in need of the family;
5. Services used (for children, the elderly and people in need of the family) and evaluation of their quality;
6. Expectations by the State, the market and the non-governmental organization for the solution of social problems;
7. Evaluation of the efforts of the state, the market and non-governmental organizations for the solution of social problems;
8. Institutional trust;
9. Availability in paying more taxes to improve public services.

The data will be subjected to univariate and bivariate analysis, choosing the most suitable techniques to the treatment of the variables according to their level of measurement.

#### 4. Analysis and review of data

The survey conducted in the Eurobarometer 74.1 (August-September 2010) has presented a number of *items* related to respondents' opinions on several issues focused on the reconciliation of work-family and in family policies, such as the accessibility and quality of welfare services and care solutions considered 'optimal' or preferable for children, dependent elderly parents and for the weak members of the family. The questions on these issues posed in the questionnaire made it possible to detect in which EU countries there are prevailing opinions in favor of State intervention (de-familialisation and central government policies) and, conversely, in favor of a propensity for the 'use' of internal resources (familialism and welfare do-it-yourself).

The presentation of data is divided into four parts, which are in the order: 1) views on social spending and government policies, 2) opinions on the best solutions to take care for elderly parents

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<sup>10</sup> Eurobarometer 74.1. Data collection from August to September 2010, publication November 2010.

and children, 3) the costs for caring parents and children at home, 4) opinions on the quality of public services for the long-term care and children.

#### First part: views on social spending and government policies

##### *Request for welfare policies more incisive in Spain and Italy*

In the examined group of countries, Italy and Spain are the ones that have a greater propensity to state intervention, through government action, which should ensure everyone to receive what they need (tab. 1). For Spain nearly the 70 per cent of respondents' are for the State intervention, while for Italy this value is 63.8 per cent. The northern European countries are instead those that show higher values on the side of the engagement of citizens in providing for what they need, respectively 53.9 per cent for Sweden and 51.2 per cent for Denmark. In summary, it is possible to argue that expectation of greater government intervention of the State in favor of social policies are greater in the countries where the family has been historically considered a strong institution, which may be considered one of numerous signs of the increased difficulties of south European countries to face their own new social risks.

##### *Italians are willing to pay more taxes for health care, education, social spending*

Here is resized a certain widely opinion diffused in Italy, which considers the tax charge too high. For a better level of health care, education and social spending, Italians are strongly in favor of a tax increase, with 80 percent of the responses (tab. 2), probably because the perceived quality and the nature of the services are considered not satisfactory. There is a significant difference between the two Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Sweden) on tax cuts: very strong demand for Denmark (28.7 percent) and much lower for Sweden (7.3 per cent), where the tax charge for social spending is perceived less oppressive.

#### Second part: opinions on the best solutions to take care for elderly parents and children

##### *For Italian and Spanish elderly parents are better cared at home*

How to deal with elderly parents no longer able to cope with everyday life in an independent and autonomous way? What is the best solution between remaining in their own home cared by sons, or considering the residential or nursing homes option? There are two groups of countries (tab. 3) that give opposite answers: Denmark and Sweden are strongly in favor of a 'Public or private home care or nursing home' solution (86.7 per cent for Sweden and 78.5 per cent for Denmark). It is important to underline that the Nordic countries are characterized by generous care service for older people, which also enable older people to be independent of the family and liberate (female) family members from the obligation of care<sup>11</sup>. The choice in Italy and Spain is more in favor of 'Living with a child/children or one of them assists parents at home' (66.6 per cent for Spain and 56.8 per cent for Italy). This last result shows a propensity to a familialistic orientation, though it remains unclear if this choice is dictated by factors related to a traditional view of the family (which is legitimized by phrases like 'who abandons the elderly in a residential home is not a good son/daughter', 'who does not loves him/her enough puts them in the hospice') or merely by economic and social factors (lack of adequate facilities on the territory or excessive costs for residential and nursing homes). Unfortunately, there is a lack of information on the intensity of care provided by these services, particularly in the case of home service. Existing studies (OECD 2005, Rauch 2007, Saraceno, Keck 2010) when only homecare is considered,

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<sup>11</sup> Care provision takes place within a highly regulated and formal setting, with mainly professionalized and qualified staff members. But the theme of de-familialisation, which is considered a main characteristic of the Nordic welfare regimes, is not more a solid pillar. After Denmark and Sweden have taken diverse provision of formal public tax-financed home care for older people, in Sweden is it possible to see an increase of informal care (help within the household is almost entirely spousal/partner care) of older people with lower social-economic status, while people with higher education tend to purchase help from market providers. For a deeper analysis on the policy of ageing in Sweden and Denmark see Rostgard, Szebehely (2012).

intensity is comparatively high in the Scandinavian countries, Finland and the Netherlands, and low to very low in most other countries.

*Germans are more in favor for child care provided by mother*

Now let's see if and how things change when the beneficiaries of care work are no longer elderly parents, but the children in their first years of life. With regard to access to public or private services (pre-school centers), among the various possible options for the care of children 0-3 years old, is here confirmed the primacy of this choice for the Northern Europeans (72.2 per cent for Sweden and 70.5 per cent for Denmark; for Italy this percentage is 43.6) while it is quite surprising the figure for Germany (tab. 4 and tab. 5). It is the last place (42.9 percent) in the group of countries analyzed in preference for access to nursery/pre-school centers and in first place (41.2 per cent) on the preference 'child care provided primarily by mother'. Italy and Spain follow Germany in this 'maternal' attitude, respectively with 34 per cent and quite far with 22.4 per cent.

After these preliminary considerations, it should be noted that Germany, Spain and Italy have lower fertility rates (see tab. 6) with respect to Denmark, Sweden and France, where the choice in favor of de-familialisation of young children care is definitely the majority. Here it is confirmed the trend that in countries offering more public services for children and more attention to reconciling work and family the fertility rates are higher, if compared to other countries where instead a mix of cultural factors and lack of economic resources makes the choice of having a baby a project which can put the family at a risk of poverty.

Third part: the costs for caring parents and children at home

*The children in Italy are 'very expensive'*

Saying that children are also a 'cost' for families is something obvious. However, in some countries such as Denmark (tab. 7) they have a minimum impact on family income (only 0.3 per cent believe that it is necessary to allocate 50 per cent or more of household income for the care of children), in others countries, like Italy the 'cost' in proportion is 100 times more (in Italy almost 35 per cent feel right to allocate 50 and over per cent of household income). If in Italy the 'cost' of children is perceived so high and on the territory is not developed a network of public services to support parents and families, it is quite obvious to observe how fertility rates in Italy are among the lowest in Europe.

*In Italy, compared to other countries, even the elderly are 'very expensive'*

Also for the costs of their elderly parents, Italy is still in first place, even if with smaller differences between other countries when compared to the 'cost' of children (tab. 8). Nearly 40 percent of respondents in Italy believe that it should be allocated a percentage between 20 and 49 percent of family income to the care of their parents. If the two values, cost for children care plus elderly care, are summed on the proportion of income between 20-48 percent, Italian families believe that it is reasonable to devote to the care of parents and children nearly the 75 per cent of family income, while in Denmark the same proportion has as a sum of 11 percent. The cost of the typical Italian welfare, mainly charged on the families, have a strong impact on household income, but families in Italy are less and less able to sustain these costs, both because the caregivers are decreasing and is growing the number of elderly people who need assistance. The risk of an increase in poverty for families in Italy is also confirmed by recent data from Istat, the Italian National Institute for Statistic.<sup>12</sup>

Part Four: opinions on the quality of public services for the long-term care and children

*For Italians the quality of services for the treatment of long-term ill and children are unsatisfactory*

The opinions on the quality of services for long-term care, intended not only for older people, are very different in the sample of countries under consideration. France, with more than 60 percent of

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<sup>12</sup> ISTAT, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2013), *Report on Social Cohesion, Year 2012*.

rates 'very good/fairly good' is ranked first in terms of satisfaction (tab. 9). In Italy, the satisfaction level is about half (31.9 per cent) than the French, the lowest among the countries analyzed. Consequently, Italy is the country with the highest rate of dissatisfaction, where the answers 'fairly bad/very bad' reach 43.4 per cent, much higher than the levels of satisfaction, equal to 31.9 percent.

Opinions in Italy on the level of satisfaction with the services for children are slightly better (tab. 10), in the sense that the majority opinion is positive (43.6 per cent 'very good/fairly good') than negative (37.3 percent 'fairly bad/very ad'). Italy, however, remains at the first place among the countries surveyed in terms of dissatisfaction. Compared to long-term care, Sweden and Denmark show higher levels of satisfaction for children services.

## Tables

Table 1 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - "Which of these statements comes closest to your opinion?".

	The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone has what they need	People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves	It depends	Does not know	Total
Sweden	36.40%	53.90%	8.10%	1.70%	100.00%
Denmark	41.10%	51.20%	7.10%	0.60%	100.00%
France	50.70%	36,00%	10.40%	3.00%	100.00%
Germany	60.10%	32.30%	7.00%	0.60%	100.00%
<b>Italy</b>	<b>63.80%</b>	<b>20.90%</b>	<b>11.70%</b>	<b>3.70%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Spain	69.90%	20.70%	6.20%	3.30%	100.00%

Table 2 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - " And still about the different steps that should be taken to help solving social and economic problems in your country, which of these two statements comes closest to your view? "

	Higher level of health care, education and social spending must be guaranteed, even if it means that taxes might increase	Taxes should be decreased even if it means a general lower level of health care, education and social spending	It depends	Does not know	Total
Denmark	52.90%	28,70%	13.60%	4.80%	100.00%
Germany	53.40%	17.80%	22.30%	6.50%	100.00%
Spain	62.10%	20.80%	11.00%	6.10%	100.00%
France	64.60%	16.30%	9.90%	9.20%	100.00%
<b>Italy</b>	<b>80,00%</b>	<b>13.30%</b>	<b>5.30%</b>	<b>1.30%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Sweden	85.00%	7.30%	4.60%	3.10%	100.00%

Table 3 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - "Imagine an elderly father or mother who lives alone and can no longer manage to live without regular help because of her or his physical or mental health condition. In your opinion, what would be the best option for people in this situation? Firstly?".

	Living with a child /children or one of them assists parents at home	Public or private home care or nursing home	Other	It depends	None of these	Doesn't know	Total
Spain	66.6%	26.9%	0.5%	3.2%	0.3%	2.6%	100.0%
<b>Italy</b>	<b>56.8%</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Germany	48.3%	45.0%	0.3%	4.9%	0.6%	1.0%	100.0%
France	37.6%	57.1%	0.6%	2.8%	0.2%	1.7%	100.0%
Denmark	18.9%	78.5%	0.0%	1.2%	0.2%	1.3%	100.0%
Sweden	9.7%	86.7%	0.1%	2.7%	0.3%	0.6%	100.0%

Table 4 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - Part 1, The dimension of family care: mother, father, relatives. "Childcare for children aged 0-3 can be organised in different ways, by combining several options or by relying on only one option. In your opinion, what is the best way of organising childcare for children aged 0-3? " (Multiple answers possible)

	Child care provided primarily by the mother	Child care provided primarily by his father	Child care provided by the mother and father	Child care provided by grandparents or other relatives
Germany	41.2%	9.8%	49.1%	24.5%
<b>Italy</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
Spain	22.4%	6.6%	50.6%	19.8%
France	17.7%	5.3%	20.0%	24.3%
Sweden	14.2%	6.9%	60.6%	15.4%
Denmark	13.9%	3.7%	24.1%	11.2%

Table 5 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - Part 2, The dimension of 'external' care: pre-school centers, nursery, baby-sitter. "Childcare for children aged 0-3 can be organised in different ways, by combining several options or by relying on only one option. In your opinion, what is the best way of organising childcare for children aged 0-3? " (Multiple answers possible)

	Public or private pre-school centers	Baby sitter or staff at par at home	Baby sitter certified in family houses, that is, people with certification or diploma for the care and assistance to children
Sweden	72.2%	16.8%	16.6%
Denmark	70.5%	13.1%	57.1%
France	59.7%	17.1%	34.6%
Spain	58.0%	2.3%	2.0%
<b>Italy</b>	<b>43.6%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>
Germany	42.9%	9.8%	14.9%

Table 6 – Fertility rates. Ordered descending by year 2010. Source: Eurostat.

Countries	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
France	2.00	1.98	2.01	2.00	2.03
France (metropolitan)	1.98	1.96	1.99	1.99	2.01
Sweden	1.85	1.88	1.91	1.94	1.98
Denmark	1.85	1.84	1.89	1.84	1.87
<b>Italy</b>	<b>1.35</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>1.41</b>
Germany	1.33	1.37	1.38	1.36	1.39
Spain	1.37	1.39	1.46	1.39	1.38

Table 7 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - "Approximately, what percentage of the total income of one's household do you think is reasonable to pay for the care of one's children?"

	50% and over	20-49	0-19	No answer	Do not know	Total
<b>Italy</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>34.3%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
France	14.5%	38.40%	13.9%	0.4%	32.9%	100.0%
Spain	11.2%	33.7%	19.1%	0.8%	35.1%	100.0%
Germany	7.8%	31.8%	30.7%	2.7%	26.9%	100.0%
Sweden	2.7%	13.1%	52.8%	1.2%	30.2%	100.0%
Denmark	0.3%	5.2%	63.2%	3.3%	28.0%	100.0%

Table 8 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - " In your opinion, approximately what percentage of the total income of one's household is reasonable to pay for the care of one's parents?".

	50% and over	20-49	0-19	No answer	Do not know	Total
<b>Italy</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>39.1%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>28.2%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Spain	7.1%	29.6%	26.2%	1.1%	36.1%	100.0%
Germany	4.3%	24.2%	38.9%	2.7%	29.8%	100.0%
Sweden	2.7%	8.1%	62.5%	1.4%	25.4%	100.0%
France	2.5%	22.1%	37.2%	1.1%	37.1%	100.0%
Denmark	0.7%	5.8%	65.5%	3.9%	24.1%	100.0%

Table 9 - Eurobarometer 74.1 - "Thinking now about the quality of long term care services in your country, would you say that it is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad?".

	Fairly bad/very bad	Very good/fairly good	Does not know	Total
<b>Italy</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Germany	37.9%	42.6%	19.5%	100.0%
Denmark	34.8%	59.7%	5.5%	100.0%
Sweden	31.3%	53.9%	14.8%	100.0%
Spain	20.8%	42.3%	36.9%	100.0%
France	17.7%	60.6%	21.7%	100.00%

Table 10 - Eurobarometer 74.1 – "Thinking now about the quality of childcare services in your country, would you say that it is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad?".

	Fairly bad/very bad	Very good/fairly good	Does not know	Total
<b>Italy</b>	<b>37.3%</b>	<b>43.6%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Germany	26.4%	61.1%	12.5%	100.0%
France	17.4%	52.6%	29.9%	100.0%
Spain	15.7%	52.1%	32.1%	100.0%
Denmark	11.5%	80.1%	8.4%	100.0%
Sweden	6.6%	81.9%	11.5%	100.0%

## 5. Conclusion

At this stage of the ongoing research, the starting question (analyzing whether the persistence of familism welfare in Italy is due to the persistence of traditional models or is it the result of complex social dynamics) can only present preliminary answers. Eurobarometer data's analysis provides a first valid point of reflection on the Italian case. Compared to the considered countries (Denmark and Sweden as a social-democratic welfare regime, France and Germany as conservative welfare regimes and Italy and Spain as Mediterranean welfare regimes), Italy is at the first front with regard to the choice to assist elderly at home instead of in residential and nursing homes, as well as the tendency to prefer, along with Germany, the child care with the mother, compared to the low preferences for the choices for pre-school centers. These first data on the perceived 'best practices', could suggest the prevalence in Italy of a familistic orientation concerning the care work. Nevertheless other data suggest that things are not so simple. Italians are among those who want to pay higher taxes to ensure an adequate care system and ask for a more decisive government's social policies, are the ones that spend the highest levels of household income for the children and elderly care, are the most dissatisfied with the long-term care and children services. These further data suggest that the tendency of Italian families to 'do everything at home' can be the consequence of complex situations, often perceived as a forced choice generated by the lack of a structural policies that guide and organize the

reconciliation between productive work and care work, by the shortage and often lack of public services, by the difficulty of raising public funds due to the persistence of global economic crisis.

Warning signs on the difficulties being experienced by Italian families - especially when they have to intensify the care duties, due to a new child's birth or an elderly parent's needs - are certainly not missed in recent years, even before the beginning of the economic recession. Recent literature on welfare and social policies captured these signals (Barbieri, Cutuli, Tosi, 2012; Di Nicola 1998, 2013; Del Boca, Rosina 2009; Donati, Ferrucci 1994; Kazepov 2009). Structural and primary social networks' changes that have crossed the Italian family during the last thirty years are probably transforming the idea on 'how to give care'. It is possible to argue that despite the traditional sense of care is still a character of the Italian family, it is important to be aware of the new trends which may realign tasks and responsibilities between the couple, producing consequent demands for increased support by the institutions. At the same time, it is important to underline how much these expectations may be frustrated by a cultural and political system that still fails to grasp the occurring deep changes in Italian families' way of life.

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