

# **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CURRENT, FUTURE AND IDEAL FAMILY: A CROSS NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT IN ITALY AND ROMANIA**

**Presented by Stefania Aiello**



- ✚ “Little is known as Family as social representation (SR) among public opinion, **everyone acting as though the common use of the word meant a universally accepted representation**”.

The appropriation of a dominating social model depends on an unpredictable number of variables, finally on individual norms and values system.

(Berthélémy, 1986)

- ✚ “Family, as social institutions, can be considered as SR: it has a **collective** and a **normative** dimension coming from iconography and culture and a more **personal** dimension, due to the relations that every person experiences in its own family”.

(D’Atena, 1996)

- ✚ “Rather than having a **classical definition**, there may be a variety of features and forms of family that people consider more typical than others”, definitions that can be considered as an **alternative** possibility and that, belonging to their family model, define concepts or central / peripheral aspects of the family conceptual categories.

(Weigel, 2008)



A cultural legacy of the **ideal family** exists in Western countries (based on three simultaneous conditions) :

**marriage, heterosexual union and child care-taking**

(Allan, Hawker & Crow (2001) .

In the current scenario, however, it is clear that the family takes on new and varied forms: changes in value systems and in social relations have introduced new expectations linked to gender, to a process of the **subjectivation of norms** (Bozon, 2004) and to the **de-institutionalisation of traditional** forms of family.



The family as SR should express the tension of our times between morphostatic and morphogenetic aspects in the family system.

## *Getting into the research....*

*1. Aims*

*2. Objectives*

*3. Hypothesis*

*4. Tools*

*5. First results in a cross-national perspective*

*Delineate and Explore the **VERBAL** and **ICONICAL** dimensions of the Social Representations of the:*

***Current** (personal experience level),  
**Ideal** (family as a normative cultural object) and  
**imagined Future family** (personal expectations and projections of  
the imagined dimension)*



*in a sample of **emerging adults** (Arnett, 2007) to find out if and how  
the ideal model of family and a personal expectation about the  
future effect the transition to adulthood.*

*The research plan is based on two heuristics considered as tools for a psycho-social understanding of the family: the relational-symbolic paradigm and the theory of social representations.*

Family is a unique and specific **SOCIAL ORGANIZATION** that **CONNECTS** and **TIES** the crucial differential variables:

- \* different **GENDERS** (male and female),
- \* different **GENERATIONS** (parents and children),
- \* different **LINEAGES** (origins of the father and origins of the mother). (Scabini & Cigoli, 2000)

**GENERATIVITY** as main goal and intrinsic function of the family. (Erikson, 1959)

<p style="text-align: center;">Object</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Subject      Others</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gender, Generation, Lineage</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Family      Others</p>
<p><i>Semiotic triangle (Moscovici, 1984)</i></p>	<p><i>Articulating SRT and symbolic-relational paradigm . (de Rosa, D'Ambrosio, Aiello, 2012)</i></p>



## MAIN QUESTIONS:



According to Arnett (2007) the phase of emerging adulthood represents a transition characterized by:

- frequent changes and exploration;
- no longer normative about the achievement of key-events for adult status, instead appreciating more individualistic criteria;
- a crucial stage to determine the self as an individual that takes position in front of family, community and society.

- ➔ **Can we still talk about a dominant representation of family that is normative to future expectations?**
- ➔ **Or it remains more a traditional image that doesn't affect future?**



# OBJECTIVES



- ➔ To investigate some of the characteristics attributed to the family in the naive theory using a **multi-methodological** approach;
- ➔ To investigate the relationship between the **perception of continuity and of change** in the social phenomenon of the family in terms of young people's changing objectives;
- ➔ To explore differences and similarities between the **verbal, symbolic and iconic contents** associated with the *current family*, with the personal expectations and projections in the *future family* and with the cultural objects in the *ideal family*;
- ➔ To survey the level of **family satisfaction** and **family relations' patterns** in the specific transition expected during the emerging adulthood period;
- ➔ To assess the **time orientation** of the emerging adults in object.



- ① There is a dominant representation of the family inherited both from the traditional Italian and Romanian culture is of central importance to the representation of the *ideal family*.  
This idea of family, coming from the normative dimensions strictly anchored to a strong cultural system is still presented as hegemonic;
- ② Changes in the dominant representation of family will emerge in the representations of one's *current family* and in those projected in the *future family*;
- ③ The multi-methodological approach in the study of such SRs represents a special need in the accessibility to multiple contents that will allow a more complex understanding of the phenomenon (ex. verbal tools will express important and different contents with regards to iconic techniques) .



# Cross-National HYPOTHESES








Due to the relevance in the life of individuals of such a theme as family, the strength of a normative dimension in the traditional Italian and Romanian culture will force individuals to inherit a dominant representation of the *ideal family*.

- a strong homogeneity in the social representations of the ideal family compared to the social representations of the current and future family.

However, this strong cultural system will have a different salience in Italian and Romanian's family representations (different level of *subjectivation of norms*):

- Italy much more variability in all current, future and ideal family representations where *personal projections* will take a stronger role
- Romania much more hegemonic representations, where *social expectations* will take a stronger role

-  **ASSOCIATIVE NETWORK (de Rosa, 1995);**
-  **HAND-DRAWING;**
-  **FACES III (Olson, 1985);**
-  **ZIMBARDO TIME PERSPECTIVE SCALE**  
(Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999);
-  **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW.**

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES

- ❖ Semantic dimensions of the field of SRs:  
content, structure, polarity
- ❖ Iconical dimension of the hand-drawn SRs:  
compositions, relations, emotions

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Gender
- Economical Condition
- Family Satisfaction and Family Relational Pattern
- Time Perspective

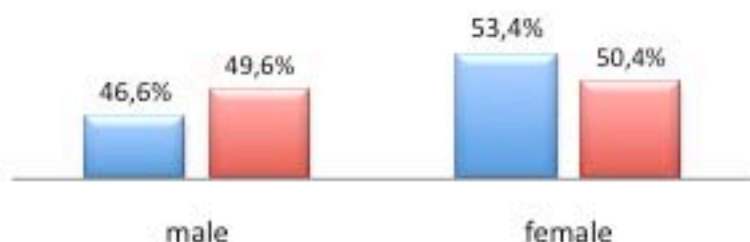
# SAMPLE

## Socio-Anagraphic Profile 1



### GENDER

Italy Romania



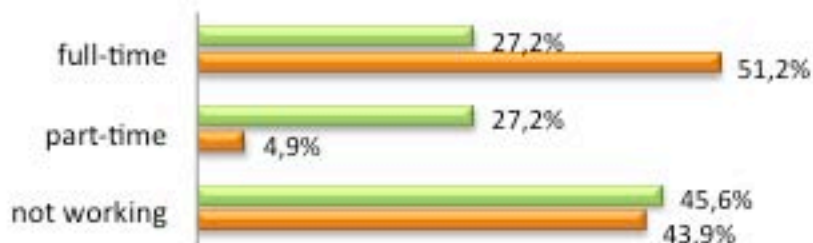
### AGE

Italy Romania



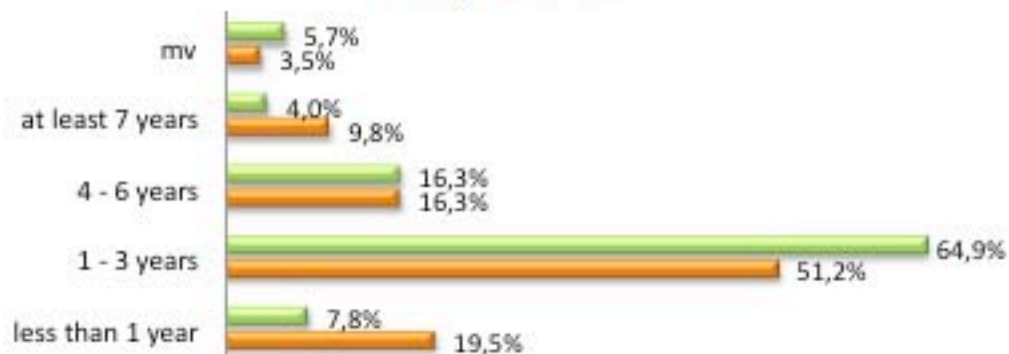
### OCCUPATION

Italy Romania



### LEAVING HOME PROJECTION

Italy Romania



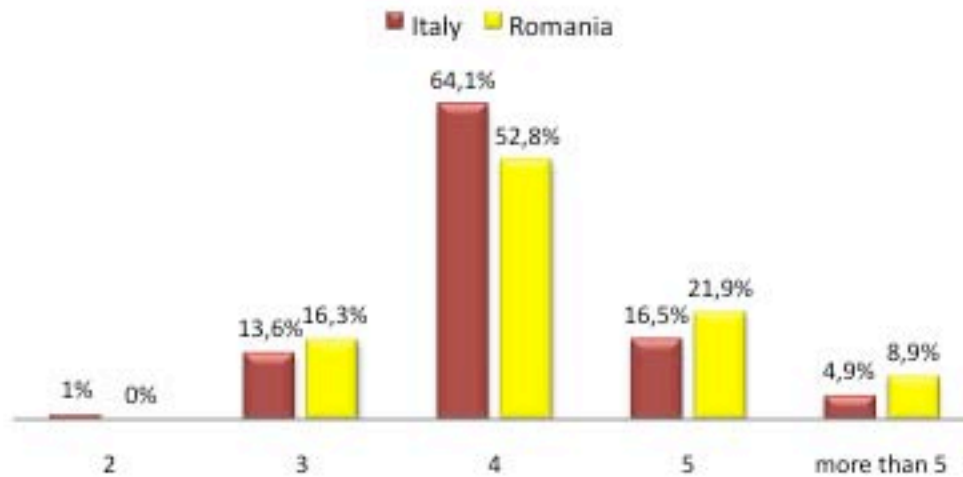


# SAMPLE

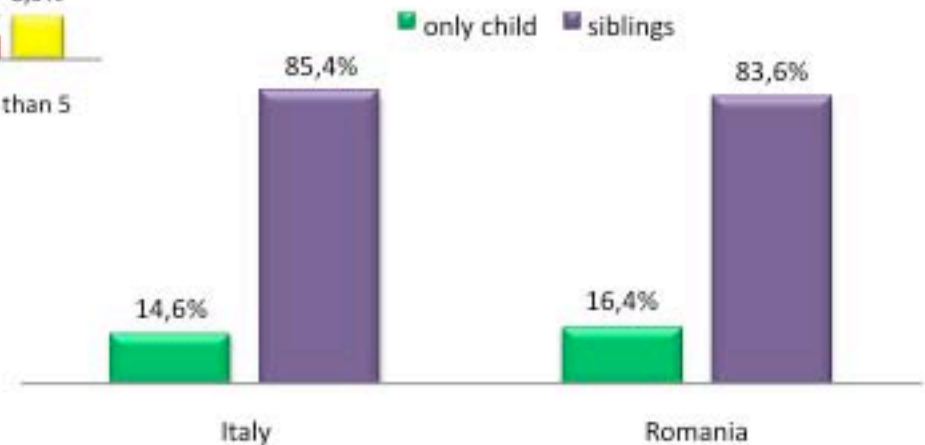
## *Socio-Anagraphic Profile 2*



### FAMILY MEMBERS

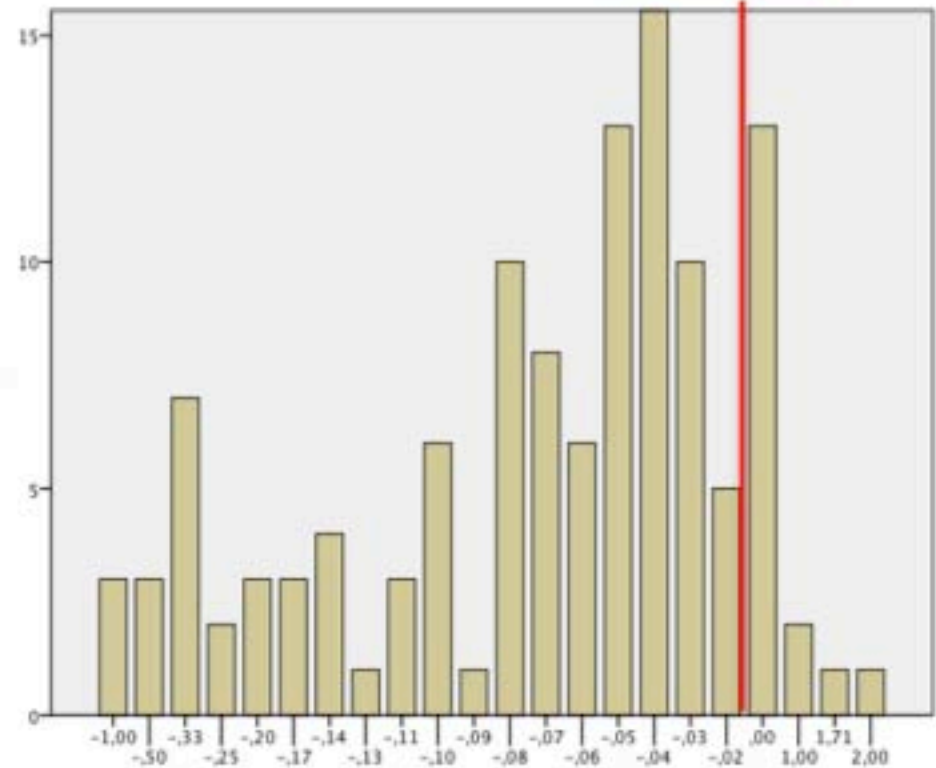
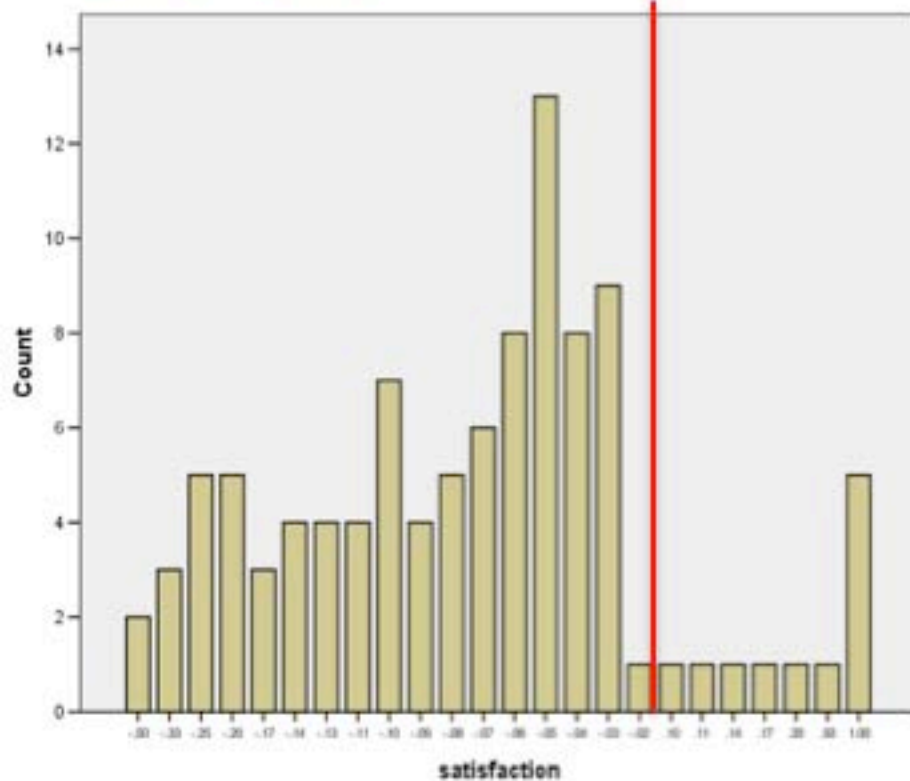


### SIBLINGS





# FACES III



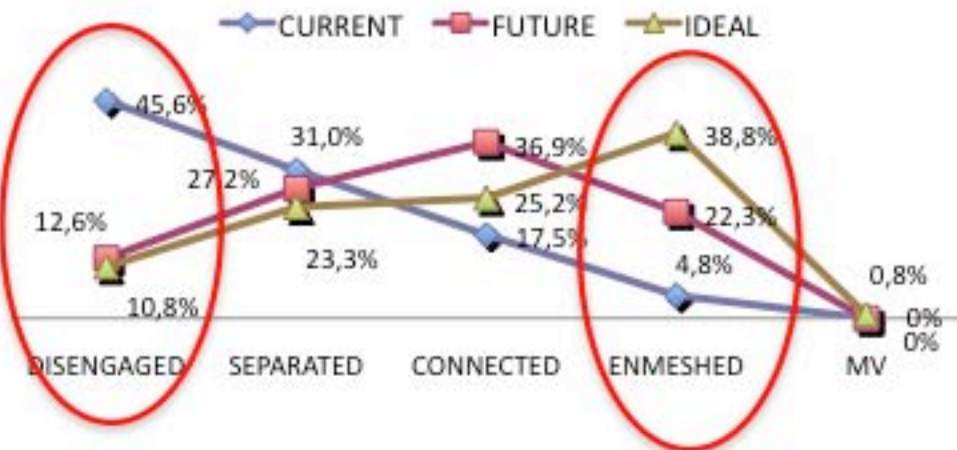
Low satisfaction in both samples



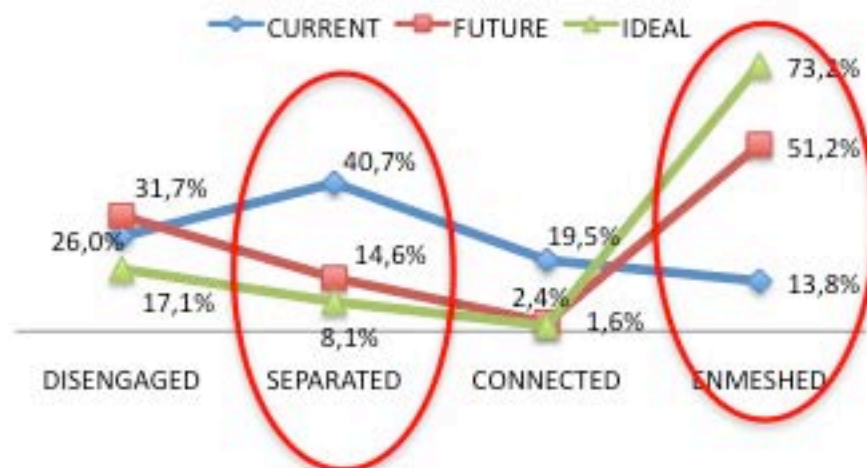
# FACES III



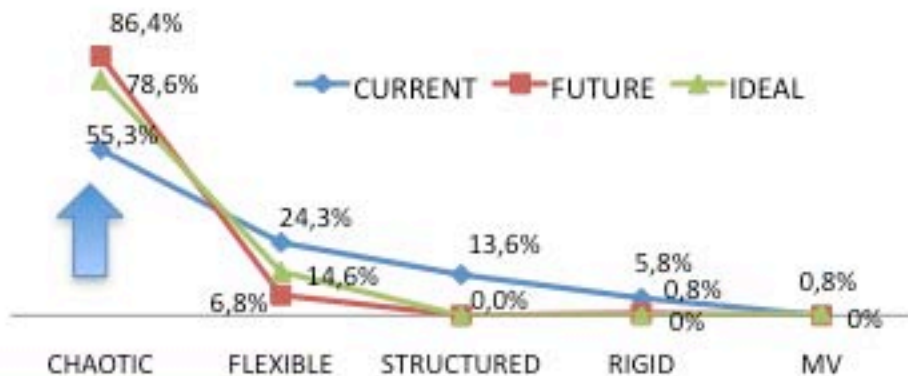
### COHESION (It)



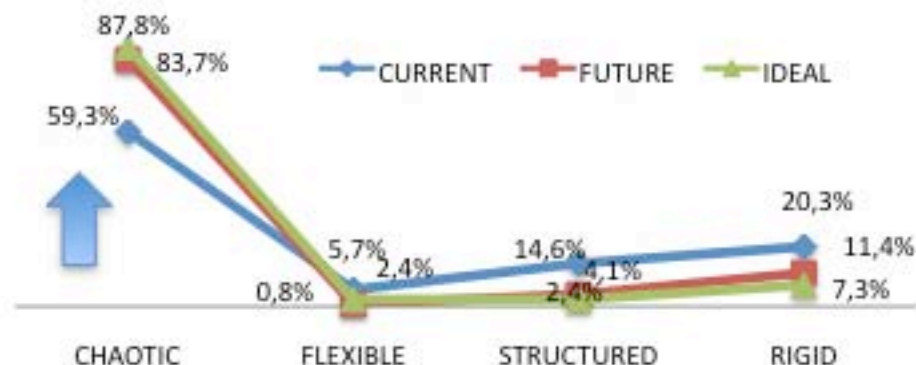
### COHESION (Ro)



### ADAPTABILITY (It)



### ADAPTABILITY (Ro)



SRs of current, future and ideal family

# Summing up FACES III...



The current – future - ideal family's representations expressed both by Italian and Romanian young adults show a potentially **paradoxical content** with regards to their family transition (leave family of origin-adulthood):

- ***a stronger emotional proximity*** (COHESION) in a transition that implies high level of differentiation;

\*How much the feeling of uncertainty of these young adults needs to be reassured?;

- Higher percentage in the Romanian sample (73,2% Ro - 38,8% It)

- ***more easiness and lack of rules and hierarchy*** within their family (ADAPTABILITY) though the distribution is similar for current and ideal family.

\*This results showing a more relaxed control within the family seems more coherent with the transition in object, in the idea our families knows how to adapt more in terms of flexibility, facing the cohabitation of two adults generations, than emotivism.



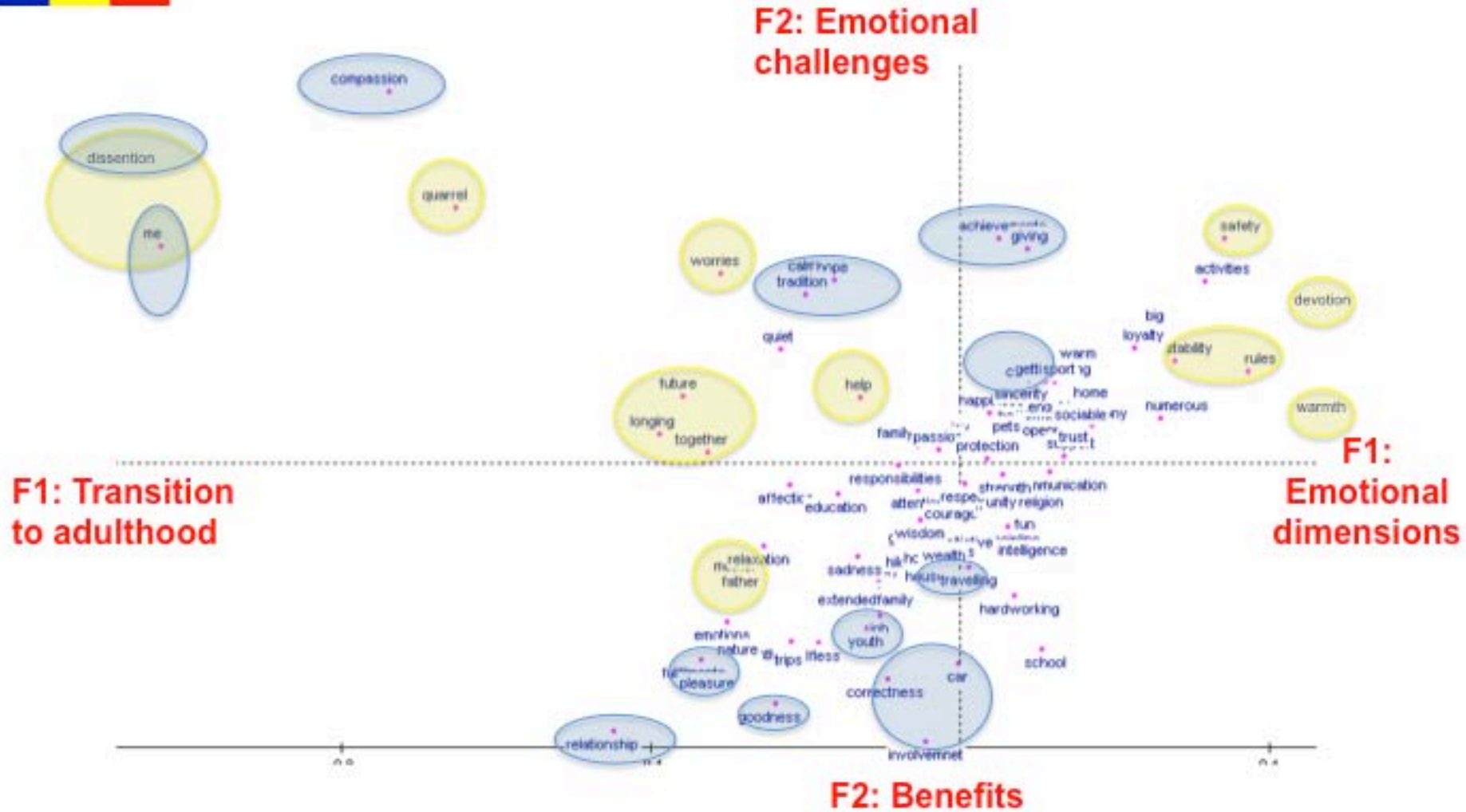








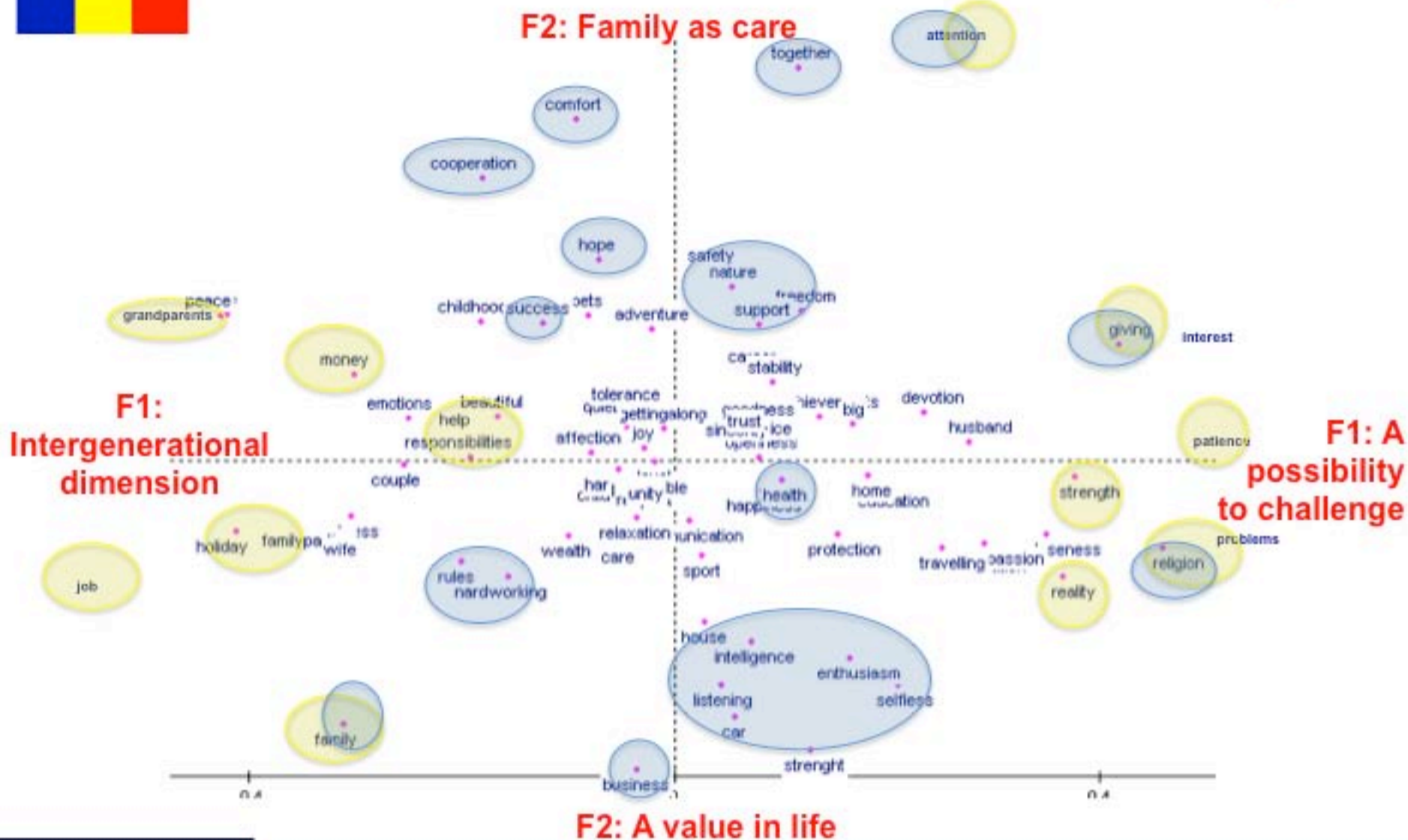
# Associative Network: Future Family









# Associative Network: Ideal Family



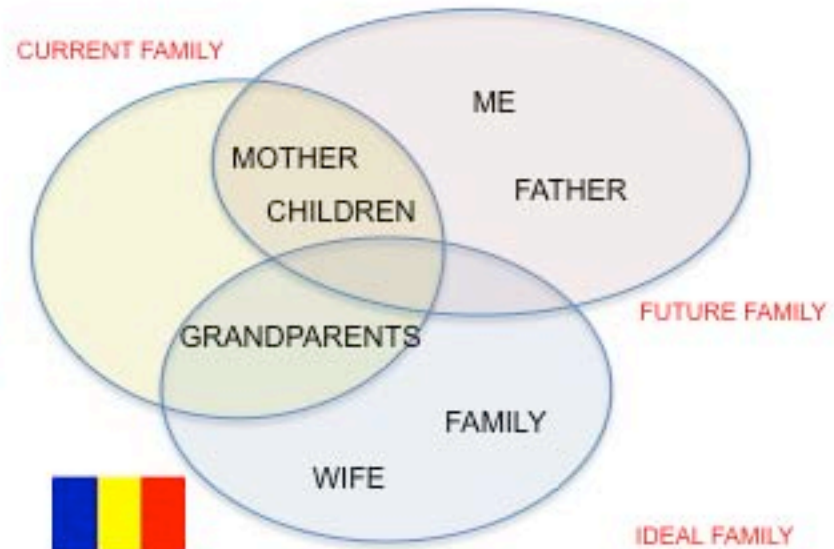
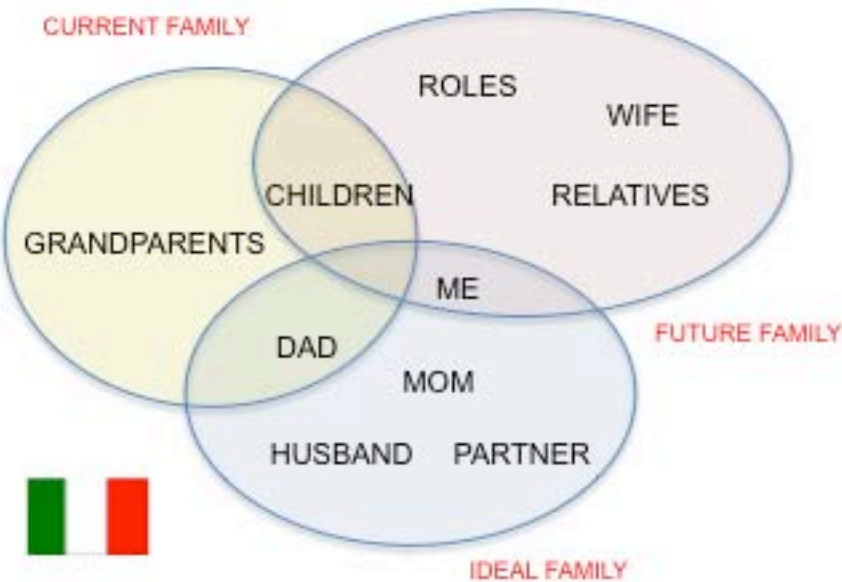
# Summing up Associative Networks...

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EMERGING SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE REPRESENTATIONAL SYSTEM CURRENT, FUTURE IDEAL FAMILY

<b>Shared dimensions</b>	 SRs of <i>Current, Future and Ideal Family</i> share the dimensions of <b>VALUES</b>	 SRs of <i>Current, Future and Ideal Family</i> share the dimensions of <b>CHALLENGE</b>
<b>Peculiar dimensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>CURRENT FAMILY:</b> Critical attitude (limits and resources, dysfunctional dimension)</li><li>➤ <b>FUTURE FAMILY:</b> Challenges (generativity, transmission of values, functional dimension)</li><li>➤ <b>IDEAL FAMILY:</b> Commitment (Relational and emotional)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>CURRENT FAMILY:</b> Structures and values (modern, intergenerational, values)</li><li>➤ <b>FUTURE FAMILY:</b> Achievements (Transitions, benefits, emotional dimension)</li><li>➤ <b>IDEAL FAMILY:</b> Value (carefulness, intergenerational dimensions, a possibility to challenge)</li></ul>

# Summing up Associative Networks...

## SPECIFIC CONTENTS CONCERNING THE FAMILY ROLES



- **CURRENT FAMILY:** *Intergenerational*  
(Dad – Children – Grandparents)
- **FUTURE FAMILY:** *Extended*  
(Roles - Children – Wife - Me – Relatives)
- **IDEAL FAMILY:** *Generative Couple*  
(Husband\*, Me, Dad, Mom, Partner\*)

- **CURRENT FAMILY:** *Intergenerational*  
(Mother – Child – Grandparents)
- **FUTURE FAMILY:** *Core – Nuclear*  
(Me – Father – Mother – Children)
- **IDEAL FAMILY:** *Intergenerational*  
(Grandparents – wife – family\*)



# Consistencies between Associative Network and Faces III

## SEMANTIC DIMENSION (derived on Associative Networks):

- a. the **limits and the resources / dysfunctional dimensions** emerge in the current emotional sphere and in the relational exchange within the family.  
The **emotional commitment** and the **carefulness** characterise the challenges in the future family representation and are fundamental dimensions of the ideal family representation;
- b. The rules and structure appear as part of a current and ideal functional dimension to transmit to the future generations.

## FAMILY'S RELATIONAL STRUCTURES (derived on FACES III):

- a. emotionally **disengaged** (It) or **separated** (Ro) in their real family the young adults participating to the research wish as ideal very close relations, so much as **enmeshed**;
- b. A **lack of hierarchy** and **control's** request (confrontation between current future and ideal) within the family appear more consistent in both Italian and Romanian sample.

# Next Findings...



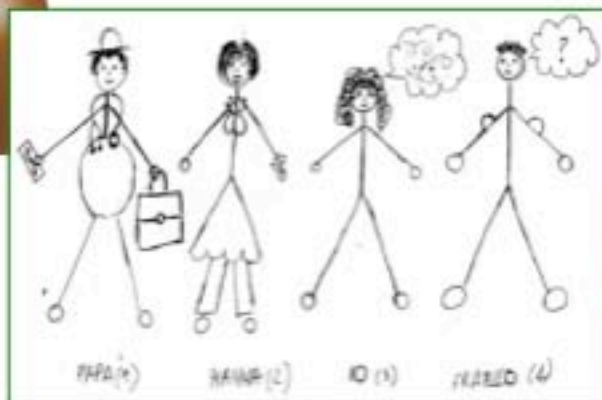
Time perspective



It\_091 IDEAL FAMILY



Ro\_003 GRANDM FAMILY



It\_052 CURRENT FAMILY



Ro\_004 FUT FAMILY

H  
a  
n  
d  
-  
D  
r  
a  
w  
i  
n  
g  
s

# Bibliography

- Allan, G., Hawker, S., Crow, G. (2001). Family diversity and change in Britain and Western Europe. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22 (7), 819- 837.
- Arnett, J.J. (2007). Emerging adulthood: what it is and what it is good for? *Child development perspectives*, 1 (2), 68-73.
- Berthélémy, M., Muxel, A., Percheron, A.(1996). Et si je vous dis famille...Note sur quelques représentations sociales de la famille. *Revue française de sociologie*, 27, 4, pp. 697-718.
- Bozon, M. (2004). *Sociologia da sexualidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Editions de la Fondation Getulio Vargas.
- D'Atena, P. (1996). *La famiglia come risorsa conoscitiva*. Milano: Unicopli.
- de Rosa, A.M. (1995). Le "réseau d'associations" comme méthode d'étude dans la recherche sur les R.S.: structure, contenus et polarité du champ sémantique. *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie sociale*, 28, 96-122.
- de Rosa, AS, d'Ambrosio, M., Aiello, S. (2012, forthcoming). Mapping Social Representations of family in Italian emerging adults through figurative projective techniques. In *Papers on Social Representations*.
- Erikson, E. (1982). *The life cycle completed. A review*. New York: Norton W.W. & Company.
- Moscovici, S. (1984a). The phenomenon of social representations. In: R.M. Farr, S.Moscovici (eds), *Social Representations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olson, D.H., Portner, J., & Lavee, Y. (1985). *FACES III*. St. Paul MN: Family Social Science, University of Minnesota.
- Olson, D.H., Russell, C. S., & Sprenkle, D.H. (1983). *Circumplex Model VI: Theoretical update*. *Family Process*, 22, pp. 69-83.
- Scabini, E., Cigoli, V. (2000). *Il familiare*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.
- Scabini, E., Iafate, R. (2003). *Psicologia dei legami familiari*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Weigel D. J. (2008). The Concept of Family: An Analysis of Laypeople's Views of Family. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29, 11, pp. 1426-1447.
- Zimbardo, P., & Boyd J. (1999). Putting time in perspective: A valid, reliable individual differences metric. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, pp. 1271-88.