



# Family Cultures: Residential Independence and Family Ties of University Students in Italy and Germany

Therese Lützelberger

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences  
of the European University Institute

Florence, January 2013



European University Institute  
**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

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## **Abstract**

European societies differ in the role that family relations have in the life of their members, for example, in the provision of care, in work relationships and in living arrangements. While southern European societies can be described as family-centred or familialistic, northern Europeans are regarded as rather individualistic. This study shows that the departure of young people from the parental home is a key element in explaining these differences.

Young southern Europeans usually (not only since the recent economic crisis) leave the parental home later than their northern European peers. A thorough examination of the literature on this topic, including studies in sociology, geography, history, economics, anthropology, and psychology, reveals that this behavioural difference is not merely the result of favourable or unfavourable economic conditions. From open-ended interviews with university students and their parents in Italy and Germany (N=43), it was possible to reconstruct different social norms and opposed patterns of interpreting reality that support either the early residential independence of young people or their coresidence with parents. These socially shared patterns of interpretation concern various aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as the role of parents as advisors of their children; the preparation of young people for their future lives; and the expectations regarding meritocracy in the labour market. The interviews, furthermore, illustrate how these norms and meanings are transmitted from one generation to the next in the socialisation process.

Having their roots in the period before the Industrial Revolution, the different patterns of leaving home have considerably shaped northern and southern European societies over time. The study points out that residential independence during education and early career can be a source for innovation and social change as well as a triggering factor for economic growth and for the development of public welfare institutions.

## Acknowledgement

Many people have contributed with their help and support to the completion of this thesis. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

Special thanks go to Prof. Martin Kohli, who served as my supervisor and made this research project possible. I wish to thank him, as well as Prof. Fabrizio Bernardi, Prof. Manuela Naldini and Prof. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr for their invaluable scholarly advice.

The thesis could not have been written without the anonymous students and parents who participated in the interviews in Italy and Germany and kindly shared their time and thoughts with me. I am deeply indebted to them.

The European University Institute has been the most suitable place to carry out this research. I would particularly like to thank Päivi Kontinen, Martina Selmi and Gabriella Unger for their great administrative support, Flavio Carnevali and Camilla Salvi for their interesting Italian classes, the Department of Political and Social Sciences for funding my participation in conferences and an additional Italian course, the library staff for their always timely and competent service, and Judy Carter for proofreading the thesis.

I furthermore felt supported by colleagues, friends and my family. I am very grateful to Ingelore Drömer, Stephanie Drömer, Karen Pietsch, Sara Scharmacher and Tobias Weber for their help with preparing the fieldwork, as well as to Maren Frömel, Ulrike Lützelberger, Moritz Meyer, Susanne Pihs, Maarit F. Ströbele, Ina Wiesner, and Giulia Zanini for inspiring discussions and for drawing my attention to new information and literature throughout the research process. In any case, I would like to thank my parents, Renate and Hubert Lützelberger, for their continuous and unconditional support.

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# 1. Introduction

The scope of this thesis is to gain insight into the different family cultures – often described as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ family ties – in southern and northern Europe with a special focus on the departure of young people from the parental home. At first glance, leaving home seems to be a small detail of the life course which is often taken for granted: During the transition to adulthood, most young people in the Western world leave the household of their parents and start to live on their own. Nevertheless, this topic catches considerable media attention because, in several countries, the group of late home leavers has been growing. Above all, the long coresidence of young southern Europeans with their parents in comparison to their northern European peers arouses general interest.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis aims to find answers to the question as to why there is such a pronounced age gap between the departures from the parental home in southern and northern Europe. Another goal is to demonstrate that the differences in leaving home need to be regarded as crucial to better understand some important facets of Western societies: Empirical evidence shows that the departure from the parental home cannot simply be explained as the result of today’s institutional conditions, but rather it has preceded and influenced the development of such conditions. I thus argue that the patterns of leaving home have been shaping important social institutions, such as welfare provision, over time.

With qualitative – that is, exploratory and theory-building – research methods, based on data from interviews with university students and their parents (conducted in 2009, i.e. before the Italian debt crisis sparked off in 2011), I explore the patterns of meaning that the interviewees applied to make sense of their reality, and that shaped their preferences and behaviour regarding their living arrangements. As examples of southern and northern European societies I chose Italy and Germany for the fieldwork. The result of the interview analysis is a dichotomous typology of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will use the term ‘southern European countries’ for Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain, whereas the term ‘northern European countries’ refers to the continental, western and Nordic parts of Europe. Eastern European countries have not been included in the comparison due to their diversity and their specific historical conditions, which require particular attention in the research process and are, therefore, left to future research.

meanings, which either support the togetherness of family members on the one hand, or the early residential independence of young people from the family on the other. The intergenerational transmission of these interpretive patterns contributes, as I argue, to the stability of the so-called ‘strong family ties’ in southern Europe and ‘weak family ties’ in northern Europe. These underlying cultural patterns can, therefore, be seen as structuring principles of familialistic and non-familialistic societies in Europe.

In the subsequent introductory sections, I will give a short overview of the key findings and arguments of the thesis. All points made here will be discussed more extensively in the following chapters, supported by the interview findings and further empirical studies.

### **Focus on culture**

The goal of the empirical part of this thesis is to explore the departure from the parental home as a cultural phenomenon. I am aware that the concept of culture can evoke negative connotations with some readers: Supposedly cultural arguments – often called ‘culturalistic’ – can be alleged as being racist if culture is erroneously defined as a fixed disposition, similar to genes, that is supposed to determine unchangeably the behaviour of individuals or ethnic groups. The critics of this concept may, moreover, fear that cultural explanations would imply the agreement or even happiness of the study participants with their own, sometimes difficult, situation. Both kinds of criticism, however, create a justifiable fear that such culturalistic arguments can be used to declare social policy and welfare expenses useless.

These problematic ideas of culture fundamentally differ from my definition of the concept. My understanding of culture is that it represents the very basic sociological idea that human beings live in a social world that has been created intersubjectively through communication and interaction. That is human action is founded on meaning, as already described by classical authors such as Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Based on this sociological approach, I define culture in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge as institutionalised, shared meanings, which individuals use to make sense of reality. These meanings are constructed, reinforced and modified over time through communication and interactions. They provide orientation for decisions and behaviour.

The focus of my research on shared, subjective patterns of interpretation emerged from the examination of the literature in this field, which revealed some puzzling aspects that could not

be explained by individual economic rationality. For example, it seemed surprising at the beginning of the research process to read that a considerable share of young Italians remain in their parents' home even though they have steady jobs and could afford residential independence if they were to opt for it. Moreover, the observation that not only working-class parents of students but also Italian middle-class parents tend to avoid the expenses of a student accommodation for their children at university is rather unusual from my perspective as a German researcher. However, a glance at the high homeownership rates of young Italians and the low private debts in Italy puts another complexion on the matter<sup>2</sup>: Many Italians would be able to afford residential independence during higher education and early career, yet they prefer to use their financial resources otherwise, namely to acquire property, while many Germans pay rent for early residential independence, but often remain tenants their whole lives without ever owning their own home. Taking this into account, the two prevailing patterns of leaving home in Italy and Germany need to be redefined: It is not only leaving home early, on the one hand, and leaving home late, on the other, but starting early to pay rent for residential independence in Germany, as opposed to saving money for home ownership at a young age in Italy.

As an explanation, one could assume that the comparatively strong German welfare state provides more social security to its citizens so that home ownership, as a form of old-age insurance, is less necessary in Germany than in Italy. This, however, is only partly true because Italian pensions were comparatively high (before the onset of the debt crisis in 2011). Moreover, young Germans have been facing considerable insecurity too regarding their future. One consequence of this uncertainty is the constantly low birth rate in Germany, which does not differ much from the low fertility rate in Italy. Regarding old-age security, German young people are aware of having a substantial risk of old-age poverty because the public pension insurance system in Germany will not be able to provide them with sufficient retirement pay when they grow old. The general income decrease over the last decades in Germany and the relatively small income gains that higher education yields compared to professional training add to the impression that the residential independence of German university students is irrational from a financial point of view. Given these facts, it can be regarded as surprising that many young Germans still incur debts to finance rental accommodations during higher education instead of remaining with their parents and saving money for home ownership. Taking these considerations into account, the

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<sup>2</sup> This is a description of the Italian society before the onset of the fiscal crisis in 2011.

long coresidence of parents with their grown-up children in Italy looks less puzzling and more reasonable compared to the German emphasis on early residential independence. These examples show that, both, the German and the Italian behaviour can be regarded as either ‘puzzling’ or ‘rational’ depending on the standpoint. Putting the research focus on culture, therefore, seemed to be fruitful.

### **Key results and argumentation**

The interview passages about the transition from school to university revealed that the participants of this study did not systematically compare the benefits and costs of all alternative living arrangements. Instead, they used ‘mental shortcuts’, following intuitively their feelings and social norms, which were largely taken for granted. The intergenerational transmission of norms and meanings and the interviewees’ future expectations concerning the requirements of the labour market were more relevant, according to the interviews, in the choice of a living arrangement than the financial opportunities and constraints of housing markets and the availability of public support.

The interview analysis further revealed that the subjective perception of the various financial costs involved as being either ‘acceptable’ or ‘too expensive’ depended on the relevance and meanings ascribed to early residential independence and the motives for leaving home. I found that the interviewees interpreted certain key concepts in different ways. The data reflect two distinct views regarding the transition to adulthood, the role of parents as advisors, meritocracy in the labour market, identity construction, residential mobility, the importance of kinship and local networks, parental love, and other concepts related to the departure from the parental home. The different interpretations of these concepts are part of two general perspectives: one supporting the togetherness of the family, and the other promoting early, premarital residential independence. They give meaning to the prevailing norms of leaving home identified in the data and in previous studies: that is, in Italy, the normative expectation of leaving home at marriage combined with home ownership, or leaving home for compelling reasons related to education and employment; and, in Germany – that of leaving home to gain individual experience and prove independence. The interviews showed that these patterns of meaning and norms existed prior to the interviewees’ perception of the material conditions for studying and living in their environment. The interviewees, for example, mentioned their parents’ attitudes as the source

of influence regarding their living arrangements as university students. In addition, we know from comparative studies on educational values and parenting styles in the field of cross-cultural psychology, that parents in northern and southern Europe educate their children in accordance with these norms and meanings from a young age on. In this way, the children are groomed by their parents for either independence or for close family relationships.

Historical studies provide evidence that these different norms and patterns of meanings regarding the departure from the parental home also existed in past epochs. They derive from the shared experience of previous generations and are part of the collective memory of southern and northern European societies. In northern Europe, there has been a centuries-old tradition of premarital residential independence, according to which, young men and women of all social classes leave the parental home to work or study and gather experience outside their home environment as travelling journeymen, domestic servants, governesses, live-in farm hands, university students or travelling noblemen. Besides educational purposes, the spatial and residential mobility of young, unmarried workers also served to relieve tense local labour markets and the household budget of their families in times of economic hardship. Southern European families, by contrast, usually attempted to solve economic problems together instead of sending their younger members away. Especially girls were supposed to stay under the protection of the family. Young southern Europeans thus remained in or near the parental household when they started their own family, while northern Europeans more often settled down at a greater distance from their parents. This difference can still be observed in the present, as explained in chapter 3 and the following chapters. These two traditions form the basis for the so-called weak family ties in northern Europe and strong family ties in the Mediterranean countries. The interview data illustrate that they are deeply embedded, not only in taken-for-granted thought patterns but also in the way people feel and cope with their feelings regarding the departure from the parental home.

Based on the interview results and empirical studies from related fields, I suggest that the different traditions of leaving home have been exerting a strong impact on northern and southern European societies. Their influence mainly originates in two areas: socialisation and network structures.

Socialisation is influenced by the departure from the parental home because the circle of socialisation agents changes when people leave home. The early, premarital departure for the purpose of gaining experience reduces the influence of parents and the familiar home

environment in the socialisation process and increases the possibility of being exposed to new influences. Moreover, it promotes strong individual and professional identities as sources of individual orientation. This pattern of leaving home probably contributes to the economic success and efficiency of society but can also make private relationships – friendships, marriages and intergenerational relationships – more brittle. By contrast, if young people remain in their parents' household during the transition to adulthood, they more constantly interact with the same socialisation agents and have fewer opportunities to observe and experience other ways of living and new perspectives. Eventually, this may reduce the society's ability to generate and adjust to social change. It may also contribute to a stronger position of the older generations within society and make society more conservative because knowledge is mainly transmitted from older persons to the young without many external influences and reinterpretations. On the other hand, less rapid social change and more stable personal relationships can have a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of individuals. The basic principle of this argument is that the exchange of ideas triggers innovation and creativity. The early, premarital departure from the parental home and the residential mobility of young people promote such exchange of ideas. According to this argument, also "stay-at-home" societies can be highly innovative if they take advantage of influences coming from outside, for example, through trade relations and other ways of attracting foreigners.

The second aspect of society that is affected by the different patterns of leaving home is the strength of kinship networks. Leaving home at marriage implies remaining at the parental home during education and early career. Also, after marriage many young people remain near their parental home in southern Europe. This spatial immobility strengthens local kinship and friendship ties. As a result, strong family networks are able to provide welfare, care, security, employment and other benefits to their members. In societies in which family ties are weaker, due to premarital residential independence and more individual spatial mobility, the tasks of family networks need to be complemented by other social institutions, such as voluntary associations and the state, or, to some extent, by the market. Moreover, the reduced availability of kinship contacts necessitates more interaction and cooperation with strangers and, thus, promotes the development of values that help generate general trust and a stronger orientation towards meritocracy. General trust and meritocracy, in turn, are favourable conditions for individual investment in education, workplace mobility and exchange of ideas which together help trigger

technological innovations. Weaker family ties, more meritocracy and the social sharing of risks allow workers to leave their kinship networks and be more spatially flexible which makes the labour market more efficient. In the long run, the combination of general trust, innovative ability and social risk-sharing produces economic prosperity and wellbeing which, at least to some extent, compensate for the absence of strong family ties and reinforce the norms and social support for early premarital residential independence.

The norms, values and subjective interpretations underlying the northern and southern patterns of leaving home can be seen as ‘mental shortcuts’ that sustain and stabilise familialistic or non-familialistic institutional structures. However, the focus of the empirical part of this study is on the subjective and socially shared interpretations of individuals, rather than on policy making or the historical development of state welfare provision or other institutions. Nevertheless, I will attempt to delineate some important links between the patterns of leaving home and certain relevant institutions.

### **Chapter overview**

The second chapter starts with an overview on how the field of research evolved. I then take a closer look at the most common explanations that seemed to be obvious at first glance at the beginning of the research process. These explanatory factors are youth unemployment rates and job insecurity as well as the affordability of rental accommodations, the availability of state support and the different educational systems, which affect the financial situation of young people. A critical discussion of these institutions together with possible cultural factors reveals that different norms are very relevant and often underestimated elements in explaining the timing of the departure from the parental home in southern and northern Europe.

Hence, in the third chapter, in which the literature review is enhanced, I pay special attention to the normative link between marriage and leaving home in the Mediterranean countries. This link constitutes a key element in the formation of strong kinship networks, which characterise southern European societies. Taking into account the long history and persistence of strong family ties in these countries, and weak family ties in the north and west of the continent, I argue that the causality between leaving-home patterns and related institutions could also be reverse. I exemplify that institutions such as welfare regimes and housing markets have also been influenced by the prevailing patterns of leaving home and are not merely producing them.

Historical studies and research on second-generation immigrants underline the persistence of cultural interpretations over several generations and support the argument that institutions such as public welfare and the housing market have been shaped by cultural patterns.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to methodological issues. It contains the definitions of the theoretical concepts that I use, drawing mainly on the sociology of knowledge, which is the conceptual approach that I find most suitable to integrate the complex empirical reality outlined in the previous chapters. Furthermore, the fourth chapter includes the criteria for selecting the countries and places of my fieldwork, followed by a description of the sample, the interview process and the method of analysis – the documentary method.

The fifth chapter addresses the economic situation of university students in Italy and Germany. It is divided into two parts: first, a description of the financial conditions of students in the two locations chosen for the fieldwork and, second, the analysis of the subjective interpretations of the financial situation of the interviewees. The detailed description of the economic conditions reveals that the financial situation of students in both places is not as diverse as one might assume, given the strong differences between the living arrangements in both countries. Moreover, the analysis shows that the criteria for being eligible to receive public housing support for students in Tuscany follow the logic of strong family ties, whereas the German student subsidies are based on the implicit idea that residential independence during university studies is, at least partly, an individual future investment. The analysis of the interviewees' subjective interpretations of the financial costs of residential independence evidences that the perception of the costs as being constraining depends on the particular values of a given respondent, and the benefits he or she expects to gain from residential independence. In the following chapters, I explore the perceived long-term, non-material 'costs' and 'benefits' of residential independence during higher education, that is to say, the different values which the interviewees attribute to such independence.

Chapter 6 discusses the norms that I reconstructed from the interviews. These norms mainly refer to the socially accepted motives for leaving home. Examples reveal that the interviewees perceived the norms as coming from teachers and parents who passed them on to the young through communication. Another section is dedicated to the interviewees' feelings related to the move-out – from the perspective of both the children and their parents. It illustrates how the subjective perception and interpretation of these feelings is shaped by the prevailing norms of

leaving home. I, then, analyse the interpretive patterns that the interviewees used to give meaning to the norms. Two overarching patterns of meaning emerge: a pattern of meaning supporting the residential independence of young people during the transition to adulthood, and another pattern supporting the interdependence and togetherness of family members.

The seventh chapter sheds light on the role of parents as socialisation agents and how their continuous presence during the transition to adulthood or their withdrawal from their children's lives are related to the pace of social change within society. In this chapter, I argue that the societies in which the majority of parents support the early residential independence of their children during the transition to adulthood have an 'inbuilt accelerator' for innovation and social change because, due to the early move-out, young people are more intensively exposed to other socialisation agents outside their familiar home environment. The results suggest that there are two strategies of coping with uncertainty in rapidly changing, modern societies: 1) remaining under the protection of the parental home, or 2) leaving home to gain individual experience as a source of orientation.

The eighth chapter is closely related to the seventh. The topic of finding orientation and coping with uncertainty is addressed more in depth through a discussion regarding the concept of identity construction in relation to the departure from the parental home. This brings the analysis back to the motives for leaving home that are normatively acceptable or unacceptable in familialistic and non-familialistic societies.

The ninth chapter extends the interpretation of residential independence during education as a useful 'strategy', and therefore as an 'investment' – instead of the opposing interpretation which considers residential independence a mere 'luxury'. I examine the perceived usefulness of premarital residential independence with a focus on the labour market. The interviewees brought up the topic of meritocracy and the role of contacts and kinship networks in the job search. It becomes apparent that the interviewees' expectations regarding the labour market as meritocratic or not meritocratic influenced the subjectively perceived usefulness of residential independence and residential mobility during education. Including further historical and sociological studies, I argue that the departure from the parental home and residential mobility not only influence the strength of kinship networks but also the development of general trust, public welfare provision, innovative ability and economic growth.

In the last chapter, I summarise the patterns of meaning reconstructed from the interviews in a typology that gives an overview on the two cultural perspectives: one promoting the reproduction of strong family ties; the other geared towards more independence from the family. I then examine the implications of the results for the causality between shared interpretations, social norms and related institutions. Moreover, I discuss the findings with regard to purpose-rationality, altruism, economic efficiency, individualisation and the necessity of public welfare.

As a final remark, I want to stress that the interview data presented in this book were collected in 2009. Hence, the data reflect the situation in Italy before the onset of the debt crisis in 2011 entailing severe social reforms and budget cuts that have drastically changed the lives of many Italians.

## **2. Leaving the parental home in Europe**

### **2.1 How the field of research evolved**

The departure from the parental home is a relatively young field of research since differences between countries only became visible in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the post-war period until the 1960s, leaving home and marriage coincided at a relatively young age. Hence, sociologists did not differentiate between both life-course events (see, e.g., Glick/Park 1965). This situation changes in the 1970s when the Australian sociologist Christabel Young (1974) discovered that a number of young people leave their parental home before marriage for various reasons such as education or work or simply in order to gain more independence from their parents.

The first comparative studies on this issue were published in the 1980s. Kiernan's (1986) pioneering comparison of north-western European countries is soon supplemented with data on Italy (De Sandre 1988). The information reveals that young Italians stay much longer in their parents' home than their northern European or U.S.-American counterparts (see table 2.1). This phenomenon, called the "long family", has been subjected to thorough examination by Italian social scientists (see Scabini/Donati 1988). They point out that the late departure from the parental home in Italy is linked to the postponement of marriage, given that both life-course events are "structurally and culturally linked" (Donati 1988: 8), which differentiates the Italian society from northern European countries (see also Blangiardo/Maffenini 1988, De Sandre 1988).

The rising age of marriage brought about an increasing number of non-family living arrangements in northern Europe, while in the Mediterranean countries the postponement of marriage led to a prolonged stay in the parental home (Alders/Manting 1999, Rosina et al. 2007). Analysing these developments, Jones (1995) and Galland (1995) describe different European patterns of leaving home. The southern European model is distinguished by a strong link between the departure from home and marriage and, consequently, a higher age when leaving home. The northern model is characterised by a lower age at the departure from the home and a prolonged period of non-family living before starting a new family. Galland (1995) distinguishes a British

**Table 2.1:** Living arrangements of 20 to 24-year-olds, 1982, in percent

	With parents	Married, with partner	Unmarried, with partner	Alone	With others
Men					
Denmark	26	11	24	29	10
Germany	43	11	19	21	5
France	52	18	14	13	4
Britain	58	28	3	4	8
Netherlands	58	17	10	11	4
Ireland	62	21	--	4	13
Italy (1983)	90	9	(..)	1	(..)
USA (1982)	n.a.	38	2	n.a.	n.a.
(1985, 18-24 years)	60	16	-----24-----		
Women					
Denmark	11	12	42	31	4
Germany	31	27	14	23	4
France	27	43	12	17	2
Britain	23	59	6	6	7
Netherlands	28	48	7	8	9
Ireland	57	29	1	3	10
Italy (1983)	65	34	1	1	(..)
USA (1982)	n.a.	57	2	n.a.	n.a.
(1985, 18-24 years)	48	32	-----20-----		

Note: n.a. 'not available'; (..) 'not available and/or supposedly zero'.

Source: De Sandre, 1988, p. 74 (Data: K. Kiernan, 1986, "Leaving Home: Living Arrangements of Young People in Six Western European Countries", *Eur. J. Population*, 2, p. 180; S.M. Bianchi, 1987, "Living at Home: Young Adults Living Arrangements in the 1980", unpubl. paper, tab. 5).

model from the northern model to which it resembles due to an early departure from the parental home. The British model differs from the northern model by an earlier entry into the labour force, a shorter period of studies, and an earlier tendency to start living with a partner (married or unmarried). Child birth is postponed by British young adults, as well as in the other models. Alders and Manting identify three different patterns in Europe and form three country groups accordingly: a northern cluster, where young people leave home the earliest; a continental and western European cluster in the middle; and a southern cluster characterised by late departure. Similar to Jones and Galland, they conclude that "there is a clear-cut difference between Southern European and other European countries" (1999: 3).

**Table 2.2:** Percentage of young adults living with parents, by age group, 1986 and 1994

	Men				Women			
	20-24 years		25-29 years		20-24 years		25-29 years	
	1986	1994	1986	1994	1986	1994	1986	1994
Britain	57,2	56,8	21,9	20,8	33,8	37,0	8,6	10,8
France	56,9	61,8	19,3	22,5	36,4	41,6	8,4	10,3
Germany	64,8	64,6	27,4	28,8	42,8	44,6	11,0	12,7
Greece	76,5	79,3	53,8	62,6	52,3	62,3	23,8	32,1
Italy	87,8	92,2	49,6	66,0	70,4	82,4	25,5	44,1
Spain	88,1	91,5	53,2	64,8	76,1	84,3	35,3	47,6

Source: Fernández Córdón (1997: 580), data: EUROSTAT, Labour Force Survey

The research on this topic became more controversial after Fernández Córdón's article in 1997. His comparison of three continental and western European countries with three Mediterranean countries in 1986 and 1994 respectively, revealed once again that the percentages of young people living with parents increased strongly in southern Europe during that time, especially in the group of 25 to 29-year-olds, whereas it only rose slightly in the three continental European countries (see table 2.2). In his explanation, he explicitly excludes the important role of the family in southern European societies. He therefore ignores the correlation between leaving home and marriage as an explanatory factor. Instead, he points exclusively to changes in the economic conditions of young southern Europeans which make an early departure from the nest more difficult, such as the lack of affordable housing and the increase in precarious employment.

Subsequently, a discussion about the economic and cultural origin of these north-south differences ensued among social scientists. Jurado Guerrero (2001), who conducted the first study focussing on two countries in-depth on this issue, pursues a similar argument comparing young people's economic opportunities to leave the parental home in France and Spain. At the same time, Holdsworth criticises the reduction to economic factors as "too simplistic" (2000: 202). She and many other scholars advocate for the consideration of normative expectations concerning the socially approved way of leaving home, which might play a decisive role in the explanation because economic factors do not completely account for the differences.

Since extensive data sets on this issue, comprising many European countries, have become available, for example, the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) and the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS), detailed comparative analysis has been undertaken (see, e.g., Billari et al. 2001, Corijn/Klijzing 2001a, Iacovou 2002, Iacovou/Berthoud 2001). With the help

**Table 2.3:** Median age of leaving home, FFS data, cohorts born around 1960

	Men	Women
Sweden	20,2	18,6
Norway	21,4	19,8
Switzerland	21,5	19,2
France	21,5	19,8
Finland	21,7	19,8
Austria	21,8	19,9
Great Britain	22,4	20,3
East Germany	22,4	20,6
West Germany	22,4	20,8
Netherlands	22,5	20,5
Belgium	23,3	21,5
Portugal	24,3	21,8
Spain	25,7	22,9
Italy	26,7	23,6

(KM-estimates) Data: Family and Fertility Survey (FFS, 1988-1997), UNECE  
Source: Billari et al. 2001, p. 345

**Table 2.4:** Median age of leaving home, ECHP data, cohorts born in 1959 and the 1960s

	Men	Women
Denmark	21.4	20.3
Finland	21.9	20.0
Netherlands	23.3	21.2
Great Britain	23.5	21.2
France	24.1	22.2
Germany	24.8	21.6
Austria	27.2	23.4
Belgium	25.8	23.8
Ireland	26.3	25.2
Portugal	28.0	25.2
Greece	28.2	22.9
Spain	28.4	26.6
Italy	29.7	27.1

Data: European Community Household Panel (ECHP, 1994, Austria 1995, Finland 1996), EUROSTAT  
Source: Iacovou 2002, p. 46

of these data, the median ages at leaving the parental home in different Western European countries can be compared (see tables 2.3 and 2.4). Table 2.3 shows the values calculated by using the Family Fertility Survey for cohorts born around 1960. The median age of young men varies from 20,2 years in Sweden to 26,7 years in Italy. The values of female respondents lie about two to three years below the median ages of the male respondents since, as pointed out before, setting up with a partner or spouse is a widespread reason for leaving the parental home, and women are usually younger than their partners. The data show that the Nordic people are the youngest to leave the parental household. Most of them start living on their own in their early 20s. By contrast, young southern Europeans leave the home of their parents much later, many of them only in the second half of their 20s. The median age of continental and western Europeans lies in-between these two extremes. The values in table 2.4, based on the European Community Household Panel (first wave, ages 15-35), confirm the pronounced differences between the different parts of Europe.

A more detailed picture of the number of young people who have never lived outside the parental home is provided in table 2.5. It reveals that north-south differences are strongly pronounced in all age groups and particularly in the groups of 25-year-olds and 30-year-olds. The

**Table 2.5:** Percentage of young people who have never lived outside the parental home at a given age (cohorts born around 1960)

Age in years	Men				Women			
	20	25	30	35	20	25	30	35
Sweden	52	7	2	<1	25	2	1	<1
Norway	66	19	<1	<1	45	7	<1	<1
Switzerland	66	20	3	n.a.	38	6	1	n.a.
Finland	68	23	12	11	45	7	2	<1
France	68	20	9	6	47	11	5	3
East Germany	72	23	8	5	58	13	4	3
Netherlands	75	25	5	n.a.	57	10	2	n.a.
Britain	73	28	11	n.a.	55	13	5	n.a.
West Germany	76	30	11	7	59	14	4	1
Austria	67	30	16	12	46	15	6	3
Belgium	87	31	11	8	70	13	4	3
Portugal	79	44	26	20	63	30	19	15
Spain	86	54	25	14	76	33	14	10
Italy	87	61	32	17	78	39	20	13

Source: Billari et al., 2001, p. 347 (UNECE: Family and Fertility Survey)

studies based on these data confirm that moving into one's own household together with a partner or spouse is the strongest predictor for leaving the parental home in Europe (e.g., Rusconi 2006), yet with marked differences between the north, the centre and the south of the continent.

Table 2.6 illustrates the role of marriage in the northern, southern and continental European patterns of leaving home. The data indicate that in the Nordic countries, there is absolutely no link between leaving the parental home and marriage, whereas in the south the majority of young people leave home in the month in which they get married. In continental and western Europe, some people do leave their parental home at marriage, however, this group represents a minority compared to those who leave before.

Unfortunately, the data do not contain information on normative expectations regarding socially expected reasons for the departure from the home. Hence, the question as to whether there are different ideas about the 'right' way to leave home cannot be tackled with these data. Rather they can help us to understand how coercive the economic constraints actually are and whether economic factors do completely explain the differences or not. Sgritta (2003) therefore points out the deficits of this type of analysis. Furthermore, he warns us not to overly simplify. Although there are clear differences between northern, continental and southern Europe as well

as strong commonalities among the countries within these regions, we should not overlook the particularities of each country:

Many elements can influence the major decisions and role changes that intervene in the transition to adulthood: cultural tradition, the existence of more or less strong religious beliefs, the possibilities for economic growth, welfare policies, the rules of the education system, the organisation of the market of goods and services, etc. It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish which particular combination of factors is able to speed up or, on the contrary, hinder the transition. The number of national variants is practically unlimited. Furthermore, in many cases, it is only a question of nuances that cannot always be grasped with the conventional instruments of quantitative research. (Sgritta 2003: 61)

Only very recently, have the first comparative qualitative studies been conducted to investigate the reasons and consequences of the postponement of home-leaving in different countries (see Holdsworth 2004, Holdsworth/Morgan 2005, Newman 2008). Findings from in-depth interviews in Spain indicate that there are, indeed, social norms and preference on the part of the parents for their children to leave home at marriage (Holdsworth 2005). Interview data from Italy reveal that there is a tendency to stay with one's parents by choice and not because of

**Table 2.6:** Percentage of individuals leaving the parental home before, at, and after the first marriage<sup>3</sup>, cohorts born around 1960

	Men			Women		
	before	at marriage	after	before	at marriage	after
Sweden	98	1	1	96	3	2
Finland	95	1	4	92	5	3
Norway	92	1	7	91	1	8
France	81	16	3	67	30	2
West Germany	79	12	9	73	18	9
East Germany	70	11	19	51	14	34
Austria	74	6	20	73	14	14
Portugal	41	45	14	31	53	16
Belgium	35	63	4	27	69	4
Italy	35	59	6	19	72	9
Spain	34	58	8	20	73	8

Source: Billari et al., 2001, p. 349 (Family and Fertility Survey)

<sup>3</sup> In this case, leaving home "at marriage" means that marriage and the departure from home take place in the same month (see Billari et al. 2001: 352). Rusconi defines it as leaving the parental home six months before or after getting married or entering in consensual union (2006: 263).

economic necessity. The Italian interviewees invoke a number of advantages, which they attribute to this living arrangement, that go beyond financial benefits, for example, supportive relationships with their parents and the liberation from responsibilities, household chores, and so on. The autonomy and freedom within the parental household allows them to focus on their interests, their studies, job search or their professional development (Quadrelli 2006).

Comparative studies in this field usually contrast data from countries with different patterns of home leaving with the aim to sharpen our understanding of these patterns. Another reason for this kind of research design is to explore how people in different institutional and cultural contexts make sense of their social and economic conditions. Berthoud and Iacovou (2002) point out that there is a congruence between the different patterns of leaving the parental home and the different welfare regimes in Europe, based on the typology of Esping-Andersen (1990, 2000). Young adults in the social-democratic welfare regime leave home earliest, young people in the familialistic welfare regime are the latest to move out, and those in the liberal and conservative-corporatist regimes lie statistically in-between. In other words, the later young people leave the parental home on average, the more familialistic is the type of welfare system in their country. However, it is unclear whether the different timing of the departure from the parental home is a result of different welfare institutions, or whether the diverse behavioural norms of leaving the parental home are part of the cultural foundations of these four regime types. Therefore it is certainly reasonable to consider a mutual relationship between behavioural norms and institutional contexts as a starting point in the analysis. It is one aim of this study to further investigate the causality between institutions on the one hand, and culture, that is, norms, values and patterns of meaning on the other.

Recently, the congruence between welfare regimes and different patterns of the transition to adulthood in Europe has been illustrated by the French scholar van de Velde (2008). Comparing Denmark, Great Britain, France and Spain by using quantitative and qualitative methods, she thoroughly describes four patterns of becoming adult in detail, and how they differ from each other. First, she identifies a Scandinavian model with an early departure from the parental home, long educational pathways, which are often characterised by switches back and forth from education to work and back again, a relatively unproblematic entry into the labour market, strong state support for young people, and norms of autonomy and self-realisation. Second, she describes a British pattern, including an early departure from the home, short

educational periods, state support for the needy, an early entry into the labour market, and norms of independence and self-responsibility. For continental Europe, she depicts a third pattern which consists of an early departure from the parental home, long educational pathways, and “assisted adulthood” combining a mix of precarious employment, parental support and state assistance, based on norms of independence. Her fourth model is the Mediterranean pattern, comprising a late departure from the parental home, long educational pathways, precarious employment, the virtual absence of state support, combined with norms prescribing family proximity and the departure from the parental home related to marriage and family formation. Van de Velde’s methodological approach of mixing statistical analysis with qualitative methods illustrates that the different patterns of leaving home are not simply a result of different amounts spent on social security expenditure in the four welfare regimes, as suggested by earlier research in this field. She also shows that the understanding of adulthood and the norms attached to it vary largely among the four cases of comparison. The first three regime types provide young people with at least some kind of state assistance, whereas in the Mediterranean welfare regime young people are (almost) not entitled to support from the state at all. From van de Velde’s work we can derive that in those societies or welfare regimes that provide state support to young adults, norms of early independence also prevail.

The importance of behavioural norms and their impact on the institutional structures of society have not only attracted the interest of sociologists, but increasingly call the attention of economists. One empirically sound contribution which emphasises the importance of diverse norms and cultural reasons for delaying the departure from the parental home comes from the economist Giuliano (2007). She compared different groups of European immigrants in the United States to find out whether immigrants would adapt their home-leaving behaviour to the new institutional context, or not. Giuliano’s findings demonstrate that European second-generation immigrants in the U.S. mimic, within the same institutional context, the leaving-home behaviour of the country which their parents came from. This suggests that norms and social expectations probably play a more significant role than economic conditions in shaping the departure from the parental home. Furthermore, Giuliano’s study illustrates the stability of behavioural norms.

Findings from historical demography support the relevance of long-term cultural patterns. In the 1970s, historical demographers had already begun to describe the different patterns of marriage and residential mobility during the transition to adulthood in Europe (Laslett 1977, 1979,

1988, Macfarlane 1981). The findings provide evidence that these patterns are not recent phenomena, but existed before the Second World War, probably also long before the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Reher 1998). Leaving the parental home before marriage can, therefore, not be seen as a consequence of the development of modern welfare states in northern Europe. On the contrary, high spatial mobility of young people might have been a triggering factor for the development of strong welfare institutions at the level of the state. Chapters 3, 9 and 10 will shed light on the mechanisms as to how social institutions interrelate and correspond to familialistic or non-familialistic attitudes.

In the following section, I will present the controversial debate among social scientists, which has been taking place over the past 15 years, on the reasons why southern Europeans differ so much in their home-leaving behaviour from the rest of Europe. It will provide more detailed evidence which confirms that the patterns of leaving home in Europe are rooted in cultural diversity and not only a result of different economic or institutional conditions.

## **2.2 Economic and institutional constraints or cultural differences?**

All studies in this field agree that economic difficulties can hinder the departure from the parental home whereas financially favourable conditions can accelerate such departure. The economic constraints of young people in southern Europe result from specific institutional conditions: the large segment of precarious employment on southern European labour markets, the lack of affordable housing, and the absence of welfare state support for young people. However, the authors differ with regard to the degree of relevance they assign to culture as an explanatory variable, defined as norms, values, attitudes and interpretive patterns. Some of them neglect completely the relevance of culture while others give it equal importance or prioritise it over economic factors.

In the following sections, I will summarise the explanations that stress economic arguments. In this view, the departure from the parental home is understood as a process of rational decision making in which actors consciously compare the costs and benefits of living in and outside the parental home. Fernández Cordón observes two conspicuous aspects: a strong increase in young people staying with their parents between 1986 and 1997 in the Mediterranean countries, but also a marked age difference already in 1986, between continental Europeans, who

left their parental home earlier and southern Europeans, who left later. In his explanation, however, he focuses only on the recent delay of the departure from the parental home in the south. He explains this delay by an increase in precarious jobs due to growing economic competition. His assumptions concerning the nature of human behaviour include a virtually automatic, behaviouristic link between economic resources and leaving the parental home. According to Fernández Córdón, the departure from the home is an immediate reaction based on the possibility of having a stable income sufficient to afford a dwelling. Furthermore, the author supposes identical preferences in continental and southern Europe. In his view, young people in continental Europe, as well as in southern Europe, want to leave the parental home as soon as financial resources will permit it. The relation between marriage and leaving the parental home, which is so salient in the southern countries, remains unobserved, probably due to a lack of data regarding this aspect. Social norms are completely neglected in his explication.

Similar to Fernández Córdón, Jurado Guerrero (2001) concentrates on the economic constraints to the departure from the parental home, yet differently, she also considers norms as part of the explanation. However, in her explanation, norms only play a marginal role because, in her materialist approach, economic conditions are not only regarded as decisive elements in the decision-making process of young people, but also as the factors which determine social norms. In this point of view, social norms have no or only little independent influence on human behaviour and are supposed to change rapidly according to business fluctuations. Moreover, in this view, the preferences of young people regarding the departure from the parental home are approximately the same in all countries. This line of argument is based on the assumption that young people universally prefer to leave the parental home as soon as they can if financial resources allow for it. Norms are regarded as a residual category: Only if economic factors do not account for the observed outcome, cultural factors can be taken into consideration. The evidence presented in the following sections will show that this approach needs to be reconsidered.

### **2.2.1 Unemployment and insecurity**

One essential precondition to moving into one's own household is a fairly stable and sufficient income in order to pay the rent or mortgage. Since, generally, youth unemployment is higher in the Mediterranean countries than in northern Europe, Fernández Córdón (1997) attributes the comparatively high numbers of young people living with their parents in the south to the lack of

sufficient income. This deficit forces them to stay with their parents. He explains the remarkable increase of southern Europeans living with their parents between 1986 and 1994 by an augmentation of precarious jobs for young people. Indeed, 77 percent of 17 to 25-year-old Spaniards did not have a long-term contract in 1994, as Berthoud and Iacovou (2002) show. However, at the same time the number of young employees with precarious work contracts was relatively low in Italy (27 percent) where the percentage of young people living with their parents is even higher than in Spain, and in fact, the highest in Europe. Furthermore, in Italy, the rate of young adults with short-term contracts was considerably lower than in a number of countries where people leave home much earlier, such as Finland (39 percent), Denmark (30 percent) and France (37 percent), and it was only slightly higher than in Germany (Berthoud/Iacovou 2002: 24, data: ECHP 1994). More recent data confirm as well that in the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Finland, more young workers are in temporary employment than in Italy, although young people in these countries leave home early (Newman/Aptekar 2007: 213, data from 2003).

Regional differences within Italy, observed by different researchers, based on different data, also confirm that precarious jobs and unemployment are not the main explanatory factors. In northern Italy, where the economic development is similar to that of northern and continental Europe, more young people stay with their parents until they marry than in the south (Höllinger/Haller 1990) and more Northern Italians than Southern Italians live with their parents despite having their own income. Cook and Furstenberg point out that in Veneto, the region with the lowest unemployment in Italy in 1999, more than 60 percent of the employed 25 to 35-year-olds were living in the household of their parents (2002: 261). Similarly, Sgritta observes that in Northern Italy 60 percent of young men and 50 percent of young women living with their parents have their own income, whereas in the South of Italy only 32 percent of the young living with parents do (Sgritta 2003: 74). This means that young Southern Italians, although they face more difficulties in finding employment, start their own households sooner than Northern Italians. Rusconi, whose findings confirm this observation as well, concludes that “in Northern Italy the decision to remain in the parental home appears to be less related to insufficient resources, but more a result of choice while waiting to form their own family” (2006: 120).

Worthy of mention in this context is that an increasing number of young people in Italy having a paid job did not contribute to the family budget while living with their parents, as data from the 1980s and early 1990s reveal (Cavalli 1995). Furthermore, in 1990 more young

Europeans, and especially young Italians, perceived their financial situation as improved compared to the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup> In general, the life satisfaction of the young grew during this time (Eurobarometer 34.2 1991).<sup>5</sup> These findings add to the impression that young Italians and other southern Europeans do not perceive their prolonged stay at the parental home as a decline in life quality or as an unwanted necessity due to financial constraints. On the other hand, the high life satisfaction of young southern Europeans living with parents can be interpreted as interaction effect. According to this interpretation, the more widespread the coresidence of young adults with parents is, the more acceptable it becomes due to its increased “normalcy” (Newman and Aptekar 2007).

Jones (1995), however, shows with another example that coresidence with parents does not necessarily become widespread and hence acceptable if economic conditions deteriorate for young people. Comparing the difficult labour market conditions of southern Europe to the British case, she argues that in Britain youth unemployment rose during the 1980s and the financial situation of young people became more severe. Nevertheless, the number of young people who moved into their own household before marriage increased during this time. Jones explains this by another trend working in the opposite direction than the rising economic constraints: an increasing desire among young people for independence from their parents and the related wish to express their own identity. A different interpretation of this phenomenon would be that in Britain an increasingly difficult labour market had forced young people into higher residential mobility in search of a job and also during education. This interpretation is in line with the phenomenon that young Southern Italians leave the parental home earlier than their contemporaries in the North of the country since in Southern Italy universities are less well-reputed and unemployment rates are higher than in the North of Italy. However, the latter interpretation does not rule out the one given by Jones: A higher spatial mobility, required by the job situation, may well enhance the need for a stronger individual identity in order to live at a greater distance from one’s habitual environment.

These empirical observations turn the argument that leaving home before marriage requires abundant financial resources, upside down. Hence, it appears that we cannot assume the

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<sup>4</sup> The percentage of young Italians considering their financial situation to be acceptable was 86 percent in 1990, compared to 69 percent in 1987.

<sup>5</sup> The sum of the percentages of young Italians who were “very satisfied” and “quite satisfied” with their lives was 73 percent in 1987 and 86 percent in 1990.

same preferences or norms concerning the departure from the parental home in the north and south of Europe. It seems that there are norms in the northern countries which induce the behaviour to leave the parental household more or less after finishing school, or when starting to work, whereas in the Mediterranean countries, the desired and adequate behaviour seems to be that of living with one's parents until marriage, unless the labour market forces people to leave.

For students, though, it is not the youth unemployment rates, but rather the parents' income which is more relevant. Iacovou (2001) has shown that in southern Europe, the income of the parents has a negative effect on the departure from the parental home. For the Nordic countries, she finds the opposite effect. This can be explained by the higher propensity of children from better-off families to enrol in higher education. In the Mediterranean countries, enrolment in university studies means staying longer in the parental household, whereas in the Nordic countries it is associated with the departure from home. This can be an indicator of different norms and preferences. Holdsworth (2000) and Holdsworth et al. (2002), who compare Britain and Spain, arrive at similar results. Instead, Jurado Guerrero (2001) argues in her comparison of Spain and France, that French students leave the parental home more often during their studies than do Spanish students from middle class origin because of different geographical conditions. The French university system is more centralised than the Spanish system. Furthermore, unlike in France, there are no elite universities in Spain. This makes it less necessary to migrate for university studies in Spain. On the other hand, these findings also point to strong social norms for Spanish students, prescribing living in the parental home while studying. Jurado Guerrero's argument, however, does not explain the high rates of students living outside the parental home in other continental and northern European countries which do not have a structure similar to the French system of higher education (see below, figure 2.1).

Given the different effect of parental income in northern and southern Europe, Iacovou (2001) assumes that especially Nordic parents financially support their children's early departure from the parental home, whereas southern European parents use their financial resources to make the stay of their adult offspring as pleasant as possible. This argument receives support from Manacorda and Moretti (2006) who provide evidence that the increase of young Italians living with parents between 1989 and 2000 was paralleled by a significant growth of parental income. The authors ascribe this income growth to the Italian pension reform in 1992 in which the age of retirement was postponed. As a consequence, household heads remained longer in employment

and therefore increased their incomes. Controlling for other factors which might influence the departure from the home, the authors argue that a 10 percent augmentation of annual parental income results in approximately a 10 percent rise in the proportion of young men living with their parents (Manacorda/Moretti 2006: 800). Parents “bribe” (ibid.: 803) their adult children, so to speak, with increased consumption in order to make them stay at home. The authors conclude that this is the result of different parental preferences in northern and southern Europe. Italian parents, and their Spanish counterparts, are significantly happier if their adult children live with them. Comparative qualitative research has revealed that in Spain coresidence of adult children and their parents can become “a source of genuine pleasure” (Newman 2008: 17) for the family members involved. For northern Europeans and U.S. American parents the opposite seems to be true. North American parents prefer living separately when their children become adults. Hence in the U.S., income gains of parents lead to a decrease in cohabitation rates of parents and children (Rosenzweig/Wolpin 1993).

Since many young northern Europeans depend financially on their parents, especially those who leave home during education, their living standard usually deteriorates remarkably. Nordic youth often leave home even before finishing school, accepting a much reduced standard of living as compared to their parental home (Vogel 2003). Leaving the parents’ household generally implies a deterioration of the economic status of the young adults, even for those who dispose of their own income. Bell et al. (2007), who analyse the income of young people living in and outside the parental home in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and Italy, prove that households of independently living young people typically display lower rates of income adequacy.<sup>6</sup> They also show that, among these countries, Italy deviates from this pattern. In Italy, the income adequacy of young adults living in their own household is higher or only slightly worse than it is among young Italians who live with their parents. This result suggests that Italians, compared to young people from the other five countries examined here, do not want to leave their parental home at any price. They rather seem to wait until their financial resources permit them to maintain the living standard they are accustomed to. This interpretation

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<sup>6</sup> According to Bell et al., “self-sufficiency is reached if young adults can support themselves on their wages in a one-person household. A person is considered self-sufficient if he or she earns at least one-half of the national median ADPI” (adjusted disposable personal income). Income adequacy of households refers to the ability of maintaining an own household by having an own income plus combining it with other sources of income, for example, the earnings of a working partner. This measurement makes sense since incomes are falling but at the same time more women are working which contributes to the maintenance of income adequacy (Bell et al. 2007: 39, 41).

is in line with the subjective reasons given by young Italians for their stay in the parental home. 58 percent of the 20 to 24-year-old and 63 percent of the 25 to 29-year-old Italians agree with at least one of the following answers to the question of why they live in the parental household: “It suits me, I have my freedom”, “I don’t feel like leaving” or “I would have to give up too much” (Sgritta 2003: 75, data: 1998). These findings suggest that the preferences or norms to leave home early are weak or absent in Italy.

### **2.2.2 Unaffordable housing**

Coming back to economic reasons, another plausible cause for the late departure from home in the southern European countries is the scarcity of affordable accommodation. High housing prices make it difficult for many young people in the Mediterranean countries to establish their own household, despite of having their own income (Fernández Cordón 1997, Corijn/Klijzing 2001b). Iacovou (2001) points to the correlation at the national level between the early departure from home and a well-developed rental sector on national housing markets. In the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, where people are particularly young when they leave the parental home, a higher number of state subsidised dwellings are available for rent. Nonetheless, the relationship between owner-occupied housing and a late departure from the parental home is rather weak. According to the comparative analysis by Newman and Aptekar, a 10 percent increase in owner-occupied housing is associated with about a 3 percent increase in the proportion of 18 to 34-year-olds living with parents. Approximately 14 percent of the variance of the prevalence of coresidence with parents among European countries can be explained by the proportion of owner-occupied housing (2007: 211). However, the authors do not control for the preference of leaving the parental home in order to marry or form a stable partnership, which is, as we have seen above, the best predictor for leaving the parental home, above all in the Mediterranean countries. Italy in particular still constitutes a puzzling outlier in Newman and Aptekar’s analysis (and is left out in most of their graphs, see Newman/Aptekar 2007: fig. 8.2, 8.3, 8.6, 8.7). In their analysis, Italy is neither among the countries with the very highest percentages of owner-occupied housing nor among those with the highest percentages of young workers in temporary employment. However, it is the country with most young people living with their parents. According to their data, the percentage of owner-occupied housing in Italy and Portugal is lower than in Belgium, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Also in Greece the

percentage is lower than in Ireland and the UK, yet the percentage of 18 to 34-year-olds living with their parents is the highest in the Mediterranean countries. Hence, it is not simply a high rate of owner-occupied housing that makes it difficult for young people to acquire residential independence. In the United States, for example, where home ownership rates are high, down payments for mortgages are much lower than in many European countries. Moreover ‘first home buyer’ programmes facilitate home ownership for young people (Newman/Aptekar 2007).<sup>7</sup> These differences suggest that there has not been a strong demand for such types of programmes or mortgage conditions in most European countries.

Considering the fact that the availability of rented dwellings in northern and southern Europe is different, it is an interesting question whether northern and southern Europeans have different preferences regarding buying or renting a home. A preference for home-ownership might increase the social acceptance of delaying the departure from the parental home (Rossi 1997). There is empirical evidence which indicates that southern Europeans have indeed a stronger preference for buying a dwelling than many northern Europeans (Serrano Secanella 1997). Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda (2002) explain for Spain that, in contrast to many northern European countries, home ownership is common in all social strata, whereas renting is considered a loss of money and therefore reserved to the upper middle class. Furthermore, sharing a flat with other young people is very uncommon in Spain, although it could help to reduce costs (*ibid.*). Castles and Ferrera (1996) argue that living in the parental household until marriage makes it possible to save money in order to acquire a property together with the partner as early as possible. The pattern of leaving home combined with the purchase of a property in the south can therefore be seen as a cause to the late departure from the parental home. Or, put differently, a late departure from the parental home makes it possible to acquire a property at an early stage during the life course. In Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal, most young people who leave the parental household move into an owner-occupied flat (see table 2.7). In most northern European countries, this is clearly not the case. Young Germans, for example, usually rent a flat after leaving the parental household. Only later on in life, if incomes increase and become more stable, do they buy property. In Germany, even families with adult children frequently live in rented dwellings. The findings in table 2.7 show that in northern Europe, but also to some extent

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, after the U.S. real estate crisis in 2007, financial incentives to raise a mortgage so that also the population groups with low incomes would have access to home ownership appear in a new light.

**Table 2.7:** Percentage of 17 to 25-year-olds living in a rented dwelling

	17 to 25-year-olds in rented dwellings	
	in own household	in the parents' household
Germany	86	36
France	81	29
Finland	81	12
Netherlands	78	33
Belgium	70	16
Denmark	69	17
Austria	65	19
Greece	56	17
Ireland	56	9
Great Britain	53	22
Spain	41	11
Italy	36	17
Portugal	31	19

Source: Berthoud/Iacovou 2002, p. 47 (ECHP, 1994)

in Greece, renting is the most common form among young people between 17 and 25 years of age of obtaining a separate dwelling. In Finland, Denmark, Belgium and Ireland, where ownership rates are high among families with grown-up children, renting is a popular alternative for young people when moving into a separate household (Berthoud/Iacovou 2002).

The preferences for home ownership or renting in earlier and later phases of life seem to be to a large extent resulting from different cultures and not so much from the respective housing markets, as the behaviour of second and third generation immigrants in Australia reveals. Khoo, McDonald, Giorgias and Birrell (2002) observe that second and third generation immigrants with southern European parents and grandparents coming from Italy and Greece live more frequently in fully owned homes than children and grandchildren of immigrants from northern European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and the United Kingdom. This is true not only for young people between 25 and 34 years, of whom some might still be living with their parents, but also for the age group between 35 and 44 years (Khoo et al. 2002: 94). These findings suggest that the perceived advantages and disadvantages of renting or purchasing a home vary according to inherited cultural values, even within the same housing market.

In addition to the southern European preference of buying a property when leaving the parental home, creating a home with a partner generally involves higher costs than moving into a hall of residence or shared flat. Leaving home at marriage or starting a household with a stable partner is often associated with higher material aspirations since frequently it is the first step to

forming a family. Avery et al. (1992) have proved for the United States that establishing the first household for reasons other than partnership requires less financial effort than forming a definite household that is meant to be the home of a stable couple and a future family.

Jones (1995) compares the situation of the housing market in southern Europe to Great Britain and shows that a limited availability of affordable housing is not an obstacle per se to the departure from the parental home. In England the number of young people living separately from their parents grew during the 1980s although the supply of reasonably priced housing decreased and the government only subsidised young families with children in finding a flat. Thus the still increasing number of young people leaving the parental home may be related to the reasons mentioned above, that is, higher residential mobility during difficult economic periods and a stronger desire to foster one's own identity. Yelowitz' (2007) calculations reveal that, in the United States, rising housing costs appear to explain little of the aggregate changes in living arrangements of young people. Moreover, the phenomenon to postpone the departure from the parental home in the U.S. started much earlier than the latest rise in housing prices. At the same time, delayed home-leaving was accompanied by a trend towards sharing a flat among young people and a decrease in living with a spouse.

Chisholm (1995) acknowledges that the housing market in southern Europe does make it extremely difficult for young people to live independently because of mortgage arrangements, the type of housing offered and landlords' tenancy preferences. She, nevertheless, concludes that interpreting young southern Europeans' living arrangements as a mechanical consequence of the housing market would be "sociologically inappropriate" (Chisholm 1995: 128). Based on the findings of the Young Europeans survey from 1990, she argues that only a very small percentage of the Italian respondents perceive accommodation as a problem, although 94 percent of them live with their parents. According to Chisholm, this indicates a preference for living with one's family in Italy. A majority of young people in Portugal (59 percent), Germany (52 percent) and Denmark (48 percent) perceive the lack of suitable housing as a serious problem, whereas this is true of only a small percentage in Italy (8 percent), Greece (12 percent), Belgium (12 percent) and the Netherlands (13 percent) (Eurobarometer 34.2 1991: 36). As these data reveal, there is no north-south divide between the perceptions of young northern Europeans and young southern Europeans regarding the provision of suitable housing in their countries. Moreover, survey data confirm the prevalence of strong family values and an attitude to see the family as a main centre

of solidarity and support in Italy (Cavalli et al. 1984, Cavalli/De Lillo 1988). Therefore, Chisholm concludes that young Italians apparently prefer family living over independent living arrangements.

All these findings indicate that the relationship between leaving home and affordable housing is not as straightforward as sometimes claimed. Although it is certainly true that high housing prices can hamper the departure from the parental home, increased housing prices nevertheless have a different effect on different cultural groups.

### **2.2.3 Different educational systems**

The different educational systems in Europe are another institutional factor that has been examined to explain the variations in the departure patterns from the parental home. With regard to vocational education, Rusconi (2006) for example, suggests that young Italians in vocational education have less financial opportunities for leaving home than German apprentices because they do not receive apprenticeship pay. Since vocational education in Italy is organised as full-time education at vocational schools, young people involved in it depend financially on their parents. In contrast, vocational education in Germany usually comprises practical training periods on the job alternating with part-time education at a vocational school. That is to say that most apprentices in Germany are employed in a part-time position by a company where they receive a (usually very modest) salary for their work. Only those who are not able to find an apprenticeship position at a company attend full-time vocational schooling where they receive practical training at training workshops. From this point of view, most Germans in professional training have indeed more favourable conditions to achieve residential independence earlier on than Italians in vocational education. However, the studies presented in section 2.2.1 of this chapter have revealed that disposing of own income is not a strong incentive for leaving home in southern Europe. We can, therefore, assume that the absence of apprenticeship pay in Italy has little influence on the living arrangements of young people in vocational education. Instead, the diverse structures of the vocational training systems in Italy and Germany may indeed play a role. In particular the fact that German apprentices must obtain an apprenticeship contract with a company may force them to relocate. Depending on the situation of the labour market, young Germans sometimes send numerous applications to companies in a wider geographical area to obtain an apprenticeship position. Since apprenticeship positions can be rare, young people in

Germany may leave home and move away even at ages as young as 16 for the purpose of receiving professional education. Hence, the structure of the vocational training system may indeed be a triggering factor in the departure from the parental home. Our knowledge, however, on leaving home during professional training in a comparative perspective is still limited.<sup>8</sup>

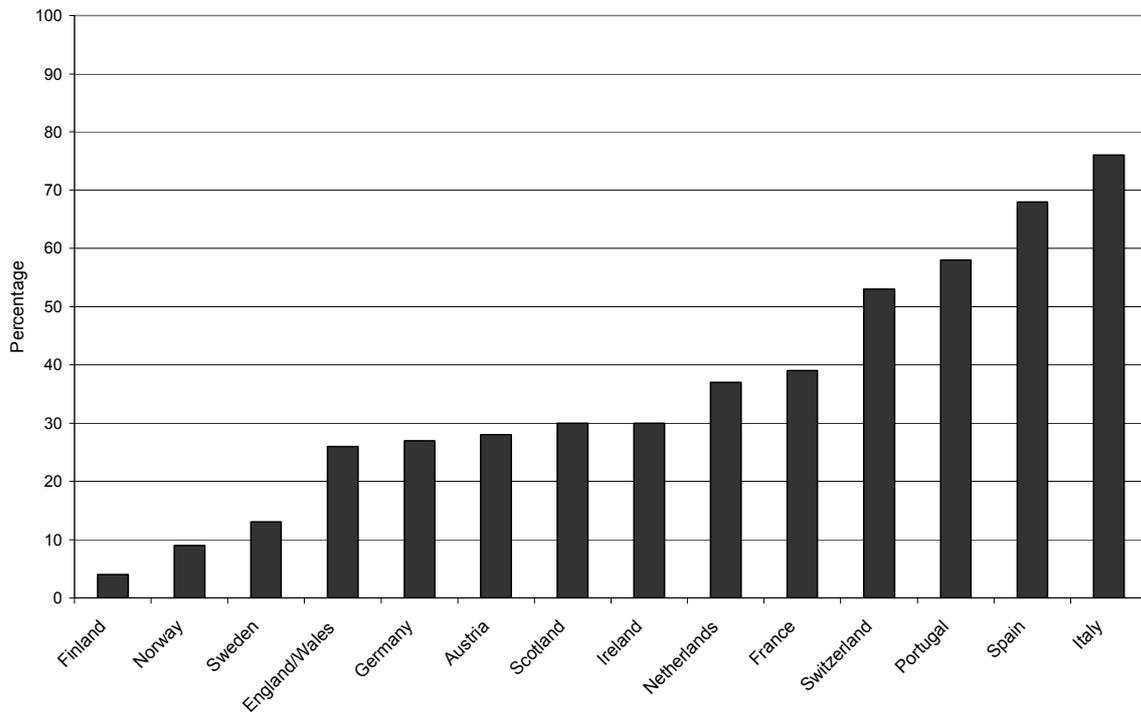
Other researchers suggest that the different amount of time spent in education influences the age of leaving the parental home. Decanini and Palomba (1999), for example, argue that in Italy more young people are enrolled in university studies than in France, Great Britain or Germany. The unfavourable study conditions at Italian mass universities contribute to the prolongation of the time spent in education (see also Cook/Furstenberg 2002). However, the duration of educational periods in Europe is very heterogeneous and does not display a north-south pattern. Furthermore, the differences between the median ages of leaving home are stronger than the differences between the duration of education in Europe (Vogel 2003). Billari and colleagues (2001) demonstrate that the departure from the parental home almost never takes place upon the completion of education. Northern Europeans frequently leave home during education whereas southern Europeans usually remain with their parents during education and even afterwards (Iacovou 2001). In Italy, for example, 16 percent of young men and 15 percent of women (cohorts born around 1960) left home while studying. Similarly, in Spain 13 percent of men and 16 percent of women did so. In West Germany, by contrast, 38 percent of men and 37 percent of women and in Finland even 57 percent of men and 67 percent of women did not live with their parents during their education. The median age of leaving home of German men is on average two years higher than the median age of finishing education. In Italy, the difference between the median age at the end of education and the median age at leaving the parental home is much greater, seven to nine years, depending on the birth cohort (Rusconi 2006).

More recent data about university students confirm the permanence of the different patterns of living arrangements during education. Students in southern Europe live most frequently with their parents, while Nordic students are the least inclined to do so. In continental and western Europe, the percentages of students living with parents lie in-between (see figure 2.1).

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<sup>8</sup> For literature on the transition to vocational education and work in Europe, see Walther (2006).

**Figure 2.1:** 21 to 24-year-old students living with their families, in percent



Source: Eurostudent III (data: 2005-2008)

The branch of research comparatively investigating the living conditions of higher education students in different European countries has developed quite independently from the sociological literature on leaving the parental home. For instance, Daniel et al. (1999) developed a typology of welfare support for higher education students in different Western European macro-regions. They analysed the various ways institutional support for students is organised across Western European countries and how much financial subsidies are provided by the state. This research, however, only takes into account the institutional structures and not the attitudes of the students themselves or their parents.

The comparison of the living arrangements of students in southern and northern Europe displays interesting differences. As we have seen above, students in France from a middle class background live more often away from home during tertiary education than their working class peers, yet this class difference does not apply to students in Spain (Jurado Guerrero 2001). In Spain, students from middle class families, as well as students from working class families live with their parents. A comparative analysis on Spain and Britain has produced similar results (Holdsworth 2000). Also in Italy, the main reason for leaving home is marriage, for people from

**Table 2.8:** Living arrangements of students, all age groups, in percent

	With parents/relatives	In halls of residence	Own lodging/sublet/ private flat
Finland	3	29	68
Norway	7	14	79
Sweden	10	26	64
England/Wales	19	21	60
Germany	23	11	65
Austria	26	10	65
Scotland	29	11	60
Ireland	40	17	44
Netherlands	39	27	34
France	43	13	44
Switzerland	39	3	58
Portugal	55	6	39
Spain	64	3	33
Italy	73	2	25

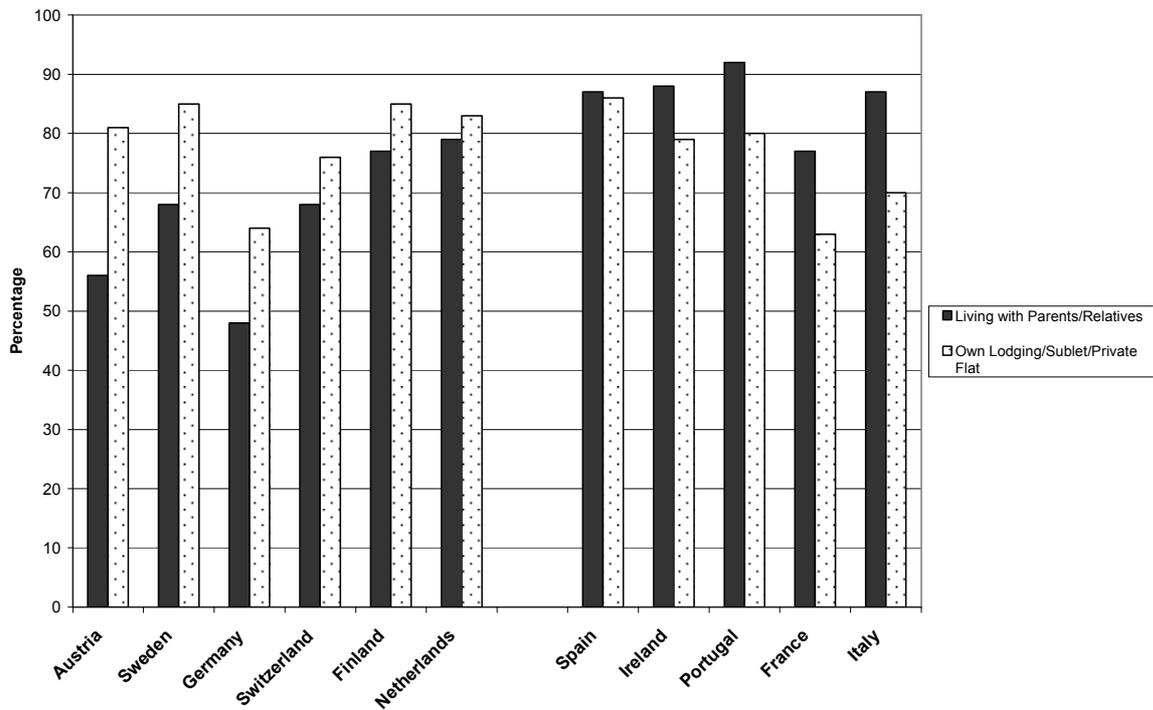
Source: Eurostudent III (data: 2005-2008)

all social classes, as well as for people with higher education (Rusconi 2006). For this reason, even scholars who neglect the relevance of cultural factors in the process of leaving home admit that the high percentage of students staying at home can hardly be explained by factors other than different norms (Fernández Cordón 1997, Jurado Guerrero/Naldini 1996, Jurado Guerrero 2001).

As explained in the section on housing markets, renting a dwelling is considered a privilege of wealthy people in southern Europe. This seems to be also true for students. Finocchietti notes that in Italian cities the presence of students who live away from home “is often seen as an opportunity to exploit a weak resource (e.g., by flat owners or shopkeepers), or as a problem that nobody really wants to deal with” (2004: 465). This attitude also seems to be reflected by the small number of students who have the opportunity to obtain a place in halls of residence in the southern European countries (see also table 2.8). Cavalli (1995) explains that in Italy policy is aimed at constructing new universities in each area of the country, yet almost no provision has been made to accommodate students from other areas: “Understandably, the parental home is still the easiest and least costly [living] solution, particularly if mother is there to do the washing” (Cavalli 1995: 27).

The findings in table 2.8 show that in southern Europe, where many students live with their parents, only a few are accommodated in halls of residence. This suggests that a lack of

**Figure 2.2:** Percentage of students who are ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with their type of residence



Source: Eurostudent III (data: 2005-2008)

affordable housing provided in halls of residence prevents students from leaving home. On the other hand, the demand for such types of housing appears to be low in the Mediterranean countries. In southern Europe, more students who live with their families declare to be ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their type of accommodation, than do southern European students living in private flats or halls of residence (see figure 2.2). This is different from northern Europe where living with one’s family seems to be less satisfactory. In the northern European countries examined in this study the satisfaction of the students living with parents is lower than the satisfaction of those living in a private flat, except in France and Ireland. In Germany and Austria, the students who live with their parents are even less satisfied than those living in halls of residence. Considering the high percentages of students living with parents or relatives in Italy, Spain and Portugal, and the overwhelming satisfaction of these students with their type of accommodation, it is plausible to suppose that the demand for more halls of residence or affordable private flats in these countries is rather low.

## 2.2.4 Insufficient public support

When youth employment becomes precarious and housing prices rise, as is currently happening in many countries, financial support from the state may cushion the negative effects of these developments on the departure from the parental home. Clearly, however, there are differences within Europe with respect to the type and quantity of state support provided. Young people undoubtedly are given more subsidies in the Nordic and the northern European countries than in the south. In 1997, for example, 28,2 percent of the 15 to 24-year-old Danes and 25,4 percent of the young Finns in education received grants or training allowances. As continental European examples, in East Germany 9,6 percent and 4,9 percent in West Germany received some kind of support during education in the form of a grant or training allowance. In southern Europe, this number did not even reach 2 percent (Eurobarometer 47.2 1997: 76, age group 15-24). Similarly, there are strong differences regarding unemployment benefits throughout Europe. In the same year, unemployment compensation or social security benefits were received by 6,7 percent of the young people in Western Germany and 12,4 percent in Eastern Germany, as well as 11,7 percent in Sweden and 18,3 percent in Great Britain. In contrast, in southern Europe, where youth unemployment is particularly high, the share of people obtaining income benefits is extremely low: 0,1 percent of young Italians, 2,1 percent of Spanish youth, and 1,3 percent in Portugal receive financial aid from the state (*ibid.*, age group 15-24, data from 1997).

However, state support in northern Europe does not prevent young people from experiencing financial hardship while living independently from their parents (Vogel 2002, Aassve et al. 2007). Especially in Denmark and the Netherlands, the risk of being 'excluded' (i.e. without employment and without family support) and being 'poor' (i.e. belonging to the lowest 20 percent on the income scale) is high for young people living away from the parental home. This is explained by the common practice of leaving the parental home without yet having a job. In southern Europe, by contrast, young people are less likely to be excluded, and the relationship between exclusion and poverty is less strong than in the northern European countries (Iacovou/Berthoud 2001). These studies show that young people in northern Europe would leave their parents' home even at a considerable risk of financial hardship and poverty. Hence, welfare support and economic security alone do not seem to be factors strong enough to trigger an early departure from home before marriage. It seems likely that different preferences or norms play a relevant role in such departure before marriage in the north.

From this perspective, the welfare state is supposed to prevent young people from hardship after being ‘pushed out’ of their parental homes by their norms and preferences of early independence. Following this reasoning, Jones (1995) argues that in countries where the departure from the parental home before marriage is socially legitimised and desired, the state supports young people in establishing their own households. In countries, by contrast, where a strong “family ideology” (ibid.: 28) prevails and marriage is the main accepted reason for leaving the parental home, very little or no state support is offered to young people. Bearing in mind the comparatively high pensions which the southern European welfare systems provide for and the benefits for family breadwinners (Ferrera 1996), it would be incorrect to conclude that the southern European welfare systems are ungenerous in general. They rather foster the financial dependence of young people on their families by directing support to the older generations. Young people in Italy who have not yet started their own family are considered by the state – and the society – as children who depend on their parents and not as independent individuals (Rusconi 2006). Given the different legal status of adult children in Europe, the legal status of students and their inclusion in the respective social systems also differ enormously (Bienefeld/Almqvist 2004).

### **2.2.5 More freedom at the parental home**

The previous sections provided a review of studies which examine the relevance of economic and institutional explanations for the different patterns of home leaving. In sum, most authors, especially in more recent studies, consent that economic factors alone do not account for the different behavioural patterns in northern and southern Europe. The authors who address and analyse the link between leaving home and forming a stable partnership agree that the late departure from the parental home in southern Europe is related to a greater relevance of strong family ties in the Mediterranean societies.

However, not all authors who point to the relevance of cultural factors define these cultural factors as the absence or presence of familialistic attitudes. Cavalli, for example, argues that the increasing age of leaving home in Italy has “little to do with enduring traditional family values and models, centred around paternal authority, rigid division of labour between the sexes and the ‘domestic’ role assigned to the mother” (1995: 28). His formulation can be understood as a refusal of the idea that young Italians, and especially young Italian men, are so-called

“mammoni”, which means “mummy’s boys”, who are spoiled by their homemaking mothers that focus all their attention on their children, particularly on their sons, who subsequently do not want to leave the parental home. This idea, which reduces a complex social phenomenon to a psychological stereotype, has been very popular also in the media (see, for example, D’Agostino 2008). However, the two alternative explanations that Cavalli offers remain weak because they only apply to the Italian or southern European context but not, for example, to Germany or other northern European countries. He argues that the expansion of higher education during the 1960s and 1970s has altered authority structures within the Italian family with parents losing their dominant position. Thus, being better educated than their parents, today many young people have “an advantage in negotiating personal autonomy and space for themselves within the family” (Cavalli 1995: 27). He, further argues that the increasing degree of autonomy and freedom young people enjoy in their parents’ home, and in particular, the possibility to have more sexual freedom has reduced “the need to ‘get away from home’” (ibid.: 28).

The first argument is weak because also in northern Europe there has been a large extension of higher education (e.g., Rüegg 2011). Like in Italy, this expansion of the educational system has changed the channels of authority within families. However, this development has not resulted in a prolonged stay of young northern Europeans in the parental home.

**Table 2.9:** “Is your son/daughter allowed to have sex with his/her girlfriend/boyfriend at home?” Young Germans, age 14-17 years, in percent

Germany	Girls			Boys		
	Yes	No	No answer	Yes	No	No answer
East	75	15	10	66	20	14
West	65	20	14	71	13	17

Source: Osthoff/Kluge, 2003, p. 197, fig. 4.81, data: 1994

**Table 2.10:** “Are you allowed to have moments of intimacy with your partner at home?” Young Italians living with parents, age 20-34 years, in percent

Italy	Yes	No	Only with advance notice
All	48	43	9
Women	-	55	-
Men	-	33	-
South, women	26	68	6

Source: Menniti, 1999, p. 14, 19, table 2.2, data: 1998

Considering the evidence given in table 2.9 and 2.10, Cavalli's second argument does not apply to Germany either. The findings reveal that more young Germans have sexual freedom within the parental home and even at younger ages than young Italians, yet this does not prevent them from leaving the home relatively early.<sup>9</sup> From the comparative perspective, there must be an additional variable to explain the late departure from the parental home in southern Europe, for example, the existence of so-called strong family ties. It cannot merely be the increase of sexual freedom. Furthermore, it is possible to assume that the lack of sexual freedom in the family home was probably only a minor factor which contributed little to the earlier departure from the parental home in previous decades. Regional differences within Italy confirm this impression. Menniti shows that young women in the South of Italy are more restricted in their sexual freedom at home than young Italian men or women in Northern Italy (1999: 14). However, women in the Southern regions do not leave home earlier than do women in the other parts of Italy. Women in all Italian regions have delayed their departure from the parental home to a similar extent over the last few decades. By contrast, among young men, there is a difference between the North and the South of Italy. As illustrated above, Northern Italian men postpone their departure from the parental home much more than men from the South, although the employment situation is more favourable in the North (Rusconi 2006). This suggests that young men from Southern Italy leave home earlier to find a job elsewhere, and not because they enjoy less freedom at home. The self-reported reasons for leaving home confirm this conclusion: Southern Italian men report more often that they left home for a job or for education, than do men from other parts of the country. By contrast, the reason to gain more personal autonomy and independence was reported more frequently by Northern Italian men (Rusconi 2006: 105). To sum up, in comparative perspective, the degree of sexual freedom and personal autonomy at home appears to have little or no direct influence on the timing of the departure from the parental home. Since the two cultural reasons Cavalli (1995) suggested remain weak because they only apply to Northern Italy, but neither to Germany nor to Southern Italy, different family norms become more relevant for analysis.

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<sup>9</sup> In general, the rates of sexual activity among teenagers are somewhat lower in southern Europe than in northern Europe (Furlong/Cartmel 2007). These findings may point, on the one hand, to stronger parental control in the family household in southern Europe or, on the other hand, to stronger social desirability among survey respondents in these countries.

### **2.2.6 Norms and values**

Only little research has been done thus far to investigate the values and norms concerning the departure from the parental home. Hence, our knowledge in this field is still limited to the normative link between leaving home and marriage in southern Europe. Sometimes, this link is not even seen as normative but as resulting from economic conditions. From the analysis of in-depth interviews in Spain, for example, it emerged that there is “a strong sense” of one prevalent pattern of leaving home which “is unambiguous: leaving home to get married and buy a property” (Holdsworth 2005: 553). All young people and parents interviewed are clearly aware of this socially expected reason for leaving home, even if they had chosen a more unconventional option. Holdsworth, therefore, distinguishes three different types of orientations and behaviour which young people display towards the socially prescribed rules of leaving home. The types identified are ‘rule followers’, ‘rule abiders’ and ‘rule breakers’. ‘Rule followers’ are young people who choose to follow the ‘classic’ pattern of leaving home to get married and buy a property because they themselves are convinced that this is the ‘right’ thing for them to do. ‘Rule abiders’ are characterised by a reluctant conformity to the rules. They only choose to follow the socially prescribed pattern of leaving home because they feel that they have no means to break these rules or because of not wanting to upset their parents. In contrast, ‘rule breakers’ are prepared to deviate from the prescribed practices. Nevertheless, this group is also aware of the prevalent norms about leaving home. Many of them negotiate their departure from home in such a way as to prevent or reduce conflict with their parents (Holdsworth 2005).

The analysis of in-depth interviews with young Italians in the province of Pesaro-Urbino (Central Italy) also points to the importance of social norms in the decision to leave the parental household (Quadrelli 2007). Quadrelli emphasises that the economic conditions of young Italians are not sufficient to fully explain their long stay in the parental home, although economic constraints are indeed very strong in Italy. She argues that cultural and economic factors interplay in the process of decision making. Cultural factors most likely influence the perception of the economic costs of setting up one’s own household. Quadrelli’s findings suggest that, due to different family norms, Italians might perceive the economic costs of leaving home as a greater obstacle than do northern Europeans. Quantitative data from the Netherlands support this argument. Billari and Liefbroer show that the perception of the housing market prospects influences those young people who prefer to leave home to live with a partner, but not the young

people who decide to live independently before moving in with a stable partner (Billari/Liefbroer 2007). Quadrelli's study reveals a rather negative perception of the early departure from the family home among her interview partners in Italy. Many of the interviewees who left the parental home did so only because of subtle conflicts with their parents or a "sort of not-understanding-each-other" (Quadrelli 2007: 7), in particular, when the young sensed the lack of autonomy in the relationship with their parents. It emerges from the interviews that many parents would not appreciate an early departure from the family home before marriage. Many young adults interviewed were aware of this opinion held by their parents. Most of them did not want to hurt their parents' feelings, having in mind that a departure from home for other reasons than a stable partnership would be perceived by their parents as a sign of conflict or of a problematic relationship. The main reasons, given by the interviewees, for staying with their parents were: practical support in daily household activities, which allows having more time with friends, but also for the purpose of saving time while working and studying contemporaneously. Furthermore, the interviewees saw the advantage of saving money in order to buy a flat and start a family household. Quadrelli concludes that the reasons given in the interviews contain a "rational element" with regard to risk reduction and a "hedonistic element" related to freedom and comfort in the parental household (Quadrelli 2007: 8).

Decanini and Palomba (1999) state that the transition to adulthood follows a different normative pathway in Italy than in northern Europe. In Italy, a stable job is not considered a reason to leave the parental home, nor is the enrolment in education a triggering factor to do so. Instead, the event which marks the beginning of residential independence is marriage. Due to this normative link, the age at leaving the parental home has been rising in Italy as a consequence of the increase in the age of marriage over the last decades. Misiti's results (1999) confirm this view. In the representative study from 1998 among young Italians living at home, ages 20 to 34, more than half answered that marriage (43 percent) and family formation (13 percent) would be the main reasons for them to leave home; 35 percent of them would leave their parental home for a job elsewhere, yet only 7 percent would do so to study in another place (Misiti 1999: 52f.).

Various studies have proved that parents and also young adults in Spain and Italy mainly consent that marriage is the most legitimate reason to leave the parental home. The agreement between parents and children on this point is underlined by the fact that Italian families do not frequently talk about this topic. Those who do talk about it do so only rarely (29 percent) or

sometimes (54 percent). Furthermore, 49 percent of the respondents (young Italians in 1998, aged 20-34) have never talked about it with their families (Palomba 1999: 34). These results, moreover, imply that the prolonged stay of young people in the parental home is taken for granted by many Italians so that they do not even feel the need to exchange ideas and opinions about it. This observation points to a deeply rooted cultural pattern.

The fact that Italian families do rarely talk about it might also signify that a prolonged residence in the parental household is not perceived as problematic by parents and grown-up children. This interpretation is confirmed by Newman and Aptekar (2007). They find that living with parents in general slightly decreases the life satisfaction in European countries. Only southern Europe presents an exception to this pattern, due to the “normalcy” of living with parents in this region (Newman/Aptekar 2007: 222). The more accepted co-residence of parents and adult children is in a group or country, the less it decreases life satisfaction. As a consequence, we can assume that the more intergenerational co-residence is perceived as normal, the less young people and their parents feel inclined to change it. Giuliano (2007) finds a similar effect among southern European immigrants in the United States. Second-generation immigrants from southern Europe in the U.S. display so-called “peer effects” in metropolitan areas with high concentrations of immigrants from the same country. That is to say, in neighbourhoods where many immigrants of southern European origin live closely together, they are more prone to conserve their southern European norms, notwithstanding the new institutional context in the United States (Giuliano 2007: 941). Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1996) observe a similar peer-effect among non-European immigrants in the U.S. who live closely together in ethnic residential communities. They conclude that affluence is much less relevant than values since their findings display only few and weak relations between economic resources and non-family living of adult offspring in some minority groups.

According to in-depth interviews in Britain, Norway and Spain, British and Norwegian parents often see the financial support that they transfer to their residentially independent children as a means to teach them how to get by on their own. The parents interviewed did not want to interfere too much with the lives of their grown-up children, not even with the purpose of helping them. Some of them were afraid to spoil their children and prevent them from becoming independent. By contrast, the Spanish parents among the interviewees understood their parental role as providers of material and emotional help for their adult children. The fear of spoiling their

**Table 2.11: Parental obligations**

“Which of the following statements\* best describes your views about parents’ responsibilities to their children?”

Percentage who agreed that “Parents’ duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being”, in percent

	All	by Age	
		16-29	50+
Portugal	84	76	91
France	81	75	86
Italy	79	66	89
Spain	75	63	86
Great Britain	74	63	83
Ireland	73	60	82
Norway	73	57	82
East Germany	72	62	80
Switzerland	69	59	78
Belgium	64	56	74
Sweden	63	57	75
Netherlands	62	53	79
Austria	61	45	68
West Germany	54	44	67
Denmark	52	40	64
Island	50	36	65
Finland	49	46	61

\*Opposite answer: “Parents have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children.”

Source: Inglehart, 1998/2000: V225 (World Values Survey, 1990-1993)

children was much less pronounced among them. Of course, also the interviewed northern European parents underlined that they would always help their adult children in need. However, they displayed the opinion that permanent help in any kind of situation could also have a negative effect on their children by hindering them from becoming independent. As an English mother said: “[...] sometimes you’ve got to be a bit cruel to be kind, [...]” (Holdsworth 2004: 919). In contrast, most of the Spanish parents interviewed would offer their help even without being asked, just “because they are parents” (ibid.: 917). This corresponds with the results of the World Value Survey, which indicate different opinions among northern and southern Europeans concerning the duty of parents to support their children (see table 2.11). More recent data of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), gathered in 2004 and 2005, provide similar results for the population aged 50 and older (Albertini/Kohli forthcoming). Some of the interviewed northern European parents in Holdsworth’s study even retain that the family is not always the best environment for the personal development of a young adult. One Norwegian

mother of a 21-year-old daughter, for example, opines that living in their own household is more appropriate for the personal development of young people. Financial support for this purpose is well-spent in this sense:

[...] Afterwards you might reflect upon it maybe..., them [the children] living at home while studying and so on..., this being the smartest thing to do in an economical sense so to speak... So it would have been no problem for us if she had decided to do that instead..., but I know that it is important for young people today to have an environment in which they are stimulated and so on, you know, a healthy psychological one so to speak... (Holdsworth 2004: 918)

A quantitative study confirming the relevance of cultural factors in the departure from the parental home, which received much attention, is Giuliano's study (2007) of second-generation immigrants from Europe living in the U.S. Her findings show that in the U.S., second-generation immigrants of northern European origin tend to leave their homes earlier than second-generation immigrants with southern European roots, controlling for other variables such as income and education. Second-generation immigrants with parents from different parts of Europe, thus, mirror the patterns of leaving home identified in Europe. Consequently, these normative patterns do not constitute a direct and stringent reaction to institutions such as housing markets and welfare support.

### **3. Disentangling the institutional fabric**

The previous chapter has shown that the departure from the parental home is embedded in a framework of social institutions, such as marriage, the housing market, the labour market and the welfare system. However, it is not always apparent in which direction the causal link between the departure from home and these institutions is effectual. It is not clear, for example, whether a delayed departure is caused by a lack of suitable housing or whether the reduced rental sector in southern Europe is a consequence of a low demand for this type of accommodation due to reduced residential mobility. Similar confusion can be noticed in the literature referring to the labour market, the welfare system and prevailing norms with regard to the departure from the parental household. In order to achieve more clarity with respect to these issues, the causal relationship between leaving the parental home and the surrounding institutional context will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections.

In this chapter, I pose the question of whether the delay in leaving the parental home, which is taking place in several European countries, constitutes a rather universal demographic tendency that can be expected to expand to all parts of Europe, or if, on the other hand, it is a phenomenon which is constrained to certain regional and national conditions. Chisholm (1995), for example, suggests that the prolonged co-residence of young adults with their parents might indeed be a new trend in which Italy takes a pioneering role since the proportions of young people living with their families are increasing in northern Europe as well. Similarly, Newman and Aptekar (2007) expect increasing numbers of young people living in the parental household throughout Europe and North America in the future. I intend to demonstrate that the postponement of the departure from the parental home does not constitute a new trend that is spreading from the European south to the north, but is limited to certain institutional and cultural contexts. It is rather to be seen as a behavioural alteration within the continuity of institutional and cultural frameworks.

To conclude this chapter, I will propose a conceptual framework which is apt to tackle the question of how to explain the differences between leaving-home patterns in northern and southern Europe.

## **3.1 A closer look at the institutional context**

### **3.1.1 Leaving home at marriage**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the departure from the parental home in southern Europe strongly correlates with the moment in which one decides to begin living together with a spouse or partner and, subsequently, forming a family. The increasing postponement of marriage over the last decades is thus the strongest explanatory factor to account for the delay in leaving home among southern Europeans. Hence, a closer look at the changing timing of marriage in the recent past and the link between leaving home and marriage is instructive.

In the 1970s, the age at first marriage started to rise in Western Europe – in the Nordic countries already in the 1960s – after it had been falling after World War II to its lowest levels (CEC 1994: 58, Höpflinger 1997, Billari/Liefbroer 2010: 66-67). In the U.S. a similar development occurred (Danziger/Rouse 2007: 3). In the two decades before the 1970s, the life-course events that were usually understood as ‘classical’ markers of the transition to adulthood, such as finishing education, starting the first job, leaving home, getting married and having children, occurred rather simultaneously. At least in Germany, this simultaneity evoked the impression that the 1950s and early 1960s were especially conservative. Then, as a consequence of the postponement of marriage and family formation, the process of becoming an ‘adult’ changed. The life course events that characterised the transition to adulthood started to take place sequentially with increasing intervals in between (Billari/Liefbroer 2010). In the Netherlands, for example, the departure from the parental home, marriage and having children happened in less than 4 years for the cohort leaving home in 1977. By contrast, young Dutch adults who left home in 1985 remained single for the following four years on average (Mulder/Manting 1994).

Various suggestions have been made to explain the delay in marriage and family formation during these decades. Some social scientists try to ascribe it to women’s growing economic independence, postulating that working women had fewer incentives to engage in lasting relationships and child rearing (see, e.g., Becker 1981). Other scholars try to explain delayed family formation and declining fertility rates by changing values from materialist towards post-modern attitudes and an augmented desire of individual self-fulfilment, going hand in hand with higher control over fertility (see, e.g., van de Kaa 2002). Both explanations ignore growing economic pressure on young people and the augmented levels of work related stress due

to increased competition on the labour markets, which are obstacles to family formation and increase relational stress in couples. Other scholars, who do take economic reasons into account, sometimes postulate that the declining fertility rates are a causal consequence of delayed home leaving (e.g., Fernández Cerdón 1997, Billari/Kohler 2004). This causal assumption, however, is flawed since the postponement of the departure from the home is not followed by an increased age at first childbirth. The age at first childbirth in Italy, for example, where birth rates are extremely low, was not higher than in other European countries in the mid 1990s (Dalla Zuanna 2001: 135, data from 1996 and 1995). Hence in this case, the low Italian birth rate cannot be a direct result of the late age at leaving the parental home. Empirical results, however, have shown that the increased participation in higher education since the educational expansion in the 1970s is one important factor to explain the postponement of marriage and family formation, for example, in Germany (Blossfeld/Huinink 1991). Fahey and Spéder (2004) give evidence that the decline in fertility is happening “involuntarily”, that is to say, it is not a preference of young people to postpone parenthood or to renounce it. Instead, most young people would like to have more children than they actually have. Fahey and Spéder show that fertility decline is a result of economic pressures, such as the cost of children and the pressure of working fulltime with long working hours. From this perspective, if we interpret the postponed departure from the parental home in southern European countries as a result of delayed marriage and fertility, than late home leaving is indeed an indirect consequence of economic pressures.

Since many young people in Europe, and in particular in the Mediterranean countries, leave home at marriage and marriage takes place increasingly late, they leave their parents' household later than previous cohorts. This phenomenon is particularly salient in southern Europe, where there is a strong link between marriage and leaving home, but also, for example, in Belgium (see table 2.6 in the previous chapter). By contrast, in the Nordic countries, where leaving home is largely disconnected from marriage and takes place almost exclusively before marriage, the age at leaving home remains unaffected by the increasing age of marriage. In continental European countries we find a more differentiated picture. Here, the median age of leaving the parental home only slightly increased compared to the striking increase in southern Europe and the rather stable situation in the Nordic countries. Regarding continental Europe, two hypotheses are possible to explain why the median age in this group of countries rose only moderately. First, the moderate increase could be a result of the economic situation of young

people which is more favourable than in southern Europe, yet less advantageous than in the Nordic countries. Second, it could be a result of an increase of young people who leave home before marriage and a decrease of those who leave home at marriage. The empirical analysis of Germany compared to Italy reveals that the latter appears to be true. Rusconi (2004, 2006) finds that Germans, and particularly German men, postpone marriage and family formation, yet they increasingly leave home for other reasons, such as education. In the group of women, the increase in premarital departures compensates the effect of the postponement of marriage on leaving the parental home across cohorts. Among men, the growing number of premarital move-outs alleviates the impact marriage postponement has on the median age at leaving the parental home, yet does not counterbalance it completely. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all West German cohorts who grew up after World War II left the parental home earlier than the Italian cohorts and, in contrast to Italy, largely for other reasons than marriage. Hence, Rusconi concludes that “it would be excessive to speak of a behavioural transformation” during this period of time (Rusconi 2006: 203). In Italy, in contrast, marriage has been the prevalent reason for leaving the parental home for all cohorts born from 1953 to 1972. While the age of marriage has been increasing over the last decades, only a very small minority of young Italians substituted the departure for marriage by other reasons for leaving home. Therefore, the rising age of becoming residentially independent could not be compensated by other, earlier motives for the departure from the parental home.

Rusconi and other scholars explain the relationship between leaving home and marriage by the “persisting importance of behavioural ‘norms’ that link the departure from home to family formation” in Italy (Rusconi 2006: 147). Jurado Guerrero (2001) argues, instead, that the strong link between leaving home and marriage in Spain results from financial constraints and a difficult labour market situation, particularly for women. However, in northern countries such as Germany, leaving home was more strongly related to marriage during the decades of economic upswing after the Second World War when the age of marriage decreased. In Spain, the age of leaving home decreased together with the age of marriage in the years of economic growth from 1960 to 1976, also due to migratory moves of mainly young people from rural areas to industrialising cities. After the end of the Franco regime in 1977, rents and housing prices rose abruptly. At the same time, the age of marriage strongly increased (Casal/García 1995). In the 1980s, however, the very strong link between leaving home and marriage started slightly to weaken and more

young women in Spain left home before marriage (Billari/Liefbroer 2010). Hence, economic difficulties do not convincingly explain the correlation of leaving home and marriage.

Baanders (1998) observes a trend in the Netherlands during the 1980s that is comparable to the development in Germany. In this period, the economic conditions for young people deteriorated. Such deterioration, however, did not lead to a general postponement of home leaving. Instead, more young people invested in their education and left home when enrolling in university studies. As a result, the odds of leaving home increased for persons between 18 and 20 years old and decreased for those older than 21. That is, they left more frequently for educational reasons as opposed to leaving for partnership and family formation. Baanders, thus, concludes that limited opportunities do not necessarily lead to a postponement of the departure from the parental home, but to an adjustment of other behavioural choices, for example, the acceptance of less attractive housing and the postponement of family formation. She argues that normative expectations play a major role in the decision to leave home. A decrease in income does not automatically translate into postponement of the departure. Instead, it is the “subjective evaluation of the adequacy of this income” which appears to be crucial (Baanders 1998: 213). Her regression analysis reveals that young people leaving home for education deem lower incomes to be more acceptable for setting up their own household than young people who (intend to) leave for partnership reasons. However, students also need a minimum level of income to start living independently which can hardly be stretched by their subjective willingness if this basic income is not available. Nevertheless, Baanders’ findings make clear that for the most part economic reasons do not have an immediate effect on the inclination to leave home but are mediated by the subjective evaluation of the financial situation of the young. The subjective evaluation of the sufficiency of the income level depends very much on the reasons for moving out.

The recently more widespread ‘solitary phase’ between leaving the family of origin and starting a new family probably also contributed to the increase in the number of single households in all European countries (see table 3.1). In southern Europe, this increase was, nevertheless, much smaller than in the north (Alders/Manting 1999).

The postponement of the departure from the parental home due to the postponement of marriage can be observed in northern countries too. Also in some northern European countries and the United States, the number of young adults remaining with parents has increased slightly

since the 1980s. This phenomenon of being still in the ‘nest’ has received attention from social scientists (e.g., Cherlin/Scabini/Rossi 1997, Lauterbach/Lüscher 1999). Compared to southern Europe, however, this trend in northern Europe and North America concerns a minority of young people and, thus, the worries about it have been “exaggerated” (at least in the U.S.), according to Danziger and Rouse (2007: 5). The median age at the departure from the parental home increased much stronger in southern Europe.

Another related observation, which belongs to the phenomenon of marriage postponement, is the growing number of so-called “boomerang kids” (Mitchell/Gee 1996) and “yo-yo transitions” (Biggart/Walther 2006). This means that an increasing number of young people leave the parental home several times because they move back into their parents’ household more frequently due to economic difficulties, relationship break-ups etc. With premarital residential independence becoming more common, the parental home is more frequently used as a ‘home base’ to shelter young adults during unexpected changes that occur in early adult life (DaVanzo/Goldschneider 1990). However, despite the ‘failures’ and more frequent returns to live temporarily in the parents’ household after being independent, northern European young adults attempt to achieve residential independence earlier than southern Europeans. Normative expectations of leaving home young might indeed be the triggering factor in this behaviour even though there is an increasing risk to ‘fail.’

**Table 3.1:** Trends in single-person households as percentage of all households

Country	Around 1950	Around 1960	Around 1970	Around 1980	Around 1990
Denmark	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	34
West Germany	12	20	25	30	34
Netherlands	9	12	17	23	31
Belgium	16	17	19	24	28
France	19	20	22	24	27
United Kingdom	11	11	18	22	26
Luxembourg	9	12	16	21	25
Italy	n.a.	11	13	18	23
Ireland	10	12	14	n.a.	20
Greece	9	10	n.a.	n.a.	19
Portugal	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	13	14
Spain	n.a.	n.a.	8	10	13

Source: CEC 1994, p. 54 (Eurostat 1994)

To sum up, the rise in the age of marriage during the last decades has brought about two major phenomena: on the one hand, a growing number of non-family living arrangements with an increase in premarital residential independence with more frequent returns to the parental home and repeated departures; on the other hand, more young people staying longer in the household of their parents before they set up a household with a partner. Both phenomena, non-family living and prolonged family living, are becoming more frequent in all European countries. However, non-family living is the prevailing pattern in the north of the continent while prolonged family living is more widespread in the south.

In this context, it is interesting to see how social scientists label certain ostensibly ‘new’ trends and phenomena. Some scholars (see, e.g., Goldscheider/Goldscheider 1996, Rusconi 2006) conceptualise the north-western European or North American way of premarital independence as ‘modern’, whereas leaving home at marriage is frequently called ‘traditional’. Galland (1995), for example, writes that in the ‘traditional’ model of the transition to adulthood leaving home and living as a couple tend to coincide.

However, what is nowadays referred to as ‘traditional’ has been labelled as ‘modern’ some decades ago. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, social scientists created the notion of the ‘modern family cycle’. One salient characteristic of the ‘modern’ family cycle was that the departure from home and marriage occurred nearly simultaneously. From the perspective of the sociologists of that time it made sense to categorise this form of life-course transition as ‘modern’ since during the 1950s and 1960s the age of marriage was declining and increasingly coinciding with the departure from the parental home (Mitterauer 2004). The velocity at which the labels ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ can lose their meanings in social sciences advises caution against using them too hastily. Furthermore, as Rusconi (2006) has pointed out, there are signs of continuity, while some aspects of the transition out of the parental household have changed indeed. This could mean that the changes we are observing might be developing only within certain cultural and institutional limitations. Ostensible convergence of life-course patterns across Europe becomes evanescent.

### **3.1.2 Strong and weak family ties**

Different from most northern Europeans, the majority of southern Europeans leave the family of origin to cohabit in a stable partnership, usually with a married partner. In northern Europe, by

contrast, many people experience a ‘solitary phase’, that is, residential independence, before they start a new family. As explained before, the state of the art in this field shows that economic factors cannot be the main cause for this difference. Southern Europeans seem to have a strong preference for being close to their family members and for having tight family bonds. This may not only be an important reason for living in the parental home during education and until marriage, but is reflected by other observations too: Geographical distances between parents and their grown-up children are closer than in northern Europe, even after marriage and leaving the parental home. Survey data revealed that (in 1986) 57 percent of the Italian population who did not live with their parents lived at a walking distance of 15 minutes or less away from their mothers. In Britain only 30 percent did so. The values for Germany and Austria were around 35 percent. About three quarters of grown-up Italians whose parents were still alive, either lived with their parents or visited them several times a week. In Germany, 45 percent did so, in Britain less than 40 percent. Germans and Britons who lived in cities saw their mothers less frequently than those who lived in rural areas or middle-sized towns which might be a result of longer distances. In Italy, by contrast, adults in cities and rural areas met their mothers equally frequently (Höllinger/Haller 1990: 108f., data: 1986). More recent data provide similar results regarding the proximity between the households of parents and their grown-up children in southern and northern European countries (Kohli et al. 2010: 232, data: 2004; for Italy, France and Germany, see also: Dalla Zuanna et al. 2008: 50, data: 2005). Southern European family members, furthermore, see each other more often and talk to each other more frequently on the phone than do family members in other European countries or the United States (Barbagli 1996). Moreover, probably also related to geographical proximity, people in the Mediterranean countries ask their family members more often for help than do northern Europeans (Jurado Guerrero/Naldini 1996, Albertini et al. 2007, Kohli/Albertini 2008).

Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda’s analysis of Spanish data shows that strong family ties do not necessarily hamper spatial mobility but can also support it, for example, if young people who move to another city have the opportunity to move into the household of family members, if they have relatives there (Holdsworth/Irazoqui Solda 2002, data from 1991). However, in this form of relocation, spatial mobility is restricted to the family network. This mobility behaviour, thus, strengthens family ties, while residential mobility beyond the ‘boundaries’ of family networks rather weakens the latter.

Due to the fact that southern Europeans live more frequently with their parents and less often with non-family members, one could expect that they have emotionally stronger relationships with their family members than their northern European counterparts. Holdsworth (2004), however, argues that it is not the emotional role the family plays in one's life but the function it fulfils. Emotionally, the family might be important for northern Europeans as well, yet the family in southern Europe fulfils more functions in everyday life, for example as a provider of welfare, than in northern Europe. The results of the World Value Survey, reported in table 3.2, prove Holdsworth's reflections right. No north-south pattern can be found in the answers of those respondents who classify the family as "very important". The family is of great relevance to all Europeans. Country differences regarding the subjective importance of the family do not correspond to the country patterns of leaving the parental home.

Instead, the relevance of the value 'independence' as an educational goal displays a north-south pattern in Europe (see table 3.3). According to the World Value Survey, 'independence' is not of great relevance in the education of children in Spain, Italy and Portugal. Especially the

**Table 3.2:** Importance of the family  
 "Please say, for each of the following, how important it is in your life: Family"  
 Percentage of those who responded "very important"

	All	Per age group	
		16-29	50+
Ireland	91	92	90
Iceland	91	85	91
Great Britain	89	87	86
Italy	88	83	90
Denmark	88	81	90
Norway	88	82	88
Switzerland	88	81	89
Sweden	87	85	86
Austria	86	81	87
East Germany	85	76	87
Belgium	84	74	87
Finland	84	73	82
Spain	82	76	83
Netherlands	82	74	86
France	82	77	85
West Germany	71	54	77
Portugal	65	61	68

Source: Inglehart, 1998/2000: V5 (World Values Survey, 1990-1993)

**Table 3.3:** “Independence” as educational goal

“Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important?”, Percentage of those who consider “Independence” as relevant

	All	Per age group	
		16-29	50+
Iceland	89	92	82
Norway	86	90	81
Denmark	81	84	72
West Germany	73	86	61
East Germany	67	79	55
Austria	63	76	50
Finland	57	64	40
Netherlands	51	54	40
Ireland	43	51	34
Great Britain	43	48	38
Switzerland	42	56	31
Spain	37	49	22
Belgium	36	44	24
Sweden	36	39	32
Italy	31	43	21
France	27	34	17
Portugal	24	33	14

Source: Inglehart, 1998/2000: V227 (World Values Survey, 1990-1993)

respondents over 50 in southern Europe do not consider ‘independence’ as relevant in education. In northern Europe, the opposite is true. Here, also the older respondents regard it as important. Northern European parents seem to anticipate that their offspring will probably leave their homes at a rather young age to live alone. Teaching young people to manage on their own – to live in one’s own household, perhaps even far away from the family home – can be a useful skill for parents to pass on to their offspring. Although we do not know what exactly parents in each country understand by ‘independence’, this variable might indeed be related to the different patterns of residence in northern and southern Europe.

A quote from Holdsworth’s in-depth interviews in Norway illustrates this attitude. A 28-year-old woman says the following about her mother’s educational goals: “[...] she always stated that ‘you ought to manage by yourself’ [...]. I actually think it is OK, because I then get to prove that I’m able to manage on my own you know... It is my apartment. It is me who does everything...” (Holdsworth 2004: 918). ‘Independence’ and getting by on one’s own seems to be more relevant in northern European societies than in the Mediterranean countries, which might be

the result of higher spatial mobility and more widespread non-family living arrangements. This, however, does not imply that the family is emotionally less relevant to northern Europeans.

### **3.1.3 Welfare regimes**

The family is not an independent institution, but closely intertwined with other social institutions. Scholars of the welfare state have identified a distinct, familialistic welfare regime in southern Europe. As explained above, the family fulfils more social functions in southern Europe than in the north. One of these functions is the frequently cited southern European 'welfare family.' The welfare regime of southern European countries is characterised by the dominant role of the family as the main provider of welfare. This distinguishes it from the 'corporatist' welfare regime in continental Europe, the 'liberal' welfare regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries and the 'social-democratic' welfare regime in the Nordic countries (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2000, Leibfried 1992, Lessenich 1994, Ferrera 1996, Martin 1996, Gallie/Paugam 2000). Another distinctive feature of the 'familialistic' welfare regime is the reduced autonomy of state institutions and their weak bureaucratic professionalism (Ferrera 1996).

In terms of gender inequality, the familialistic welfare regime resembles the corporatist, continental welfare cluster. Both favour the male bread-winner model in which women assume the role of homemakers and carers. Due to this similarity, Esping-Andersen did not differentiate between a familialistic southern European and a corporatist continental European welfare cluster (Esping-Andersen 2000). However, in terms of age-specific support these two regimes diverge considerably (Breen/Buchmann 2002), which makes the differentiation in the two regime types meaningful. The welfare systems in the Mediterranean countries promote age-specific inequalities. They provide for generous pensions but lack in benefits for young people in search of their first employment (Ferrera 1996). Especially in Italy, the expenditure on the elderly in relation to the expenditure on the young is higher than in any other European country (Boersch-Supan 2007). This means that the distribution of welfare in the southern countries favours a strong dependence of adult children on their families. Differently, young people in continental Europe have access to greater financial support during education compared to their counterparts in the Mediterranean countries, either because they receive training allowances and sometimes educational grants (Sgritta 2003, Daniel et al. 1999, Rusconi 2006), or because they have access to more indirect state benefits, for instance, in the form of public housing or housing subsidies

(Iacovou 2002). Moreover, in the Mediterranean countries not only are adult children more obliged to rely on their parents than elsewhere in Europe, but unlike continental European countries, family obligations are not only restricted to the nuclear family. Enduring legal obligations to support family members in the case of financial need include a wide range of kin and relatives. In Italy, for example, this comprises legal obligations of mutual help between grandparents and grandchildren, between siblings, between uncles and aunts and their nieces and nephews, as well as between in-laws (Saraceno 2004).

Based on the typology of welfare regimes developed by Esping-Andersen (1990) and succeeding research (in particular Gallie/Paugam 2000), Walther (2006) suggests a typology which combines the different patterns of leaving home with underlying patterns in the structures of institutions that affect young people's lives. He identifies four transition regimes, namely a 'universalistic' regime in the Nordic countries, a 'liberal' transition regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries, an 'employment-centred' transition regime in continental Europe and a 'sub-protective' transition regime in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Walther mainly focuses on institutional differences concerning young people in professional training, their entry into the labour market and the unemployment benefits regarding this group. In the universalistic regime, young people are construed as independent citizens who are expected to be preoccupied with their personal development besides education and training. In the liberal regime, the goal of the institutions is to trigger the entry into the labour market and the early economic independence of young people. In the employment-centred regime, young people are seen as young learners who should integrate into the standardised professional training system. On the contrary, only the institutions of the sub-protective regime do not provide young people with a special youth-related status. In such regime, they either start working, which can be very difficult, or remain completely dependent on their parents.

Focussing on the structures of higher education institutions, Daniel et al. (1999) construct similar categories regarding the transition regimes of higher education students in Western Europe. Based on the four-part distinction of western European welfare regimes, the researchers describe four regimes of student support which follow different social roles that these societies assign to students in higher education. According to this analysis of institutional structures, in the Nordic countries, students are regarded as 'responsible citizens' who are entitled to extensive support from the state. In Britain and the Netherlands, students are seen as 'investors' in their

future who should contribute significantly to their education. In the continental European countries (such as Germany), but also in Ireland, students are considered to be ‘young learners’ who rely on their families, yet are entitled to financial help from the state in the case of need. In the Mediterranean countries, public support for students is only offered if there is an urgent need since southern European students are generally supposed to live with their parents. In the underlying logic of welfare institutions for students, they are understood as ‘children sheltered by their families’ (Daniel et al. 1999, Schwarz/Rehburg 2004). Different from Walther’s analysis, these four concepts of the status of young people within the institutional system are grounded only on the analysis of institutional structures, not on interviews with individuals who live in the four institutional systems.

In sum, three features of the southern welfare regime are salient in marking its familialistic character: rudimentary benefits (with the exception of old-age pensions), an extremely residual character ascribing welfare responsibilities in most instances to the family and the wider family network, and a preference to support the old generations instead of providing public support directly to the young, thus promoting the dependence of young people on their parents and grandparents. At the same time, in southern Europe we observe a strong pattern of intergenerational coresidence and an emphasis on marriage as the main reason for the departure from the parental home. Moreover, in this region marriage is strongly institutionalised considering the relatively low divorce rates and lower rates of birth out of wedlock here, than in the rest of Europe (Daly 2005).

It is interesting to note that researchers investigating the departure from the parental home frequently presuppose a rather one-sided relationship between the familialistic structure of the southern welfare state and behavioural patterns of southern European families. For instance, a high age of leaving the parental home is often interpreted as resulting from a lack of state support and other sources of income (e.g., Jurado Guerrero 2001, Rusconi 2006). Sufficient financial resources are without doubt a salient factor in the process of setting up one’s own household. However, as explained above, the perception of what ‘sufficient’ means in this context can be shaped by culture. Therefore, the link between state support and home-leaving is also not as straight forward as it seems at first glance and needs further examination. A relationship which is characterised by mutual influence between welfare institutions and behavioural patterns appears more plausible than a one-way dependence of home-leaving on welfare support.

I suggest that the general structure of the familialistic welfare regime is closely related to the way family life is organised in southern Europe. Both institutions, the southern European family and the southern European welfare state, reinforce each other and provide for stability to the members of society. Marriage constitutes a way to build strong kinship networks – essential to social security in the familialistic welfare regime. Therefore, it makes sense for the parents of adult children, as well as for the state, to support the residential independence of young people only in case of marriage and family formation.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, family and kinship networks are clearly not anonymous impersonal providers of financial help. Their functioning depends on the quality of interactions that the family members have with each other. Good family relations need to be cultivated; they are not natural. Living closely together is a better condition in which to communicate and help each other within the family than is living at a great distance. The frequent contact between family members, the shorter distances between their places of residence, and the late home-leaving of young people, are therefore not only results of, but also the preconditions for the familialistic welfare regime. As long as family networks are intact and are not weakened by the growing demand of geographical flexibility on the labour market, they can serve as efficient providers of welfare to the family members. A welfare regime based on family relations thus presupposes both, close bonds and local rootedness.

Unlike Jurado Guerrero and Rusconi, Holdsworth (2004) questions the assumption that a lack of state support hinders young people's transition out of the parental home. She doubts that an increase in state welfare for young people would change behavioural patterns as long as parents and young people themselves do not change their preferences. Her scepticism seems justified. If the residential independence of young people in southern Europe depends less on income than in northern Europe – as already explained in the above (Holdsworth 2000, Rusconi 2006) – state subsidies for students in southern Europe may only increase the share of young people living away from home to a small extent. Instead, Jurado Guerrero (2001) and Rusconi (2006) believe that an increase in state support for young people would help them to become independent from their parents. Rusconi, for example, argues that the provision of state support would augment the “bargaining power” of young people: “[In Germany where the state provides

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<sup>10</sup> Also the reluctance of many Italian parents to permit their adult children to spend time with their unmarried partners alone at the family home, as seen in chapter 2, might be a result of the strong moral support of marriage. This strong support of marriage makes sense since stable marriages are indeed essential in a family-based welfare system.

subsidies to students] even those students who are not entitled to state's subsidies have a clearly defined negotiation position because parental support is anchored to the state's provision" (2006: 227). This argument is not quite correct since the link between state support and parental support in Germany works inversely. State subsidies for students are anchored in parental support instead of the reverse. The state support scheme for students in Germany was not designed to help young people to become independent from their parents. It was not implemented to facilitate residential independence but with the aim to reduce class differences and to encourage young people from working class families to enrol in university studies (Blanke 2000). I do agree with Rusconi that, once established, such a state support scheme might *reinforce* the cultural and behavioural patterns of early residential independence. I doubt, however, that the introduction of state support for residential independence would be sufficient to *change* the cultural and behavioural patterns of intergenerational coresidence in societies of strong family ties, in which many parents do not at all appreciate the early, premarital departure of their children. The crux of the matter is that such a costly state support scheme requires the approval of society to become established. This approval, however, is absent in familialistic societies. If middle-class parents in southern Europe do not consider it reasonable and necessary to support the early residential independence of their children, why should they, being voters and taxpayers too, agree that children of less affluent families receive state support for leaving home?

Family support and state support for young adults complement each other, as Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2000) show in France. Their study reveals that those young people who are entitled to state support also receive financial help from their families. That is, state support complements family support in the cases where the family is willing to help, yet not able to do so adequately for a lack of financial resources. These findings suggest that state support may be an appropriate means to mitigate class differences but not to change the cultural patterns regarding the move-out. Instead, we can justifiably assume that a cultural change needs to precede the implementation of a certain form of state support for young people.

Reher (1998) gives a similar example from the field of historical demography. He points to the historical link between high spatial mobility in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the implementation of welfare legislation, the so-called 'Poor Laws.' He argues that the 'Poor Laws' were established in England due to high levels of individual residential mobility and not the reverse. Hence, a comparable legal arrangement did not exist in the Mediterranean countries at

that time, where family members lived more closely together and family network could fulfil their welfare tasks more efficiently (Reher 1998).

In southern Europe, close-knit family networks, with most women assuming the role of carers, are widely able to provide mutual support to their members. Due to strong family solidarity and the social role of women within the family, the development of state policies concerning care for children and old people has been less needful than in northern Europe where family members have been living at greater spatial distances. Also the under-development of welfare policies for young people in the Mediterranean countries can be seen as a consequence of the general assumption that first and foremost families would provide support when necessary. The lack in policies of family welfare, in turn, reinforces the ideological assumption that the family has to provide for all its members (Flaquer 2000), an assumption which hampers the labour participation of women and young people and the early residential independence of the young generation. Quadrelli's (2007) interview data reflect this reasoning. She observes a lack of interest among her Italian interviewees in changing policies to provide more state support for young people leaving the parental home. She supposes that this attitude of parents and young adults might be a reason for the scarce state support for young people in Italy.

The different policy strategies of southern and northern European countries during the educational expansion in the 1970s, with the aim to augment the number of higher education graduates, seem to be influenced as well by the prevalence of familialistic attitudes in southern Europe. In the southern European countries, it was possible to increase the number of university graduates coming from working class families through the construction of new universities in all regions of the country, while grants only played a minor role in this process. This allowed more young people to commute to university and pursue university studies while living with their parents (Cook/Furstenberg 2002). Similarly, the northern European countries had built new universities too, in order to offer access to higher education in all parts of the country (Rüegg 2011). In addition, however, they introduced relatively generous grants to encourage students from lower social classes to pursue a higher education at university while having the opportunity to live on their own, as many of them would usually do as young workers, if they had not enrolled in higher education. In southern Europe, by contrast, working class youth seem to be more likely to pursue university studies even though public housing support for students is sparse, which suggests that living with one's parents is more acceptable and more common to them.

Moreover, the absence of numerus clausus restriction in most fields of study increases the likelihood to study at the nearest university and remain in the parental home, as is the case in Italy. This policy helps to increase the number of students in higher education by reducing the necessity of relocation. It preserves family ties and therefore avoids the weakening of family solidarity (Cook/Furstenberg 2002). This contributes to the stability of the Italian ‘welfare family’ and the familialistic welfare regime.

From this perspective, the implementation of welfare policies to support young people depends on demand. If most members of society prefer social policies which enforce, or at least do not disturb, the spatial proximity of family members, there is no political majority to change these policies and support young people’s residential independence. Furthermore, if only a few young people leave the parental home before marriage, the need to support them in difficult economic periods through state policies remains neglectable, at least in the subjective perception of many people involved in this social system.

### **3.1.4 Markets**

A similar logic of demand applies to the housing market. It has often been argued that a lack of affordable housing impedes young people’s residential independence (e.g., Jurado Guerrero 2001, Rusconi 2006). Following this argumentation, many southern European students have no other choice than living with their parents due to a shortage in affordable rooms for rent. However, it can also be argued that a higher demand in student accommodations would trigger a larger supply. An example which evidences this logic is the high availability of inexpensive housing in Spanish regions where agricultural day labour is common. In these regions with high rates of agricultural day workers, for example in Lebrija, a large amount of rented accommodations exist (Jurado Guerrero 2001). Moreover, it is possible for day workers, who constitute a highly precarious group with very low incomes, to rent only a room at a low price instead of an entire apartment. At the regional level in Spain, Jurado Guerrero finds a strong negative correlation between the rate of agricultural day labourers and housing prices. Since the housing market in these regions is more favourable to young people, leaving home and family formation occur earlier here than in the rest of the country. Thus, the regional rate of agricultural day labourers in Spain can be taken as an indicator for early, neolocal, nuclear patterns of family formation (Jurado Guerrero 2001). With this example, Jurado Guerrero qualifies her argumentation concerning the lack of affordable

housing. Following the logic of the day-labourer example, landlords would offer more low-price, low-comfort accommodation to students and young people in general, if there had been a greater demand for this type of accommodation over time. Inversely, we can assume that the housing market for students in southern Europe remained under-developed due to a low demand for this type of accommodation.

Also the structure of the labour market in southern Europe has been shaped by the family logic. Instead of being a mere consequence of high youth unemployment, the late departure from the parental home can equally be interpreted as a cause to this specific characteristic of the southern European labour market. Sgritta (2003) argues that the Italian labour market has adapted to the preference of young people to stay in the parental home until marriage, and not the other way around. Employers, trade unions and the legislator have adjusted to the prevalent pattern of intergenerational coresidence. Consequently, jobs are preferably assigned to older, male employees. This practice preserves the model of the male breadwinner and reinforces the influential role of Italian fathers within the family or, more generally, of the parents' generation. Also the relatively high pensions in Italy contribute to the secure position of the older generations whereas young people are increasingly dependent on financial distributions within the family (Cook/Furstenberg 2002). The situation in Spain is very similar. Young people, and women in particular, find it difficult to obtain long-term contracts, but only these include social insurances (Baizán Muñoz et al. 2002). According to Sgritta, these structures of the Italian labour market, which he summarises as "work gerontocracy", result from old patriarchal roots (2003: 71). 'Patriarchal', however, does not mean that southern European parents behave particularly authoritarian towards their children. Rather the opposite is true, according to the results of qualitative interviews (Newman 2008). Nevertheless, the dominant economic position of the older generations in southern Europe may well be a legacy of a formerly patriarchal social system since institutional development always includes certain inertia in which change takes place only within a framework of a certain institutional continuity. Recent empirical results from a cross-country comparison support this view.

Newman and Aptekar's (2007) findings show that the relationship between a late departure from the parental home and the degree of employment protection, which benefits older employees, that is the parents' generation, is stronger than the relationship between leaving home and the proportions of owner-occupied housing, or than that between leaving home and

**Table 3.4:** Young people obtaining jobs through their family

Country	Young people obtaining jobs through their family, in percent
Netherlands	18
Denmark	19
West Germany	21
Luxembourg	27
United Kingdom	28
Belgium	28
Ireland	33
France	35
Portugal	58
Spain	61
Italy	65
Greece	69

Source: Eurobarometer 34.2, Young Europeans in 1990, p. 39

unemployment rates or between leaving home and the rates of temporary employment among young people. The prevailing patterns of intergenerational co-residence in the south should therefore be seen as an element embedded in certain cultural and social structures, rather than as a direct result of financial constraints.

Southern European labour markets are not only shaped by intergenerational hierarchies, but they are also characterised by the influence of family solidarity on the allocation of jobs. Sixty-one percent of young Spaniards and 65 percent of young Italians find employment through family contacts or are employed by family members. In the rest of Europe, family networks play a much smaller role in the allocation of jobs (see table 3.4, see also Le Bras 1995, Iglesias de Ussel 1995, Mendras 1997).

### **3.1.5 Religion**

Some scholars have interpreted the higher frequency of premarital departure from the parental home as a sign of modernisation and secularisation. Goldschneider and Goldschneider, for example, argue in their explanation of the different living arrangements of immigrant groups in the United States that “nonfamily living has simply not been as well accepted in more familialistic ethnic groups and more familialistic religious denominations as it has been in the dominant, largely secular culture” of U.S.-Americans (1996: 175). For Europe, Flaquer (2000)

contends that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church has been delaying the modernisation process of social institutions in southern Europe.

Other researchers identify the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism as a deeper cultural cause to the living arrangements in Europe since there are also slight within-country differences between Catholics and Protestants. Rusconi (2006), for example, shows that being a Catholic slightly decreases the probability to experience premarital residential independence in Germany compared to German Protestants. Nevertheless, the role of religion remains controversial. Church attendance in Italy and Spain is strikingly low; Cook and Furstenberg, thus, argue that religion operates indirectly through “cultural heritage mechanisms”, rather than through religious practices and beliefs (2002: 261). This suggests that social institutions, being transmitted over generations, have been shaped, at least to some extent, by the teaching of the Catholic Church. Even though the influence of the Church is decreasing, the inertia inherent to institutions due to their mutual relatedness with other institutions and social norms, and the stability of social norms in people’s minds contribute to the permanence of structures that have been originally inspired by religious ideas.

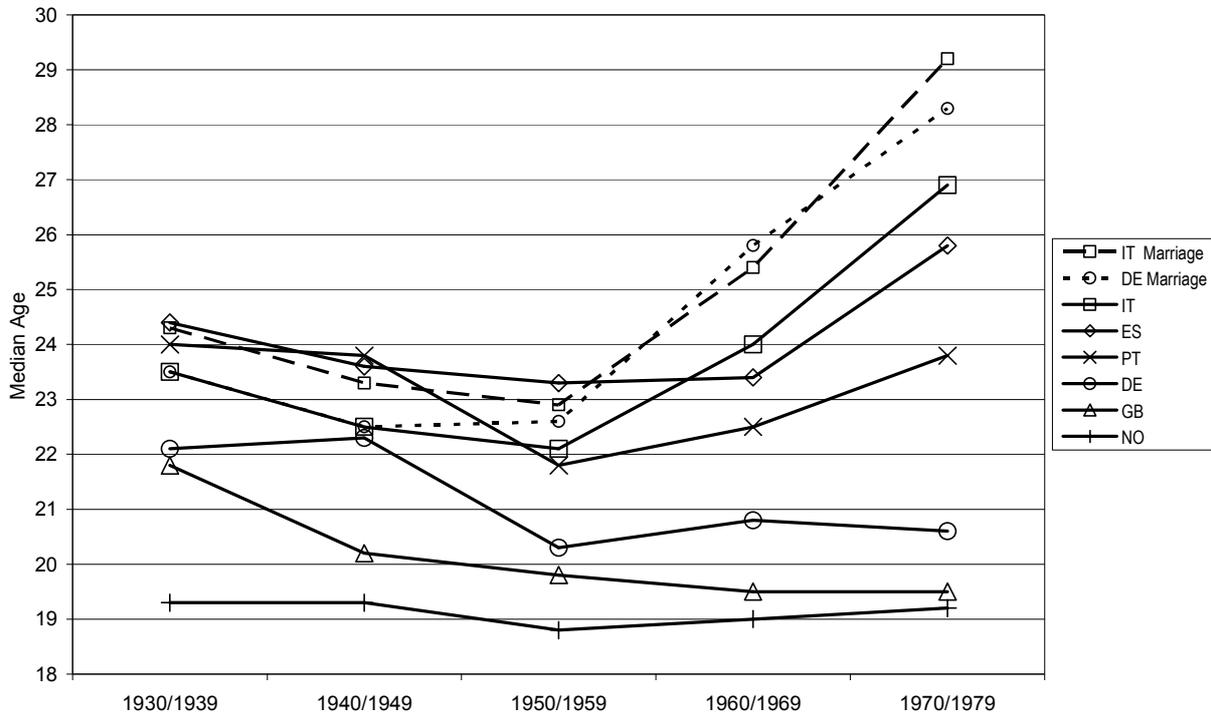
Many elements of the Catholic doctrine might have contributed to current patterns of family ties. The sacraments of passage—baptism, confirmation, marriage and the last rites—are celebrated within the family circle and bind family members together. The holy sacrament of marriage contributes to the strong acceptance of marriage as the only form of cohabitation between men and women. Furthermore, the hierarchical structure of the Church can be interpreted as reflecting and supporting hierarchies within the family. By contrast, the Protestant teaching focuses on the human being as an individual. Many rites, such as marriage, have lost the status of sacraments since the Reformation (Soeffner 1988). According to Bayer (1976), the social process of individualisation had already begun in medieval times. The Reformation can be seen as a consequence of this process. Hence, the emergence of the Protestant teaching deepened already existing contrasts in family forms and triggered processes of individualisation (Reher 1998).

### **3.2 Cultural continuity**

As previously explained, strong and weak family ties influence a number of institutions in society. One 'means' to preserve strong family ties is the protection of marriage as a social institution. At the same time, the reduction of premarital residential independence and the normative link of the departure from the parental home to marriage constitute another key element in the institutional context of strong family ties, which helps to maintain family solidarity and the familialistic welfare system as a whole. The mutual influence of institutions on one another maintains a certain continuity of the social system and provides orientation to the people living in it. This continuity is further reinforced by norms and values which are based in traditional habits and symbolic systems. Religion, together with arts and sciences, provide symbolic meanings in the institutional interplay. They add to the stability of the institutional fabric by offering meanings to human beings so that the institutional framework makes sense to them (Berger/Luckmann 1991).

Rusconi's findings, based on the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS), indicate permanence over decades of the patterns of leaving home of young men in Italy and West Germany for cohorts born between 1953 and 1972 (Rusconi 2006: 222, fig. 8.3). This can be observed not only in these two countries, but also for other Western European societies and even beyond this time frame. The stability and continuity of the different Western European patterns of leaving has also been shown for cohorts born between the 1930s and 1970s, using recent data from the European Social Survey (ESS, round 3). Billari and Liefbroer demonstrate that the different patterns of leaving the parental home have existed in the Nordic, western and southern European countries at least since the second half of the 20th century. The Nordic countries display constantly low median ages in all cohorts observed. Also continental and western Europe, including France and the German-speaking countries, are largely characterised by stability over time. Only in the years after the Second World War, until the 1960s, when Germany experienced an economic upswing, the departure from the parental home was more strongly related to marriage. In the 1970s, this strong link disappeared again in Germany, and other parts of northern Europe, while in Italy, as in Spain and Portugal, it remained strong (see Billari/Liefbroer 2010: 65, 67). Therefore, in southern Europe, the median age of leaving home has strongly increased for cohorts born after the 1950s, due to the raising age of marriage, so that the gap between southern Europe and the other groups has widened even more (Billari/Liefbroer 2010: fig.1). Figure 3.1 illustrates this.

**Figure 3.1:** Median age of leaving home for women per birth cohort in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Great Britain, and Norway and median age of marriage for women in Italy and Germany



Source: European Social Survey (ESS), round 3, 2006; for Italy: ISTAT, survey “Famiglia e soggetti sociali”, 2003 (Billari/Liefbroer 2010: 65, 67)

What becomes evident in this comparison of several cohorts is that two levels of analysis must be differentiated in the research on leaving the parental home: one of relatively stable differences between countries regarding the link between marriage and leaving home, which relate to diverse cultural backgrounds, and another one of variations in the timing of leaving home within a country over time (see figure 3.1; and for other European countries: Billari/Liefbroer 2010: 65, tab.1). These latter variations can be influenced not only by the timing of marriage, but also by the ups and downs of unemployment rates and the altering offer of housing markets in various ways, as explained earlier. Market changes, thus, interact with national institutional structures and with the meanings and norms that are prevailing in the respective society.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the results of historical demographers also show that the differences between the northern and southern patterns of leaving the parental home in Europe have been surprisingly stable beyond the last centuries (Höllinger/Haller 1990, Reher

1998). In the past, the northern European pattern of leaving home included that young people, males and often females too, left home before marriage to work and gain experience in different places. They usually left home to work as journeymen with different masters, as farm hands in the agricultural sector, as house maids or governesses. The purpose of this life stage, called ‘Wanderjahre’ (i.e. ‘years of travel’) in German, was to enrich and improve manual skills and training, earn money for the dowry or to buy a workshop, but also to reduce young people’s opportunities to settle down and start a family in periods of economic difficulties. This was different in southern Europe where adult children usually stayed with their parents and families, and they all tried to cope with economic difficulties together as a kinship group (Mitterauer 2004, van Poppel et al. 2004). In northern Europe, not only young people from the lower classes left home before marriage. Young people from all social classes used this stage of life to acquire experience outside their home environment: young people from the lower classes moved while gathering work experience; young aristocrats travelled through Europe (Günter 1994, Parmentier 1994); young businessmen learned with different merchants (Kintzinger 1994); and university students were also “fervent academic pilgrims” (Ridder-Symoens 1992: 293, Karady 2003). Italian students, by contrast, more rarely studied abroad during the Middle Ages and Renaissance because of the excellent reputation of Italian universities (Ridder-Symoens 1992). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the international mobility of students in Italy declined due to the Counter-Reformation (Hammerstein 1996).

Having the permanence of institutions in mind, Rosina and Fabroni expect that strong family ties will also shape the social life of southern Europeans in the future. According to these authors, cohabitation will continue to be a prelude to marriage in the Mediterranean countries and will not replace marriage in the near future (Rosina/Fabroni 2004). Familialistic attitudes have influenced social institutions over time in the Mediterranean countries (Reher 1998, Micheli 2000, Dalla Zuanna 2001). Staying with one’s family of origin until forming a new one can be seen as an essential part of the familialistic societies and welfare arrangements in the Mediterranean countries. The residential mobility of young people would weaken the strong family ties which are an essential precondition for family-based welfare systems.

The phenomenon of long-term stability of institutional structures and patterns of meaning and norms has been captured by the notion of *longue durée* of the well-known French historian Fernand Braudel. Braudel conceptualises a distinction of different time levels, of which

especially the concept of the *longue durée* proves beneficial for the analysis of culture. In historical and social analysis, he differentiates three time levels (1980: 27). The first comprises the short time span, the so-called event history (*histoire événementielle*). Here, the analysis centres mainly upon the sequence of historical and political events, such as the death of a political leader and the consequences following such events. In the analysis of events, the researcher focuses on the relation between events and their direct causal effects. The second time level refers to time spans of intermediate duration, that is, around ten to fifty years. Cyclical movements, mainly the economic cycle, are the object of examination here. Researchers concerned with this time level focus, for example, on the rise and fall of prices or on economic growth and deflation. Far beyond these still relatively short periods of time, the third time level can be measured in centuries. It is the examination of long time spans, that is, *longue durée*. Braudel observes that economic cycles and market crises often cover the regularities and the permanence of particular systems that underlie the cyclical movements. The history of *longue durée* therefore includes the analysis of structures, religions, and even civilisations, as he calls it, that is, the cultural and institutional systems of societies over time. Objects of examination are patterns which do not break down easily, such as geographical and biological environments, technological limits of productivity, but also habits of thinking and acting. According to Braudel, these structures can be stable over generations and centuries. They form the basis for cyclical movements and events and shape the “flow of history” (Braudel 1980: 30). Therefore culture, or “mental frameworks”, can also form “prisons of the *longue durée*” (ibid.).

In Braudel’s terminology, the different Western European patterns of leaving home constitute structures of *longue durée*. They form the background of “mental frameworks” and institutionalised behavioural patterns in which market changes take effect differently. Therefore the far-reaching social and economic impact of the economic changes in the era of globalisation also had different effects on young people in northern and southern Europe as we will see in the following section.

### **3.3 Strategies in times of global competition**

Social scientists agree that young people are particularly hit by the negative effects of globalisation in all European countries and welfare regimes (Mills et al. 2005). Globalisation, that

is, increased competition on global markets and the changing international division of labour have been accompanied by the rise of mass long-term unemployment in many European societies in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>11</sup> The difficult position of young people on the labour markets has been further aggravated by the development of management policies which promote ‘flexibility’ at the work place and among the labour force in general (Bradley/van Hoof 2005). As explained before, increasing competition and growing uncertainty diminish young people’s inclination to engage in stable relationships and to start a family. The consequences are higher median ages of marriage and reduced fertility rates (see section 3.1). During the 1990s, especially in countries belonging to the conservative-corporatist and familialistic welfare regimes, young people postponed family formation and partnership, due to a still prevailing male-breadwinner model (Mills et al. 2005).

Nowadays, not only in southern Europe, but also in most northern European countries, young people have difficulties in settling down and procuring mortgages. Precariousness has become a widespread characteristic of young people’s lives throughout the continent (Jones 2005, Bradley 2005). This development has changed the transition to adulthood in two ways. First, transitions to adulthood have been lengthened due to the expansion of education and the longer period of time required to settle down and reach a certain degree of stability in one’s professional life. Second, transitions are increasingly precarious and complex. They are characterised by movements back and forth between periods of study, part-time or temporary employment, and jobs in the black economy, training, self-employment and full-time employment (Bradley/van Hoof 2005). Due to the increased economic difficulties which young people are facing, Bradley and van Hoof speculate that the patterns of leaving the parental home in Europe might converge. They suggest that also the northern European patterns are moving into the direction of the Mediterranean pattern, especially in the liberal and conservative welfare regimes. Except for Finland, the Nordic countries, with their extensive welfare support for young people are, according to the authors, better able to cushion the pressures of globalisation on their young inhabitants.

However, in the light of the findings compiled here, the prediction of converging patterns of leaving home does not appear to be differentiated enough. As explained above, an early

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<sup>11</sup> This section was inspired by the interviews that I conducted in Germany and partly by some interview results from Italy. They display that living away from home and leaving one’s old circle of friends is not always enjoyable, but also associated with the experience of loneliness and the psychological pressure “to make it on one’s own” (See chapter 6).

departure from the parental home is not necessarily the consequence of economic affluence. It can be, on the contrary, a strategy to confront the perils and changes that globalisation involves. As we have seen in section 3.1., no general trends of postponing residential independence in the northern European countries can be found even though the median age of leaving home is rising in some of these countries as well. Nevertheless, this increase is smaller than in the south and partly counterbalanced by young people leaving early for educational and job reasons.

I therefore argue that there are two strategies which young people and their families choose to cope with economic pressures in the age of global competition. On the one hand, there is a growing number of non-family living arrangements with an increase in premarital residential independence among young adults. This pattern is characterised by a low standard of living and more frequent returns to the parental home and repeated departures. Young people following this pattern have left the parental home, but are not able to set up a definite household and start a family. Instead, they live in small or shared flats. Many of them work on short-term, low-paid contracts, ready to move, trying to be flexible and adaptive to the scarce offers they find on the labour market. They invest a great deal in their education and career in order to increase their 'employability' (Plug/du Bois-Raymond 2005). This strategy often involves the departure from the home and the readiness to move to another place where educational and job opportunities are more promising.

On the other hand, more young people are staying longer in the household of their parents before they set up their own household. This allows them to save money and to receive emotional support from the environment they are familiar with. Scabini and Cigoli describe this strategy from the perspective of the young in the following way:

The future is fraught with difficulties. Unemployment looms large, all kinds of anxieties stand in the way to self-fulfilment, and a family of their own is simply out of the question at the moment. Yet, they can always rely on their present family, on its emotional and economic support in case of 'temporary crises.' (1997: 619)

Among those young people who leave the family household, but cannot yet start their own independent household, flat-sharing has become increasingly popular due to the flexibility and economic convenience it offers.<sup>12</sup> From the perspective of the young, this household form conveys advantages similar to those of the family household, combined with residential

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<sup>12</sup> For the growing popularity of flat-sharing among students in Germany since the 1970s, see Isserstedt et al. (2007).

autonomy and geographical flexibility: “living with others [in a shared flat] provides a feeling of safety and security as well as emotional and material relief in a period of future uncertainty, material dependency and a range of opportunities with respect to one’s private life and professional career” (Steinführer/Haase 2009: 583).

Both strategies, non-family living and prolonged family living with one’s parents, have become more frequent in all European countries over the last decades. In the age of globalisation, these two living arrangements have become symptomatic for the life phase preceding family formation. However, both strategies are not evenly dispersed in all parts of Europe. Non-family living during post-adolescence is the prevailing strategy in the north of the continent, while prolonged family living is more widespread in the south (Baanders 1998, Rusconi 2006, Furlong/Cartmel 2007, van de Velde 2008).

For young Italians, for example, “[k]eeping as long as possible ‘on this side of the fence’ appears to be a shared strategy, although partly unconscious” (Scabini and Cigoli 1997: 621). Especially highly educated young Italians tend to wait until they find the job “they think is due to them,” (Bianchi 2005: 211) instead of accepting a job away from home (Livi Bacci 1999) or working their way up to the desired professional position (Bianchi 2005). They tend to accept unemployment and wait for the desired opportunity to come along, while being sheltered by their parents. This strategy seems to pay off in Italy and Greece, where young people enter the labour market very slowly, but obtain first jobs with high occupational status.<sup>13</sup> Whereas young southern Europeans frequently remain in the parental home, young northern Europeans often accept jobs below their educational status which allows them to enter the labour market more quickly (Wolbers 2007).<sup>14</sup> This strategy has become even more widespread in recent years (ibid.). Moreover, other findings reveal that job-to-job mobility is higher among young people in Germany and Great Britain than in Italy. Thus, in Germany, and even more so in Great Britain, young workers change their jobs more frequently, lose them, or quit the labour market in their early career, than young employees in Italy. In fact, job-to-job mobility is very rare in Italy, despite the increase in short-term contracts (Scherer 2005).

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<sup>13</sup> According to data from the year 2000, job entry in Portugal is quick and occupational status is high. Only in Spain the entry into the first job takes place late combined with jobs of rather low status (Wolbers 2007, data: Labour Force Survey 2000).

<sup>14</sup> This is the case, for example, in Finland, France, Luxembourg, and Sweden (Wolbers 2007).

In sum, the general acceptance or preference of young unmarried southern Europeans to remain in the parental household allows them to wait for the 'right' job. In times of economic recession and increased competition, parents consequently extend their willingness to give shelter to their adult offspring. By contrast, young northern Europeans follow norms that prescribe early residential independence. Therefore, they more often accept a lower standard of living, lower occupational status and higher job-to-job mobility for the sake of residential autonomy. In times of increased economic difficulties and precariousness, they leave home and risk returning to the parental household in periods of financial hardship. That is, they usually use the shelter which parents offer them only for determined periods of time to bridge over periods of economic difficulty. By accepting low-status employment, internships, job-to-job mobility, additional training or study periods and spatial flexibility they increase their employability. If necessary, parents or the state help out financially so that the young can pursue this strategy to search for more stable employment with more adequate occupational status. In southern Europe, in contrast, the strategy to obtain stable, high-status employment is rather to wait and to be patient until one is eligible for a breadwinner position. Since spatial flexibility is not a widely recognised strategy to obtain employment, and early residential independence in itself is not a cultural value, the young remain in the parental household and are not eligible for state support. The different European patterns of leaving the parental home identified by Jones (1995), Galland (1995) and van de Velde (2008), can therefore, be interpreted as different strategies adopted by young people to cope with the effects of globalisation.

Both strategies have upsides and downsides for the wellbeing of young people. Young southern Europeans may feel dependent, inactive and blocked in their personal development, yet protected by their families. The early independence of young northern Europeans, in contrast, involves the danger of feeling stressed and depressed. This is reflected, for example, in the high suicide rates among young adults which can be observed in many northern European countries compared to low suicide rates in the Mediterranean countries (Retterstøl 1993, OECD 2009, Kapusta et al. 2009). The pressures of social isolation and loneliness are apparently greater in northern Europe where young people leave the parental home early (Reher 1998).

Taking into account this information of higher suicide rates among northern Europeans and the postponement of family formation and childbearing all over Europe, it is hard to judge whether young adults in southern Europe are hit harder by the effects of the globalised economy

than young adults in northern Europe. Instead, it seems more appropriate to say that young people in all European countries are struggling with increasingly difficult conditions in the transition to adulthood. However, they pursue different strategies to cope with the consequences of globalisation. Remaining in the parental home is therefore not necessarily a sign of failure, but can signify a successful adaptation in a social context of familialistic values and institutions.

### **3.4 The behaviour of second-generation immigrants**

As previous research shows, young people in northern and southern Europe use different strategies to cope with increasing insecurity and economic difficulty brought about by the process of globalisation. One remaining question is whether these different strategies are the results of different institutional structures or whether they are also the consequences of different attitudes, values and norms. In the latter view, culture constitutes an explanatory factor on its own. That is, culture is not only understood as deriving from the institutional setting, but remains fairly stable despite the changes in the institutional background. In the first view, young people are perceived as being coerced by institutions. In other words, the structures of labour markets, housing markets, educational systems and welfare systems, including family structures, prevail upon the young to choose a certain strategy rationally. Mills and Blossfeld, for example, argue that increased uncertainty as an effect of globalisation is mediated differently throughout Europe by different national employment systems, education systems, welfare regimes and family systems which function as “institutional filters” (Mills/Blossfeld 2005: 3). Most scholars assume rather vaguely that both institutions, but also culture in some way – influence the departure from the parental home.

Studies on the behaviour of immigrants or second-generation immigrants provide a starting point for a more differentiated insight into the relevance of culture. Immigrants move from one institutional context into another one that can be considerably different. They have been socialised in one institutional setting and then relocate into a new social context that is partly different from their own. If culture was not an explanatory factor in its own right, immigrants, or at least their children, would completely adjust their behaviour, their way of thinking, their attitudes, values and norms according to the new institutional context. That is, if the departure from the parental home and the strategies chosen to cope with insecurity and economic

difficulties depended exclusively on the institutional fabric of society, then immigrants would abandon their original interpretive patterns and adopt the new one. As pointed out in the previous chapter, this is not always the case.

Giuliano compares second-generation immigrants from Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Poland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) in the U.S. in 1970 and 2000. She finds that in both years the patterns of leaving home of these immigrants in the U.S. resemble the patterns of leaving home in the respective countries where their families came from. Furthermore, the change of living arrangements over time of immigrant groups in the U.S. follows a similar pattern as the change in the countries of origin. That is to say, the percentage of second-generation immigrants of southern European origin living in the parental home in the U.S. increased drastically paralleling the postponement of the departure from the home in southern Europe. During the 1970s the differences in leaving the parental home between second-generation immigrants from southern Europe and those from the rest of Europe were marginal. This changed remarkably in the following two decades. The share of 18 to 33-year-old Americans of Greek origin living with their parents rose from 23 percent to 49 percent, the percentage of immigrants from Italy increased from 24 to 44 percent, for immigrants from Portugal from 25 percent to 61 percent and for immigrants with Spanish roots from 20 percent to 24 percent (Giuliano 2007: 935). By contrast, for immigrants from Great Britain and the Nordic countries, there was almost no difference between 1970 and 2000, whereas for immigrants from continental European countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany and France, the percentage of young people in the parental home increased slightly. Giuliano controls for differences in the preferences of home ownership among these groups of immigrants since southern Europeans seem to prefer buying a dwelling over renting. Controlling for other relevant variables, such as sex, age, education, labour market status and family income, she finds no evidence for differences in preferences for home ownership within the different groups. Augmented housing prices therefore do not have a stronger effect on those groups of immigrants who might prefer buying a property. Hence, for the United States, Giuliano can rule out the possibility that the late departure from the parental home of southern European immigrants is caused by an increase in housing prices.

Some years before, Khoo, McDonald, Giorgias and Birrell (2002) made a very similar observation in Australia. Based on data from 1996, they found that the share of the second-

generation immigrants of the age groups between 15 and 24 who were not living with their parents varied according to the country where their parents or fathers came from. Among European second-generation immigrants, those with southern European ancestors left home later than those of northern European origin. For example, the percentages of young people with parents coming from the United Kingdom, Germany or the Netherlands who were living away from the parental home were approximately twice as high as the shares of young people with parents from Italy, Greece, Croatia or Macedonia. These results support the idea that the departure from the parental home does not for the most part depend on the institutional conditions of the labour market or the housing market and the educational system, but on culturally specific attitudes which are handed down from parents to children.

Recent findings from two other countries further support this view. Different groups of second-generation immigrants in Sweden, for example, also display different median ages of leaving home. Young people of Nordic origin, for example from Norway, leave slightly earlier than young people with Swedish parents. In contrast, young adults of foreign origin, but not from the Nordic countries, leave home considerably later, if both parents were not Nordic. Moreover, the median age of leaving home increased from the cohorts born in the second half of the 1960s to the cohorts born in the first half of the 1980s. If one parent is Swedish and the other one immigrant, the median age at leaving home is slightly higher than that of young people with both parents from Sweden, but lower than that of young people with two non-Swedish parents (Statistics Sweden 2008: 23).

Another example, pointing in the same direction, comes from France. Analysing the living arrangements of adult children of immigrants in France, Attias-Donfut and Wolff conclude that the continuity of cultural norms influencing the cohabitation of young adults and their parents is “incontestable” (Attias-Donfut/Wolff 2009: 137). The adult offspring of immigrants from southern Europe, North Africa, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, from Asia display a relatively high frequency of cohabitation with parents, controlling for living conditions and urban environment. In contrast, the second-generation immigrants of northern European, continental European, eastern European, American and sub-Saharan origin live less frequently with their parents. The authors interpret these results as a confirmation of the continuous strength of Mediterranean familialism.

In Germany, this phenomenon has been analysed for second-generation immigrants of Turkish origin. They differ from young people of German descent in that they more frequently leave home for marriage and family formation. Moving away from the parents' household for reasons related to education is rather uncommon in this group, despite sharing the same institutional conditions as other young people in Germany (Windzio/Aybek 2012). The most common motive for the departure from the parental home of second-generation immigrants of Turkish origin in Germany thus resembles the prevailing pattern of leaving home in Turkey, where residential independence before marriage and family formation is largely uncommon, especially in rural areas (see Koc 2000).

As the studies on second-generation immigrants show, it is possible that young people grow up in an institutional environment that offers financial help for early, premarital independence yet without evoking the inclination in the young to actually make use of this help to leave home. These examples concerning second-generation immigrants in three different welfare regimes – liberal, social-democratic and conservative – underline that culture constitutes an explanatory factor on its own in the analysis of the departure from the parental home. A study about the influence of norms on the departure from the parental home in the Netherlands supports this view. The authors prove that the young people who stay longer with their parents pay more regard to the norms of their parents than to the norms of friends and society in general. The young adults believe that their parents favour intergenerational coresidence. They therefore do not leave the parental home before moving in with their partners (Billari/Liefbroer 2007). This study shows that the norms transmitted within the family can be more important than the norms of the general social context.

More generally, these findings underline that the way individuals interpret their environment and behave accordingly cannot be regarded as an automatic reflection of the economic conditions and institutions surrounding them, but is to a large extent the result of intergenerational transmission within the family. This transmission of interpretations and norms and values within the family is the cause for a cultural phenomenon denominated as 'cultural lag' or 'cultural inertia', which means that if norms, values and meanings are taken for granted or subjectively perceived as appropriate they are resistant to changes in the material environment.

### 3.5 Do institutions produce culture or does culture shape institutions?

The findings discussed in this chapter and the previous one have revealed that neither economic conditions nor the national institutional background can exhaustively account for the different Western European patterns of the departure from the parental home. Culture is a relevant element in the explanation, not only because it produces norms but also because it mediates the perceptions and evaluation of economic constraints and opportunities, as the empirical chapters will illustrate. Furthermore, due to its persistent nature, culture also influences national institutions, such as housing markets and the welfare system. Nevertheless many social scientists working on the transition to adulthood still think exclusively of unidirectional influences (see, e.g., Bianchi 2005). Only a few researchers in this field display more awareness of the socially constructed nature of institutions and the influence of norms and meanings in their evolution (e.g., Bienefeld/Almqvist 2004, Rusconi 2006).

At this point, a few theoretical considerations are useful to develop a better understanding of the relationship between culture and institutions, and how important the role of culture is in this relationship. Institutions, defined as institutionalised interaction processes and socially shared, stable behavioural patterns, relate to other institutions which usually support each other, but can also have undermining effects. Changes in some institutions can thus evoke change in other related parts of the institutional fabric. Institutions can be seen as originating in shared meanings, norms and values. At the same time, shared meanings also derive from the interpretation of the existing institutional environment (Berger/Luckmann 1991). According to Berger and Luckmann, there is a mutual relationship between institutions and culture. This assumption, however, of mutual influence between institutions and meanings remains somewhat vague. The patterns of leaving home of northern and southern European immigrants in several countries, for example, contradict the supposition of mutual influence. According to these findings, culture can be of stronger relevance to individuals than certain institutional settings, at least when it comes to the departure from the parental home. How can we make sense of this puzzling observation?

As pointed out before, there is evidence that the strong family ties in southern Europe have been persisting over centuries. Family constitutes the basic unit of association in most societies (Knight 1992). Therefore, family takes a prevailing position in the institutional setup of society. If family culture is a structure of *longue durée* that is transmitted from one generation to the next, as suggested by the empirical findings presented above, it becomes a structuring

principle that shapes other institutions over time. Labour and housing markets, as well as the welfare state and the educational system will, in the long run, adapt to and evolve in accordance with the patterns of family proximity prevailing in some societies or to the patterns of independence and residential mobility prevailing in others. Therefore, family culture is an important key to the understanding of the structure of institutional setups.

Sewell's (1992) notions of "deep structures" and "surface structures" are helpful conceptual tools which enable us to imagine strong and weak family ties in terms of structures of *longue durée*. Sewell defines deep structures as schemas, as meanings, which generate a range of surface structures. The "deep structures" of family proximity or independence among family members generate different institutional structures at the national level. Deep structures are more persistent than surface structures. According to Sewell, the persistence of deep structures is caused by two facts. First, deep structures are present not only in one, but in a number of surface structures, that is, in a wide range of institutions, practices and discourses. Second, deep structures are mental assumptions and modes of procedure that are usually taken for granted. Actors apply them rather unconsciously, often without being aware of them.

However, the aim of this study is not the investigation of policy making, nor of the evolution of the institutions that surround young people's lives. This would be one step ahead of our goal. Nevertheless, the role we ascribe to culture in the departure from the parental home entails consequences for our ideas regarding important institutions such as public welfare support and the housing market. Hence, the scope of this study is to obtain a more differentiated understanding of how culture works in the process of leaving home.

## 4. Investigating culture

In the two preceding chapters I argued that the economic situation of young people and their decision to leave the parental home are mediated by institutions and culture. There is evidence that culture is persistent over long periods of time, despite temporary changes, and sometimes even across institutional backgrounds in cases where individuals migrate. Hence, culture is the key element to understanding the differences between northern and southern European patterns of leaving home besides economic conditions.

Our knowledge, however, of what actually constitutes culture in this research context is still very limited. Qualitative research methods, for their exploratory character, are therefore an appropriate research tool at this point. The results of the first qualitative studies conducted in this field are very instructive and promising. We know, for example, from recent qualitative research in Spain that norms for leaving the parental home at marriage can be identified, using the concept of the generalised other (Holdsworth 2005). Van de Velde's (2008) study has revealed that in Denmark, Great Britain and France, there are norms for an early departure from the parental home. Interviews with young Italians underline that the perception and evaluation of their personal economic possibilities to leave home are influenced and mediated by culture (Quadrelli 2007). Nevertheless, comparative qualitative studies in particular on this topic are still scarce.

In the previous chapter we have seen that there is evidence that young people in northern and southern Europe pursue different strategies to face the difficulties that have come along with globalisation and increased competition. Whereas southern Europeans largely leave home for partnership and prolong their stay in the parental household that gives them shelter, northern Europeans tend to leave home before marriage while pursuing an education or training and in search of employment. This is reflected also in the shares of university students living with their parents in Western European countries as presented in the second chapter. While most students in southern Europe live with their parents, most northern European students have left their parental home. In Italy, 79 percent of the 21-year old students live with their parents or other relatives. In Germany, in contrast, only 30 percent do so (Eurostudent 2005: 75). Qualitative studies, however,

with a particular focus on university students, in comparative perspective, have not yet been undertaken.

To this end, in the next few chapters, I will pursue the answers to the following questions: How do young people who have enrolled in university studies make sense of their decision to move out of their parents' household? How do students interpret their institutional environment and their financial opportunities? Can we identify different patterns of sense-forming and different social norms among students in northern and southern Europe? To find answers to these questions, I conducted interviews with students and parents in Italy and Germany.

I decided to limit my fieldwork to students in higher education – and their parents – and excluded young professionals and young people in vocational education for several reasons. First, this limitation facilitated the investigation of the possible link, at the individual level, between institutions, on the one hand, and cultural patterns, on the other. That is, in order to better understand the interviewees, it was necessary to describe and compare the institutions that influence their living conditions, such as housing, sources of income, expenses, and the educational systems in the two countries. The focus on only one specific group of young people – in the case of the present study, on university students – reduced the complexity of the comparison of the institutional settings and thus allowed for a more detailed picture. Moreover, this focus helped to limit the number of interviewees to a feasible amount. I chose to concentrate on university students because their living conditions and the systems of higher education are rather similar in Italy and Germany, while the situation of young professionals and young people in vocational education differs considerably in these two countries (see chapter 2). Probably due to this reason as well, it was easier to find comparable statistical information regarding the living arrangements of university students than to find information regarding the living arrangements of young people in vocational training. This knowledge gained from quantitative studies certainly facilitated and enriched my analysis and was a fruitful starting point for this study based on qualitative methods. Nevertheless, similar studies conducted with young professionals or young people in vocational education would be equally interesting and desirable.

In this chapter, I will present the conceptual framework, the research design and the methods that I used in this inquiry.

## 4.1 What is culture?

Before entering into the practical issues of the research process it is necessary to clarify the definition of culture that I consider the most fruitful for the purpose of this study. Alfred Schütz (1953) argues, following Weberian ideas (Weber 1978), that human action and behaviour is grounded in intersubjective sense-making which enables human beings to find orientation, to communicate and cooperate with each other. In this conceptual framework, our world is understood as highly complex that can only partly be grasped by the cognitive tools of human individuals. That is, human perception and thinking is always selective and therefore not objective. Human beings thus perceive a culturally structured image of the complexity that surrounds them (Weber 1985). They use abstractions and general concepts to make sense of what they see, hear and feel. This applies to common-sense, as well as scientific thinking. Consequently, individuals in different societies interpret their environment differently, at least to some extent, according to the prevailing concepts of the society. That is to say, interpretations are based on the different commonly shared abstractions that are established through communication within (and sometimes beyond) society. However, abstractions are not random. They are based on experience with the objective world. These experiences, though, do not transform one-on-one into objective images and concepts in human perception. The American psychologist George A. Kelly, who developed a psychology of personal constructs in the 1950s, summarises this point of view as follows:

We presume that the universe is really existing and that man is gradually coming to understand it. By taking this position we attempt to make clear from the outset that it is a real world we shall be talking about, not a world composed solely of the flitting shadows of people's thoughts. But we should like, furthermore, to make clear our conviction that people's thoughts also really exist, though the correspondence between what people really think exists and what really does exist is a continually changing one. (Kelly 1991: 5)

Similarly to Schütz, Kelly's idea of human nature is that of "man-the-scientist" (1991: 4). He conceives human beings as individuals who make sense of their environment by trying to adjust their constructs as closely as possible to their experience. Despite its complex character, we experience our world as an organised world from birth on. Our perception of the world has been organised by our predecessors who passed their knowledge to the following generations. Hence, the way we make sense of our experience and observations is shaped by our own

experience and also by the experience of previous generations (Schütz 1953). We adopt most abstractions that we use to make sense of our world from other human beings by communicating and interacting with them, also by reading documents, books, and so on. This way, cultural knowledge can be transmitted over long periods of time. Kelly therefore writes, “that man might be better understood if he were viewed in the perspective of the centuries rather than in the flicker of passing moments” (1991: 3), which means that also the social sciences should include the historical perspective in their explanations. By transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next, human beings ensure the continuity that is necessary to find orientation over time. This enables different generations to communicate with each other and to cooperate. It also allows for the accumulation of knowledge, for example in the evolution of science. The structures of *longue durée*, of long-term patterns, described by Braudel (see section 3.5), can thus be understood as the result of the intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

Goffman refers to Schütz’s ideas of abstractions and generalisations as “frames” because they offer frameworks of orientation to human perception. They are the “definitions of the situation” (Goffman 1986: 1). Other scholars call these definitions “schemata” or “schemas”, “patterns of meaning” or “constructs.” They structure the experience of individuals at any moment in life because they help to recognise particular situations and to act accordingly.

Very often users are not likely to be aware of the patterns of meaning they employ, nor are they able to give a complete description of such patterns if asked. This does not hinder them from applying their frames effectively. Individuals or groups of people, nonetheless, may use misleading schemas resulting in destructive or self-destructive interpretations and behaviours. Because the patterns of meaning are shared within groups of interacting individuals, they can be regarded as a constituting element of a group’s culture. Goffman (1986) denominates the ensemble of a group’s frames as a ‘belief system’ or a ‘cosmology.’ This, however, does not mean that within a nation, for example, all people share the same patterns of meaning. Instead, different social groups within society might use different schemas. Moreover, also individual actors are able to employ diverse and even contradictory schemas (Sewell 1992).

The relative stability of cultural knowledge does not exclude the possibility of agency and social change. In the approach used in the present study, however, human agency is not constituted by consciously choosing among behavioural alternatives, but by the ability to revise abstract concepts and transpose them into a new context. Hence, human beings are not passive

products of their cultural knowledge. They apply this knowledge creatively in their interactions (Sewell 1992). By recognising analogies between situations, social actors are capable of transposing schemas into different contexts. This ability to transpose is what makes human agency possible. Social actors are able to reformulate their patterns of meaning and subsequently change their behaviour. It is thus important to notice that the reproduction of schemas does not happen identically and automatically during the period of socialisation, but depends on active processes of interpretation and modification. Furthermore, Sewell argues that the desires which people feel and the preferences they develop also result from the schemas applied in a particular group or cultural context.

Goffman (1986) describes frames as involving rules. Other scholars, such as Giddens (1984), use the concept of 'rules' synonymously to 'frames' and 'schemas.' The empirical results of the present study, however, reveal that rules and frames are two concepts that should not be used interchangeably. I argue that rules, or behavioural norms, are based on socially shared patterns of meaning. I thus agree with Mannheim's conceptualisation of meaning as the basic unit in the analysis of culture. According to Mannheim, patterns of meaning, or worldviews, as he calls them, are the foundations of "cultural objectifications" such as norms, religions, and philosophical approaches (Mannheim 1952: 38).

Our experience and shared knowledge is not only 'conserved' in the patterns of meaning but also in the values we uphold and the norms we follow. Like frames and norms, values are part of the knowledge that we inherit or learn from others. Values can be defined as general guidelines that provide orientation to our behaviour and judgements. They help us to evaluate our own conduct, as well as that of other people, according to the standards of the society or group to which we belong. Like frames and norms, they guide our perceptions and, consequently, influence our preferences. We build up our values during the process of socialisation and identity construction. The most relevant institutions in the transmission of values are the family, as the location of primary socialisation, and educational institutions. Furthermore, the media as well as religious, political and economic actors propagate values. They are reflected in the structure and functioning of institutions. On the other hand, the institutional context influences our beliefs (Trommsdorff 1989). Values can vary across social contexts. One example of different values is the higher or lower relevance of 'independence' as an educational goal in European countries, as outlined in chapter 3 (see table 3.3). Norms are less general than values and refer to behavioural

rules. They tell us what we ought to do and what we can expect other people to do. They also provide guidelines about what we can expect with regard to other people's expectations (Luhmann 1972). In contrast, values present a more general framework of orientation and can thus be applied in different contexts and situations. They can be seen as so-called "rules of thumb" or heuristics that help us to evaluate our perceptions. They are supposed to provide us with some kind of guidelines even in unknown, highly complex or uncertain situations, for example, when no behavioural norms and not sufficient information for a rational evaluation of costs and benefits are available.

As an example, people may use a frame of reference which defines the departure from the parental home as a step towards independence. Others may interpret it instead as a threat to the unity of the family. Based on these interpretations, people may evaluate the independence of youth and their detachment at a certain age, as desirable or undesirable. If leaving home at a certain age is widely considered as desirable it becomes a behavioural norm. Then people expect themselves and others to move out at about this age. They might even expect social sanction in case of non-compliance. At least they are aware of these social expectations even if they do not comply with the norm in question. That is, even those individuals who do not follow the norm usually recognise their existence (Luhmann 1972).

Hochschild explains metaphorically that social actors dispose of two different "books" in which their cultural knowledge is collected: a "dictionary" and a "bible" (1998: 7). The "dictionary" contains the meanings that individuals have at their disposal. In addition, the "bible" incorporates the prescriptions, the values and norms, which guide the individuals' judgements and activities. These three elements of culture—frames, values and norms—help social actors to develop strategies of action. Culture, thus, can be understood as a "tool kit" (Swidler 1986: 277) or repertoire of interpretations and evaluations that orient human behaviour and social interaction. Whether individuals are able to negotiate and change their cultural "tools" depends on their degree of "embeddedness". "Embeddedness" refers to the varying degree of explicitness or implicitness of shared meanings and prescriptions in a particular social context (Swidler 2001: 94). Habits, for example, and common sense interpretations, which are taken for granted, can usually not be negotiated because people are unaware of their existence. Only if interpretations and norms are made explicit and people become consciously aware of them can they be negotiated and changed.

In the following chapters, I will thus use the terms ‘pattern of meaning’, ‘pattern of interpretation’, ‘schema’ and ‘frame’ synonymously to denominate the semantic content which individuals ascribe to the words and concepts they use in the processes of communication or self-reflection, in order to make sense of their environment (see also table 10.1). I define ‘values’ (or ‘beliefs’) as ‘heuristics’ (i.e., ‘rules of thumb’) that provide further help to human individuals in the interpretation and evaluation of their environment and of their experience. Values help categorise concepts and behaviour as useful or harmful, and therefore provide important guidelines to individual actions and decisions. In contrast to values, which contain rather general orientation, ‘norms’ provide relatively clear codes of conduct for specific situations. In this sense, norms are implicit behavioural rules, which are linked to the meanings and values of individuals and social groups.

These conceptual considerations form the framework upon which the empirical analysis of this study is based. Before addressing the description of data collection, the recruitment of the interviewees and the method of analysis, I would first like to briefly discuss the possibilities of defining ‘residential independence’ in empirical research, and moreover, spell out the criteria of case selection according to which I chose the locations for the fieldwork.

## **4.2 The definition of residential independence**

Considering the diversity of life courses, the departure from the parental home is not always a clearly defined step. Some young people, for example, leave the parental home for good, whereas others move temporarily back to their parents after a period of living on their own. Another group of young people live away from the parents’ home only for some days during the week and return to their parents at the weekends to be provided with fresh clothes and new stocks of food for the following week. This diversity poses a challenge to quantitative research since the exact measurement of the departure from the parental home requires a clear definition of residential independence. As a consequence, survey questions to investigate the age of leaving home might measure slightly different things. For example, in the third wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted in 2006, the departure from the parental home is defined as “living in separate accommodation from your parent(s), for 2 months or more” (see, e.g., Billari/Liefbroer 2010: 64), whereas the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS), carried out in Italy in 1995, and in Germany in

1992, also comprised shorter periods of residential independence in the definition of the departure from the parental home: “Did you ever leave your parents home to go to live on your own (alone or with others)?” (see, e.g., Rusconi 2006: 262).

The purpose of my study, however, was not to measure the departure from the parental home. Hence, I did not approach the interviewees with a prefabricated definition of residential independence, nor did I ask the interviewees to formulate a definition for themselves. Instead, my goal was to investigate, on an individual basis, the meanings and expectations that the interviewees ascribed to their living arrangements, and to the changes of the latter. Therefore, the implicit definition of residential independence, which emerged from this research strategy, was rather broad: having one’s own (shared) accommodation outside the parents’ household, regardless of whether the young interviewees regularly spent some time, for example the weekends or their vacations, at the parental home.

## **4.3 Case selection**

### **4.3.1 Comparing Italy and Germany**

In this study I compare interview material collected in Italy and Germany. There are several reasons for selecting these countries. Scholars doing comparative research in this field often choose their countries in accordance with the typology of welfare regimes that has been developed by Esping-Andersen (1990, 2000). This makes sense since the availability of financial support from the state can have an important influence on the decision of leaving the parental home, as we have seen above. Esping-Andersen distinguishes between a Nordic welfare regime with a more generous and universal provision of welfare by the state, an Anglo-Saxon welfare regime in which the provision of welfare is mainly organised by the market, and a continental welfare regime in which the state is an important provider of welfare, however with a strong emphasis on promoting the family and the male-breadwinner model. For this reason, it is often called the conservative welfare regime. It strongly supports marriage and the principle of subsidiarity. Different from the social-democratic roots of the Nordic welfare states and the liberal ideology of the Anglo-Saxon welfare regime, the continental welfare regime is strongly influenced by Catholic thinking. According to Esping-Andersen (1990, 2000), both Germany and Italy belong to the conservative regime type. However, there has been strong disagreement with

this point of view among social scientists. Different from Esping-Andersen's initial threefold typology, a number of scholars advocate that the southern European countries form a fourth type of welfare regime (Leibfried 1992, Lessenich 1994, Ferrera 1996, Martin 1996). Due to the very pronounced role of the family in the provision of welfare in this regime type, it is categorized as familialistic. As outlined above, this regime type is characterised by a strong responsibility on the part of the family for its members and, unlike the conservative welfare regime in the continental states, also by the responsibility of the wider kinship network to provide welfare for its members (see Saraceno 2004). As explained in chapter 3, family members live more closely together in the Mediterranean countries and have more frequent contact with each other than families in continental and northern Europe. This closeness enables the families to fulfil their welfare function. Comparative research on leaving the parental home in a country of the conservative welfare regime and in a country of the familialistic welfare regime would therefore help us to better understand the different social and cultural foundations that have formed these two welfare-regime types. Although both regime types resemble each other regarding the role of women, the position of young people and the importance of residential independence before marriage and residential mobility during education are very different and have not yet been sufficiently investigated.

However, no qualitative study focussing on culture by comparing shared meanings in the corporatist-conservative welfare regime and the familialistic welfare regime has yet been undertaken. The few existing qualitative studies in this field to date have often avoided including a continental European example in the comparison. Holdsworth et al., for example, exclude the departure from the parental home in the conservative regime from their research since the link between family and state welfare in the conservative welfare regime is more difficult to grasp theoretically. Holdsworth departs in her analysis from a distinction between "familialized welfare regimes in the Mediterranean region and de-familialized welfare regimes in northern Europe" (Holdsworth 2004: 910). The continental European countries do not easily fit into this simple division since their welfare systems are based on the central role of the family as the first provider of welfare, however combining this with relatively generous state support for young people. This makes the theorising of family and state welfare "somewhat more complicated" (Holdsworth 2004: 910) and challenging for this regime type. I argue that a comparison between

a southern and a continental European country, such as Italy and Germany, can be especially fruitful to learn more about this cultural feature that distinguishes these two regime types.

The reason for choosing Italy instead of Spain, Portugal or Greece lies in the history after World War II. Italy's history as a democratic country after the Second World War is as long as that of the German democratic development. In this respect, Italy differs from other Mediterranean countries which struggled against dictatorship also in the second half of the 20th century. In Spain, for example, the dictatorship of Franco ended only in 1975. The current structure of the Spanish welfare state can thus be interpreted as a consequence of the conservative regime under Franco and the phase of transition which followed (Lessenich 1995). Different from Spain, Italy, as well as Germany, became democratic states with the end of World War II. Both countries were founding members of the European Community, whereas Spain, for example, became part of the EU only in 1986. For these similarities between Italy and Germany, Italy is more appropriate for the purposes of this comparison.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the southern European welfare states have been reluctant to introduce family policies after becoming democratic states since policies that interfere with the family conveyed a negative connotation for being associated with pro-natalist policies of the authoritarian regimes that existed in these countries before (Naldini 2003). With regard to this argument, Germany is an especially interesting case for comparison since it too was dominated by a dictatorship that introduced pro-natalist policies in the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, in Germany many more policy measures that 'interfere' with the family, for example child allowance, have been implemented after the end of the Nazi dictatorship. And even though the welfare regimes in both countries have been influenced by Catholic belief, the amount of support for young people from the state is quite different in Germany than in Italy. If family culture can be understood as a structuring principle that shapes welfare state institutions, and both countries have been shaped by Catholicism, then what makes the differences in the family cultures of Italy and Germany so characteristic with regard to the departure from the parental home?

Another reason to compare Italy and Germany refers to the density of higher education institutions in both countries. With regard to the Nordic countries, it can be argued that the early departure from the parental home for educational reasons and employment is caused by a low population density and greater distances between urban centres. Therefore, the spatial distances

which need to be overcome to reach institutions of higher education and work places are longer. For this reason, it can be argued that young people in the Nordic countries leave their parental home early and for reasons other than partnership and family formation. However, this argument does not apply for Germany and other continental European countries belonging to the conservative welfare regime. In Germany, population density is higher than in Italy. Whereas the number of students in higher education institutions is only slightly higher in Germany than in Italy<sup>15</sup>, the number of institutions of higher education appears to be much higher in Germany than in Italy (see for Italy: Elevati 2008, for Germany: Bundesagentur für Arbeit et al. 2008).<sup>16</sup> Hence, a possible difference in the density of institutions of higher education can hardly be a decisive reason for the different living arrangements of students in Italy and Germany. The similarities of the geographical structures, in addition to the influence of Catholic thinking and other historical similarities, make the different living arrangements of students in Italy and Germany even more puzzling. A comparison of these two countries thus helps to identify cultural features that affect the departure from the parental home.

### **4.3.2 The locations of fieldwork**

As locations for fieldwork I chose Florence in Italy and Bonn in Germany and the regions in close proximity to these cities. One reason for this selection was to ensure that the interview data reflect ‘average perspectives’ and not the perspectives of certain regional outliers. ‘Average’ is used here in the sense of ‘settled’ and ‘stable’, that is, a region where the current economic situation does not force young people to become more geographically mobile than the rest of the country. For this reason neither East Germans nor Southern Italians are suitable subjects for the data collection since, in these two regions, young people tend to leave the parental home earlier than in the rest of their country due to difficult economic conditions (for Italy: Rusconi 2006, for Germany: Schimml-Neimanns 2006). The same is true for students. East German students and Southern Italian students move more frequently away from their home region. Moreover, they more often move beyond their neighbouring regions and choose a university at a greater distance

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<sup>15</sup> In 2007, 2.279.000 students were enrolled in higher education (first cycle) in Germany and 1.994.000 students in Italy (Turchetti/Gere 2009: table 1).

<sup>16</sup> In Germany, there are 390 institutions of higher education (state and private), in Italy there are around 120 with much larger numbers of students per institution than in Germany (for Germany, see: Bundesagentur für Arbeit et al. 2008; for Italy: Elevati 2008). However, many Italian universities have some additional sites in other, often smaller, cities nearby, which are not included in this number. That is to say, the institutions of higher education in Italy are somewhat less concentrated in urban centres than this number suggests.

from their home (for Italy: Viesti 2005, Jahnke 2004; for Germany: Isserstedt et al. 2007, Kultusministerkonferenz 2006).

As mentioned above, the culturally prescribed patterns of mobility apply to students also. For Italians with higher education, as for most Italians, marriage is the main reason for leaving the parental home, although more people with higher education leave the home for reasons other than marriage, as compared to less educated people. In Germany, students leave the parental home usually before marriage, as most Germans do (Rusconi 2006). However, we can also observe within-country differences, for example between urban and rural areas. Above all in the three city states, Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen, where unemployment is high, the median age at leaving the parental home is lower than in other areas, especially for young men. Furthermore, young German men in rural areas leave home slightly later than average (*ibid.*). Since for the purpose of this study, I'm interested in shared, widespread patterns of meaning and prescriptions, it would be more appropriate to conduct interviews in less 'extreme' locations, that is, neither in big metropolitan areas nor in rural areas or small towns, but in medium-sized cities.

For these reasons, I conducted the interviews in cities in Germany and Italy which are similar in size and atmosphere. Florence was a suitable place for the data collection in Italy because it has a big and well-known university and is therefore attractive to many students also from other regions. At the same time the city is economically and culturally flourishing and thus probably also attractive as a place to live for young people, even with a future perspective beyond their studies. The same is true for Bonn in Germany. Both cities have a similar number of inhabitants. Neither of them is provincial nor among the biggest cities in their countries. The dominant religion in both places is Catholicism. In the case of Germany, it was also important to avoid a university which belongs to the recently created circle of elite universities because they are attracting unusually high numbers of applicants from all over the country. Since in Italy a comparable system does not exist, it is more appropriate to choose a university of 'normal' (i.e. non-elite) attractiveness in Germany, such as Bonn.

Since there are regional within-country differences in the patterns of leaving home of students, I aimed at avoiding a comparison between evidently different regions. In Germany, for example, higher shares of very mobile students and lower numbers of students living with their parents are displayed not only in the Eastern regions, but also in the northern, Protestant regions – where we find lower numbers of students who live in the parental household, than in the southern

and western regions which are mainly Catholic (Isserstedt et al. 2007). From this point of view, Bonn and the region North Rhine-Westphalia are less different from Florence and Tuscany than other northern or East German regions. North Rhine-Westphalia is the region with the third highest share of students living in the parental household. Around 27 percent of all students in this Bundesland live with their parents. Only Saarland with 40 percent and Hesse with 30 percent display higher values (Isserstedt et al. 2007: 357/table 11.6).<sup>17</sup>

With regard to Italy, we know that among students enrolled at universities in medium sized cities, such as Florence and Bologna, 64 percent on average are living with their families.<sup>18</sup> Emilia-Romagna, where the University of Bologna is situated, is the most attractive study location for students coming from other Italian regions. Nearly 45 percent of all university graduates in Emilia-Romagna come from outside this region. Tuscany, where the University of Florence is located, is the third most attractive region for students from other parts of Italy, after Emilia-Romagna and Lazio, the region which includes Rome. In Tuscany, around 27 percent of all graduates come from other regions. The other 73 percent are graduates coming from within the region. Most students from outside come from Southern Italian regions, such as Puglia, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, but also from Liguria. However, Tuscany is not only an attractive study location for large distance movers. The Tuscans themselves also have a strong preference to pursue university studies in their region. Only 10 percent graduate outside Tuscany, whereas nearly 90 percent remain in their home region and graduate from Tuscan higher university institutions (Viesti 2005). This high share of students staying within their region of home residence is clearly above the Italian average of 78 percent (Cammelli 2005). The regions where more students move away are mainly situated in Southern Italy (Jahnke 2004). However, short-distance mobility of students between provinces within Tuscany is above the Italian average since

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<sup>17</sup> The percentages of students living with their families in the German regions in 2006 are: west Germany (mainly Catholic): Saarland 40 %, Hesse 30 %, North Rhine-Westphalia 27 %, Rhineland-Palatinate 25 %; south Germany (mainly Catholic): Baden-Wurtemberg 26 %, Bavaria 25 %; north-west Germany (mainly Protestant): Bremen 21 %, Hamburg 20 %, Lower Saxony 14 %, Schleswig-Holstein 14 %; east Germany (mainly Protestant in the past): Saxony-Anhalt 22 %, Brandenburg 19 %, Saxony 17 %, Berlin 16 %, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania 13 %, Thuringia 11 % (Isserstedt et al. 2007, p. 357, table 11.6).

<sup>18</sup> The percentages of students living with their families in Italy in 2007 are: in study locations smaller than 100.000 inhabitants 71 %, in study locations with 100.000 to 300.000 inhabitants 72 %, in study locations with more than 300.000 to 500.000 inhabitants 64 %, in study locations bigger than 500.000 inhabitants 77 % (Eurostudent III 2008, Italian profile: 53, table 24). In Germany, these values are: in study locations smaller than 100.000 inhabitants 27 %, in study locations with 100.000 to 300.000 inhabitants 20 %, in study locations with more than 300.000 to 500.000 inhabitants 24 %, in study locations bigger than 500.000 inhabitants 25 % (Eurostudent III 2008, German profile: 59, table 24).

only four Tuscan provinces host a university. The density of locations with institutions of higher education is not very high in Tuscany (Cammelli 2005).<sup>19</sup>

North Rhine-Westphalia, the region in Germany where Bonn is located, displays a very high density of institutions for higher education. Furthermore, high-school graduates from this region tend to remain and start higher education in the same federal state. With around 81 percent of high-school graduates staying in the region for studying, North Rhine-Westphalia is the German region with the highest quota of students who continue their education in their home state. With 22 percent of students coming to North Rhine-Westphalia from other regions, this federal state is the least attractive study location for non-locals. In Rhineland-Palatinate, for example, which is a neighbouring region, 54 percent of the students come from other regions (Kultusministerkonferenz 2006).<sup>20</sup> However, comparing North Rhine-Westphalia to Tuscany, the shares of students who remain in the same region to enrol in higher education are similar (81 percent in North Rhine-Westphalia, 90 percent in Tuscany). Also, the quotas of students who come from other regions are nearly the same (in Tuscany 27 percent, in North Rhine-Westphalia 22 percent).

In a comparison at the national level, the interregional mobility rates of students in Germany and Italy are similar as well. On average, 70 percent of the German students, in 2003, remained in the region in which they graduated from high school, which is only 8 percentage points less than the share of students living with their parents in Italy. Furthermore, German students who moved away from the region where they graduated from high school mainly moved to a neighbouring region. Only around 13 percent moved beyond bordering regions (Kultusministerkonferenz 2006). These figures reveal that German students have a preference for residential independence but avoid long-distance moves. Spatial mobility over longer distances is often evoked only by the admission restrictions and *numerus clausus* regulations of German universities (Heine et al. 2009). This implies that most students in Germany manage to remain in their home region, as they prefer, in spite of admission restrictions and *numerus clausus* regulations.

This brief overview on the spatial mobility of students in Italy and Germany shows that the migration patterns in these two countries are not completely different. Nevertheless, we can

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<sup>19</sup> Data from 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Data from 2005.

observe higher residential mobility and higher residential in Germany, while Italians more often commute to university on a daily basis. Despite admission restrictions in Germany, most German students enrol at universities that are relatively close to their family home. At the same time, most of them prefer to live in their own households. Is this reasonable from a financial point of view? How do the actors make sense of their behaviour? In Italy, more students live with their parents and commute to university, which is more sensible from an economic perspective. Nevertheless, the high shares of young Southern Italians who move to the North, for example to Tuscany, for the purpose of their university studies show that financial constraints can be overcome in many cases. What are the rationales underlying these behaviours in both countries? How do the actors interpret their environment and make sense of their behaviour? The selection of two regions for fieldwork in Germany and Italy which are fairly similar, or at least not completely different in their structures, helps to sharpen our knowledge of cultural interpretations. The selection of similar regions, such as Tuscany and North Rhine-Westphalia, allows us to focus on the comparison of interpretations without pointing hastily to structural differences that allegedly trigger or hamper the departure from the parental home.

#### **4.3.3 Sample structure and the recruitment of interviewees**

With the aim to seek answers to the above mentioned questions, I carried out a qualitative interview study. The results of the study are based on open-ended interviews conducted with 17 higher education (HE) students and 10 parents (9 mothers and one father) in Germany during the spring of 2009; and with 11 HE students (plus one young employee), and 4 parents (3 mothers and one father) in Italy during autumn of 2009. The young generation in the German sample consisted of 6 female and 11 male students; in the Italian sample 6 female students, 5 male students and one young female employee. The students were between 19 and 32 years of age and studied a variety of subjects. They came from different socio-economic backgrounds, working class or middle class, and differed with regard to the financial means at their disposal, ranging from affluent families who could easily afford the residential independence of their children, to poor families who could only support their children with a few euros per month. I chose students from a variety of living arrangements and types of accommodations, for example, students living: with their parents, in student halls, in shared flats, alone etc. Amongst the German interviewees were 7 students whose parents, either one or both, had immigrated to Germany from other

countries (from Italy, Eastern Europe and Afghanistan). In the Italian sample, there was one student with a migration background (one parent from Great Britain). Most interviewees were Catholics in both countries, apart from 4 Protestant and 2 Muslim participants in the German sample.

I recruited most interviewees on campus, for example, at the entrance of university buildings by asking them whether they would like to participate in an interview study on the lifestyles of students in Germany and Italy. A small number of students were recruited with a snowball strategy through recommendation by other participants. I contacted the parents after conducting the interview with their sons or daughters. This way, the students had a chance to get a more precise idea of how the interviews were, before asking their parents to participate, or giving me the contact details of their parents. The Italian parents were less inclined to participate in the study than the German parents. A possible explanation for this may be that Florentine families tend to be closed to outsiders, as some Italian students explained to me. The parents who participated, however, varied greatly in their financial resources, as well as in their attitudes towards the residential independence of their children. This variation compensated, to some extent, the small number of participants.

I interviewed the students separately from their parents because I wanted them to feel free to express their own point of view without being influenced by the presence of their parents. In one case, a student asked explicitly to participate in the parents' interview because he was interested in their opinion. He also expected that his parents would be more inclined to participate if he was there. His sister joined spontaneously in the interview session and participated in the group discussion that evolved. In four cases, students suggested to be interviewed together with a friend, who also wanted to participate in the study. They felt more comfortable this way. I accepted these suggestions, hoping that a comfortable and relaxed interview situation would increase the confidence of the interviewees and contribute to the production of self-determined narratives. All these interview forms, be it one-on-one, in pairs or in a family group, proved to be fruitful.

The interviews took place at the university, in cafés or at the homes of the respective interviewees. I let the interviewees choose the place where they felt most comfortable, as long as it was quiet. Most parents chose to be interviewed at home; thus the parents' interviews required some travelling. Some parents also offered to meet, for example in a café, when they planned to

come to the city to visit their children. Most students preferred a place at the university for their interviews.

The sample structure was largely determined *a priori*, on the basis of theoretical assumptions deriving from the studies outlined in the second and third chapters of this thesis. The *a priori* determination of the sampling structure is a useful strategy when statistical results need further investigation by qualitative methods. In this sampling strategy, the knowledge gained from quantitative research about socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the individual cases is used to select interview partners. In addition, with this sampling strategy and the move from quantitative to qualitative methods, existing theories can be refined and extended (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2008).

The number of interviewees was limited by my capacities to conduct, transcribe and analyse the interviews alone. The purpose of the sample structure was to allow for comparisons of minimal and maximal opposition. Therefore, the sample is characterised by a great variety of household forms and economic conditions in which the young people live, besides the similarities in the religious backgrounds and educational levels of the young interviewees. The students either lived outside the parental home: in shared flats, shared rooms, alone, in halls of residence; or with their parents: either in the city of study or they commuted to university. None of the students lived with a partner. The distance between the parents' home and the university ranged from parents living in the same city to those living several hundreds of kilometres away. The financial situation and the sources of income also varied greatly among the students. This sample structure allowed, for example, confronting interviews of students living independently while receiving little or no money from parents or public funding, with those of students who lived with their parents despite having sufficient financial resources for residential independence. Similar to the logic of a theoretical sampling strategy, the variation in the combination of the three characteristics – financial resources, living arrangements, and orientation frameworks – made it possible to extend our knowledge beyond the existing theories.

#### **4.4 The interview**

I conducted semi-structured interviews which had a retrospective auto-biographical focus and were designed to generate narratives about the process of pursuing higher education, including

the choice of university, enrolment and the beginning of studies, the living arrangements during the studies, etc. Later on in the interviews, I asked follow-up questions concerning the financing of studies, the relationship with the parents, etc. Besides the narrative parts, the interviews also contained extensive parts of reflection and argumentation. This interview style is similar to the ‘episodic interview’ developed by Flick (2002) which systematically combines narratives with reflections. The purpose is to make episodic and semantic knowledge accessible to the interviewer. Episodic knowledge refers to individual experiences, whereas semantic knowledge includes more generalised and abstract assumptions. For the former, the knowledge is organised around a sequence of events and actions, while the latter is based on concepts and their relation to each other. This kind of interview helps to evoke a large variety of formulations containing different manifestations of the underlying schemas. I also aimed to trigger such formulations by asking questions that evoked reflections or even justifications and by carefully confronting the interviewees with the contradictions that appeared during the course of the interview (see Ullrich 1999). The parents were asked to talk, from their point of view, about their adult children, about the choice of university, the beginning of the studies, their living arrangements, etc. Then I asked them to speak about their own move-out experience when they were young (see Appendix).

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to two and a half hours. Most of them had duration of approximately an hour. The languages in which I conducted the interviews were German and Italian so that nearly all interviewees could use their native language. I recorded them and then transcribed the parts that were of interest for the analysis. After the analysis, I translated those interview parts into English that I planned to quote in the thesis text. The names of all interviewees have been changed.

## **4.5 The method of analysis**

### **4.5.1 The documentary method**

Cross-cultural research always poses particular challenges in the process of data collection and analysis because cultural differences limit the researcher’s ability to understand research subjects from other social or cultural groups. Therefore, reconstructive methods, in particular those with a theoretical foundation in the sociology of knowledge, are especially useful for the exploration of cultural diversity because they prevent the non-reflective disregard of cultural differences. They

require the researcher, more than other methods, to assume the perspective of the research subjects, to compare different perspectives, classify them, and explain them (Cappai 2010). A method for reconstructing and understanding different perspectives is the documentary method. The documentary method focuses on the analysis of underlying patterns of meaning in written texts, face-to-face interviews, group discussions, pictures and other products of communication. It provides a fruitful research procedure to disclose latent meanings and taken-for-granted frames of orientation.

Initiated by Karl Mannheim in the early 1920s (1952, 1982), the documentary method became more popular through Garfinkel (1967) and was further developed by Bohnsack (2010). Nohl (2006, 2010) adapted Bohnsack's approach to narrative biographical and semi-structured interviews. The key element of the documentary method is the constant comparative sequential analysis of the interview texts. This means that the underlying patterns of the atheoretical, implicit knowledge of the interviewees are reconstructed through the constant comparison of interview sequences concerning a specific topic of interest within one interview and, simultaneously, also across interviews. The comparison helps to identify and delineate how the interviewees interpret a topic and which underlying concepts and ideas they implicitly refer to in their interpretations. Eventually, the researcher forms a typology of these patterns of meaning and describes how the research subjects apply them in different ways (Bohnsack 2007). The result of the analysis are not the reconstruction and type formation of biographical trajectories found in the personal development of the interviewees, usually based on life histories, but rather a typology of the patterns of meaning that the interviewees apply. The key element of the documentary method is the systematic change of perspective that the constant comparison of interview sequences across cases evokes. This change of perspective enables the researcher to become aware of the tacit, often taken-for-granted assumptions on which human individuals base their behaviour and their communication (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2008). The constant comparison of interview sequences within and across cases is a procedure that is also used in grounded theory (Glaser/Strauss 2006). Unlike grounded theory, which provides a general step-by-step instruction for coding qualitative data, the documentary method is especially suitable for reconstructing underlying patterns of meaning for its strong connection to the theoretical concepts of the sociology of knowledge.

According to Mannheim, human behaviour, communication, norms, religions, habits, material products, etc. are objectifications – that is, expressions – of underlying cultural knowledge, which he calls worldviews. Mannheim explains that cultural objectifications transmit three “strata” of meaning: “objective” meaning, “expressive” meaning, and “documentary” or “evidential” meaning (1952: 44). Objective meaning is what people understand simply because they speak the same language. It is the meaning of the words, gestures and other symbols that people use for communication. Expressive meaning is what individual actors intend to communicate from their subjective point of view. Observers can only be sure that they understood the expressive meaning if they ask the individual actors about their subjective intentions. The documentary meaning is transmitted implicitly and often unconsciously. It contains information about the worldview of the cultural group and epoch to which the respective actors belong. The documentary meaning is usually taken for granted by the communicating person.

To give an example of these three kinds of meanings, we can imagine a painting in which a man and a woman are displayed who are holding hands. From this constellation we can understand the so-called objective meaning that the two individuals in the picture most probably form a couple, maybe lovers or spouses, because holding hands rates as a typical gesture of people in a relationship. The objective meaning offers us a basic understanding of what we see. As to the expressive meaning of the painting, we can only speculate. We can suppose that the painter wanted to express the general idea of love or that he wanted to paint himself and his wife, for example, but we cannot be sure of this meaning without asking the author about the painting. To grasp the documentary meaning of the picture, we need to look at how the couple is presented by comparing the painting to other paintings of the same epoch and culture and to paintings of other epochs and cultures. Through this comparison, it is possible to see whether additional unspoken information is transmitted in the way the couple is dressed, for example, or through the distance between them. These details may, for instance, contain information about the morality of the time and society of the painter. The documentary method focuses on the objective meaning and, especially, on the documentary meaning, while the expressive meaning is of less relevance for the analysis of culture.

The following example from my research can help to illustrate how the documentary method helps to ‘discover’ patterns of meaning that are taken for granted by the interviewer and

the interviewees. In chapter 9, for example, I argue that future expectations regarding the job search and, in particular, the perception of the job market as meritocratic, influence the living arrangements of university students. When asked about their strategies for finding a job after their studies, the German respondents usually talked about their ideas of increasing their competitiveness and improving their CV. Residential mobility played an important part in these strategies. However, only the comparison with the Italian interviews revealed a hidden underlying pattern of interpretation that had been taken for granted by the German interviewees, as well as by myself as a researcher from Germany. This underlying pattern is the perception of the German labour market as being mainly meritocratic. Meritocracy is the precondition for the investment of resources in one's CV and training. Only the comparison with the Italian interviews revealed the importance of meritocracy as an underlying pattern of meaning which became explicit only because several Italian students lamented the lack of meritocracy on the Italian labour market.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis procedure**

As recommended by Nohl (2006) in his instructions regarding the documentary method, I listened to the recorded interviews and selected the passages which were of interest to my research questions and transcribed them. In the next step, I grouped the interview passages around several themes – or codes – and analysed them, constantly comparing them to one another, in order to identify the underlying patterns of meaning which represent different manifestations of a certain theme or code.

The interpretation of interview passages includes two steps: 1) formulating interpretation and, 2) reflecting interpretation. In the first step, the formulating interpretation, the researcher reconstructs the 'objective' meaning of the interview by reformulating the text in her own words. This step serves to understand *what* the interview passage is about. This is a precondition for the comparison with other interview passages that follows. The second step, the reflecting interpretation, aims to analyse *how* the topic of the interview passage is elaborated on (Nohl 2010). In this step, the comparison with other interview passages is used to identify the underlying frames of interpretation, as in the example given in the previous section. Besides the analysis of the semantic level, the reflecting interpretation also focuses on the formal aspects of the interview passages. Particular formulations and wordings indicate the degree to which

necessary background information is taken for granted by the interviewees, which indicates the existence of tacit cultural knowledge.

The result of the empirical analysis is a typology of underlying meanings concerning various topics related to the departure from the parental home as a student. Bohnsack (2010) and Nohl (2010) differentiate between sense-genetic and socio-genetic type formation. The sense-genetic type formation aims to give an overview of the patterns of interpretation found in the interview data. The sense-genetic type formation is based on the themes found in the interviews. A first group of themes in my analysis derived from the existing literature in this field. Then, additional new themes emerged from the interviews through minimal and maximal comparison, until theoretical saturation was achieved, that is, until no new themes emerged. The themes suggested by previous studies include the interpretation of the students' individual economic conditions (see Quadrelli 2007) and the norms of leaving home. Another important aspect that has been discussed in earlier publications is the subjectively shared definition of 'adulthood' (see Holdsworth/Morgan 2005). Additional themes that emerge from the interviews are the development of a strong individual sense of identity as a source of orientation and the role of feelings in the departure from the parents' home, and how the interviewed students and their parents interpret and manage these feelings. Another topic that caught my attention was the anticipation of residential mobility in the interviewees' future expectations regarding the labour market which influenced the students' decision to leave home during education. In the following step, the socio-genetic type formation, the goal is to find out whether it is possible to ascribe typical patterns of meaning to specific groups of respondents. For my research, this means to investigate whether, for example, Italians and Germans use different patterns of meaning or whether there are typical interpretations of wealthy and less wealthy interviewees or of female and male participants. The socio-genetic type formation is therefore always preliminary because the small number of cases involved does not allow making general claims about the whole German and Italian population.

Compared to a quantitative research design, this method has the advantage of providing insight into the tacit and implicit cultural knowledge of the interview partners. It also helps the researcher to become aware of the taken-for-grantedness in her own reasoning. The advantage of this method thus lies in its exploratory character. It offers the possibility to reconstruct and understand how taken-for-granted, "atheoretical" knowledge – as Mannheim (1952) calls it –

influences human behaviour by examining in detail a small number of cases. Furthermore, it enables insight into how the various patterns of meaning concerning the departure from the parental home are connected in the reasoning of the interviewees. This method allows exploring the subjective perspective of the interviewees and the frameworks of orientation that they perceive as typical for a certain social group, such as Italians and Germans. Sometimes, the interviewees make this perception explicit, for example, by saying that their mother is not a very typical Italian or that their mother is different from most other mothers they know. More often, however, they give implicit hints about their perception of what is normal in their cultural context. It is thus necessary to look at the formulations of the interviewees and analyse *how* they express their ideas. For this part of the analysis, I will introduce three conceptual “tools” that proved to be useful in the analysis of implicit cultural knowledge: 1) the generalised other; 2) the concept of feeling management; and, 3) the usage of metaphors.

### **4.5.3 The generalised other**

A useful conceptual tool for the investigation of shared patterns of meaning and normative expectations is the concept of the ‘generalised other’, coined by George Herbert Mead (1962). It has been fruitfully applied in the investigation of the departure from the parental home to examine how everyday moralities are articulated in interview conversations (see Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005, 2007). References by the interviewees to the so-called generalised other indicate common normative expectations. These common expectations find expression, for example, in interview formulations such as “the majority of people think...” or “most guys I know do...” or, more generally, “you just do it this way”. The interviewees locate themselves with regard to the habits and norms of their social environment not only by comparing themselves to significant others such as family members, neighbours, friends, colleagues, etc., but also by making comparisons to the generalised other. In the case of deviance from the norms, they anticipate consequences such as negative comments or other forms of sanctions. The generalised other is part of the cultural knowledge that the members of society share. Interview formulations such as “you just don’t/do ...” and the like give an insight into prevailing norms and shared patterns of meaning that are part of the interviewee’s social context. References to the generalised other thus provide information about what the interviewees implicitly consider as normal.

#### **4.5.4 Feeling management**

Another revealing aspect in the investigation of culture is to focus on what people feel and say about their feelings related to certain decisions and experiences. In the process of socialisation, human individuals learn to synchronise their behaviour and their patterns of interpretations which facilitates cooperation. Similarly, they also learn to feel according to the requirements of their social world because a large part of the emotional reactions to certain environmental phenomena is not only inherited genetically, but shaped through socialisation (Damasio 1999). According to Hochschild, culture not only influences our behaviour by providing schemas and rules; but it also influences what we feel and how we learn to perceive, shape and control our feelings. This is of special relevance since emotions and feelings constitute an important “sensory organ” that signals changes in our environment and helps to evaluate them (Hochschild 1998). Culture thus provides orientation to human behaviour in a twofold way: through our explicit and implicit knowledge of the world, and in the form of embodied knowledge through our emotional reactions and feelings. The implicit and embodied aspects of culture contribute in particular to its persistence over time.

The embodiment of cultural rules and the management of feelings according to prevailing normative expectations is an ongoing process in which feelings and norms influence each other. If our cultural repertoire signals that a feeling is out of place we try to use strategies of feeling management to make our feelings more apt to the situation. Emotion management can therefore be defined as the attempt to “shape and reshape our feelings to fit our inner cultural guidelines” (Hochschild 1998: 9). Our internalised schemas and prescriptions for feelings indicate whether our emotional reaction to a particular event is appropriate or not. Only if our culturally shared feeling ‘dictionary’ contains a schema for the feeling which we are experiencing, are we able to express it and perceive it consciously. In the same manner, our feeling ‘bible’, as Hochschild (1998) calls it, helps us to control whether a certain emotion is appropriate or not in a given situation. Cultural feeling rules are a part of our cultural system, containing shared meanings, values and norms.

Observing how people express and explain their feelings and how they try to manage them, can thus be a revealing research strategy in the investigation of culture. I will therefore not only focus on the analysis of meanings and prescriptions that relate to behavioural decisions, but also on the feelings that the interviewees mention and describe in relation to the process of leaving home, how they managed their feelings, and how they made sense of them. Here as well,

the concept of the generalised other is a useful research tool because interviewees talking about their feelings often make reference to the generalised other.

#### **4.5.5 Metaphors**

In certain cases, shared cultural knowledge becomes accessible in the analysis of metaphors and catch phrases that the interviewees use. Metaphors are figures of speech in which images are used to transmit condensed meanings. They are culture-specific. That is, their meaning is part of the shared cultural knowledge of a society. The members of society learned them through communication together with the language they speak. For this reason, Quinn characterised metaphors as “culture-laden” expressions (2005: 49). Metaphors are used to communicate efficiently because they transmit condensed patterns of meaning in very few words. They convey complex meanings in a simple image and help avoiding long and extensive formulations. Therefore they function as communicative shortcuts to simplify the communication about complex but well-known ideas. The usage of metaphors to express a certain point of view in a conversation thus indicates that this point of view is largely shared by the members of society and nearly taken for granted. Metaphorical formulations thus contain “crystallised” cultural knowledge. They are an illustrative example of Hofstede’s definition of culture as a “crystallization of history in the minds, hearts, and hands of the present generation” (Hofstede 1980/2001: 12). “Standing on your own two feet” or “cutting the umbilical cord” are typical examples of metaphors used by the interviewees of the present study in relation to the departure from the parental home.



## **5. The interpretation of economic conditions**

The results of previous studies presented in the first two chapters indicate that a late departure from the parental home cannot be explained exclusively by economic conditions. Neither market fluctuations nor the economic conditions provided by national institutional structures can be identified as main causes to the late departure from the parental home of southern Europeans. In particular, the results of studies analysing the living arrangements of second-generation immigrants make it especially clear that the departure from the parental home is not a universal reaction to specific economic conditions. These findings suggest that the perception of reality is filtered by frameworks of meaning which people apply to ‘read’ their environment and make their decisions according to these culturally shaped interpretations. This chapter gives insight into the way the interviewees make sense of their individual economic conditions and how their economic situation influences their living arrangements as students or parents of adult children.

Before presenting the results, I will give a brief overview on the financial conditions of students and the state support that is available to them in both locations of the field research. The comparison reveals that public support for students in Italy (more precisely in Tuscany) is neither virtually inexistent, nor is the public support for students in Germany as generous as it is often commonly assumed (e.g., by Daniel et al. 1999, Rusconi 2006, Cuzzocrea 2009).

### **5.1 The financial situation of students in Bonn and Florence**

According to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the living expenses of university students in Italy and Germany are fairly similar. Based on the experience of German exchange students in Italy and on survey data from Germany (see Isserstadt et al. 2012: 252), the DAAD suggests an amount of approximately 750 Euros per month on average for both countries.<sup>21</sup> However, the economic conditions for students vary considerably within the two countries according to regions, cities and universities. Therefore, the description of the

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<sup>21</sup> Sources: for Italy: <http://www.daad.de/laenderinformationen/italien/land/de/5133-leben-in-italien/> ; for Germany: <http://www.daad.de/deutschland/deutschland/leben-in-deutschland/06466.de.html> (accessed September 2012).

institutional context provided here focuses on the two cities and regions where the fieldwork took place. This regional focus aims at providing a more detailed picture of the local conditions of studying for the interviewees. Not only rents and incomes differ regionally: tuition fees and contributions to be paid by the students also vary depending on the university. Moreover, in Italy, student grants differ in each region. That is, some regions in Italy provide more financial support to the students who are enrolled at their universities than other Italian regions do. Giving a complete national picture of the costs and the public support in all Italian and German regions would therefore go beyond the scope of this study. The regional public agency which supports students in Florence is the 'DSU Toscana' ('Diritto allo Studio Universitario'); in Bonn it is the 'Studentenwerk Bonn'.

### **5.1.1 Annual tuition fees and contributions in Bonn and Florence**

In 2006/2007, the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia introduced tuition fees at most universities in that region. That is, during the time of the interviews, students at the University of Bonn were paying fees for attending university. After a change of the regional government, the tuition fees in this federal state were abolished again in the academic year of 2011/2012. Annual tuition fees and contributions to be paid by the students of the University of Bonn in 2009 were approximately 1.420 Euros per year. They also included the compulsory payment for the student ticket for regional public transport of approximately 260 Euros (Universität Bonn 2006: 5, Asta der Universität Bonn 2009: 6).<sup>22</sup> In 2009, 8 percent of the students in North Rhine-Westphalia were exempted from paying tuition fees to alleviate the costs of studying for their families (Isserstedt et al. 2010: 276). The other students who were unable to pay the tuition fees had the opportunity to take out a loan at reduced rates of interest to cover these expenses (Bundesagentur für Arbeit et al. 2008). In North Rhine-Westphalia, 19 percent of the students used this loan to pay their tuition fees in 2009 (Isserstedt et al. 2010: 24).

At the University of Florence, the annual fees and contributions to be paid for most subjects of study in 2009 ranged from 315 Euros to 2.015 Euros, depending on the income of the parents (Università degli Studi di Firenze 2009: 56). The income group that was required to pay an amount of 1.165,62 Euros, which is similar to the general fees and contributions in Bonn less

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<sup>22</sup> The tuition fees and contributions in Florence do not include a ticket for public transport. The payment of the ticket in Bonn, however, is compulsory, which means that all students have to pay it, even if they do not use it. Due to the resulting high number of buyers, the regional transport services offer the student ticket at a reduced rate.

the student ticket, were the parents earning between 30.000 and 40.000 Euros.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, those students who are entitled to receive a grant paid by the public agency for the support of students are almost completely exempted from paying these fees and contributions ([www.dsu.toscana.it](http://www.dsu.toscana.it), accessed in April 2011). In Tuscany, this applied to about 8 percent of the students in 2009 (DSU Toscana 2011: 2).

Comparing these numbers of the two locations of fieldwork, we can summarise that only in Florence, Tuscany, students from lower income classes receive a reduction on the tuition fees. In Bonn, North Rhine-Westphalia, instead, they are required to pay the full amount. Based on the relatively high share of students who took out a loan in order to pay for these fees in North Rhine-Westphalia, we can assume that the tuition fees do indeed constitute a financial burden to the students which they cannot easily defray from their incomes.

### **5.1.2 Rents in Bonn and Florence**

Comparing the costs of accommodations in Florence and Bonn is not easy since no systematic comparative studies are available and prices vary over time. However, a look at the online offers for accommodation reveals that a single room in a shared flat is usually somewhat more expensive in Florence than in Bonn. In both cities, prices for a single room range approximately from 280 to 500 Euros. However, more offers in the lower price categories – ranging from around 300 to 350 Euros – were available in Bonn than in Florence. Despite being a rather small city, Florence almost compares in renting costs to big cities such as Rome or Milan. This price development is caused by a large demand for accommodation resulting from the exceptionally high numbers of foreign students in this city. In order to mitigate the problem of high rents, special contracts for students have been established. With these contracts, the landlords who offer their accommodations at predetermined reduced prices pay lower taxes on the income that they receive for the rental of their property. At the moment, the rents of student accommodations in bigger Northern and Central Italian cities nevertheless tend to be higher than in German cities.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that rents for student rooms in Italy usually include

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<sup>23</sup> Annual tuition fees and contributions in Florence depending on income groups in 2009, according to ISEEU (Indicatore della Situazione Economica Equivalente): income below 17.500 Euros per year: 315,62 Euros, income from 17.500 to 20.000 Euros per year: 565,62 Euros, 20.000 to 25.000 Euros: 765,62 Euros, 25.000 to 30.000 Euros: 965,62 Euros, 30.000 to 40.000 Euros: 1.165,62 Euros, 40.000 to 50.000 Euros: 1.365,62 Euros, 50.000 to 60.000 Euros: 1.565,62 Euros, 60.000 to 75.000 Euros: 1.765,62 Euros, more than 75.000 Euros: 2.015,62 Euros (Università degli Studi di Firenze 2009: 56).

<sup>24</sup> This statement however is based on the comparison of only a few room offers.

the basic furniture, such as a bed, a desk, wardrobe closets and bookshelves. This justifies to some extent the higher rents. In contrast, students in Germany usually rent empty flats and bring along their own furniture when they move in. This may be, for example, the furniture from their room at the parental home, where they consequently “lose” their room, or they are given used furniture from the family network. In addition, they buy (usually low-cost) furniture or even collect used pieces from the streets during the day of bulk rubbish collection, or manufacture it themselves.

Besides finding an accommodation on the free housing market, students in Italy and Germany can also apply for a place in a hall of residence. In Bonn, the main organisation that supports students in their daily lives and provides accommodation to them is the “Studentenwerk Bonn”. They offer support to the nearly 34.000 students of the university and the university of applied sciences in Bonn. Altogether they are able to provide accommodations to nearly 4.200 students in halls of residence. The rents in these halls of residence are reduced compared to most rents on the free housing market. Single rooms with shared bathroom and kitchen, and single apartments (bathroom and kitchen facilities included) usually cost approximately between 200 and 300 Euros (from 175 Euros minimum to 445 Euros maximum approximately). Shared rooms are unusual and cost 135 Euros per person.<sup>25</sup>

In Florence, the agency that provides support to students is called “DSU Toscana” (“Diritto allo Studio Toscana”). The number of young people who they aim to support is much larger than in Bonn since the University of Florence alone has about 60.000 students. DSU Toscana offers 1.225 places of accommodation in halls of residence for students in Florence. Room sharing is very common, single rooms are rare. The most salient difference with respect to Germany is that accommodations in these halls of residence are free of charge. That is, the students who obtain accommodation in such halls do not pay rent or extra charges for electricity, heating, water and internet access, as they would do in German student halls. Another difference is that rooms in German halls of residence are usually allocated on a first-come-first-served-basis without any other restrictions. In Italy (Tuscany), in contrast, they are assigned according to the income of the students’ family, taking also the study performance into account, but only to

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<sup>25</sup> Source: [www3.uni-bonn.de](http://www3.uni-bonn.de), [www.fh-bonn-rhein-sieg.de](http://www.fh-bonn-rhein-sieg.de), [www.studentenwerk-bonn.de](http://www.studentenwerk-bonn.de) (accessed April 2011).

students whose family home is more than one hour away from the university (by public transport).<sup>26</sup>

### **5.1.3 Public support for students in Bonn**

Depending on the income of the parents, students in Germany have the possibility of obtaining financial support from the state to defray their living expenses. This support – called BAföG support – consists of a student loan without interest, in combination with a grant. In North Rhine-Westphalia, where the University of Bonn is situated, 20 percent of the students received BAföG support in 2006 (Isserstedt et al. 2007: 261). The monthly amount to which a student is eligible is calculated depending on the parents income and the rent paid by the student. The monthly sum a student can obtain, for example, can range from 1 Euro up to 648 Euros as was the case in 2009 (the maximum BAföG support in 2006 was 585 Euros per month and 643 Euros in 2008), and is available during the standard period of study (usually 3 years for a bachelor's degree, and 1 to 2 years for a master's degree).

Five years after the standard period of study, the student is required to pay back half of the amount received during his or her studies, over several years by instalments, or all at once. The other half is a grant – that is a state subsidy – and is not required to be returned. If students need more time to finish their studies they have the possibility, within two years, to obtain a loan without interest for another year, in order to finish their studies. This additional loan is not part of the BAföG scheme, and thus, contains no subsidies. It needs to be reimbursed completely. Only if students are selected by a foundation that supports students do they have the possibility to receive a full scholarship, which does not have to be reimbursed.

The introduction of tuition fees in some German federal states increased the costs of studying notably. To help students with paying the tuition fees charged by most universities in North Rhine-Westphalia, at the time of the interviews, the federal state government had introduced a special loan at reduced interest rates without credit assessment. Moreover, in order to limit the financial burden of the young people, a law provides for a limitation of students' indebtedness at a maximum of 10.000 Euros per student, comprising the debts of tuition loans plus BAföG loans. If students are not eligible for BAföG loans they can also take out a loan at a bank. In this case, however, they have to pay interest (Bundesagentur für Arbeit et al. 2008).

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<sup>26</sup> Source: [www.unifi.it](http://www.unifi.it), [www.dsu.toscana.it](http://www.dsu.toscana.it) (accessed April 2011).

Student support in Germany does not serve the purpose of making students financially independent from their parents against the parents' will, rather to give young people from families with lower financial possibilities the opportunity to enrol in university studies. Parents are meant to be the main source of support during higher education. Eighty-seven percent of the students in Germany receive money from their parents during their studies. On average, parents support their children in tertiary education with 445 Euros per month (2009). In 2009, 23 percent of the German students received a BAföG loan to complement their parental support. Students living away from home who were entitled to BAföG support received on average 430 Euros per month in 2009. However, the second most important source of income for students after parental support is not state support or other loans (5 percent) or grants (3 percent) but student jobs. Sixty-five percent of the students contribute to their livelihood by working in student jobs (Eurostudent III 2008). On average, they earned 323 Euros per month on these student jobs in 2009 (Isserstedt et al. 2010: 13-14). The average wage for student jobs was 10 Euros (net) per hour: for undergraduate students it was 9 Euros (ibid.: 393).

#### **5.1.4 Public support for students in Florence**

In Italy in 2006, 39 percent of the students worked in student jobs, and 11 percent received grants from a public body (Eurostudent III 2008).<sup>27</sup> Different from the situation in Germany, financial support available to students in Italy generally consists of grants. That is, whereas in the German BAföG system the students must reimburse half of the monies awarded to them, this is not the case for students who receive financial support in Italy. Another difference is that Italian grants are allocated not only on the basis of the parents' income but also according to the students' study performance. In Germany, on the other hand, study performance is not relevant for receiving BAföG support at the beginning of one's studies. However, later on during the course of their studies, BAföG beneficiaries must prove that they have passed all exams on time within the standard period of studies. If they do not pass the exams on time they lose their BAföG support for the rest of their studies.

The Tuscan agency for the support of university students differentiates between three groups of students according to which they distribute different types of grants. The first group are the students whose parental home is situated in the city where they attend university. This group

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<sup>27</sup> The Eurostudent data for Italy do not contain information on the amount of income which students receive on average from student jobs and from their parents.

of beneficiaries receive a grant of 75 to 83 Euros per month plus one free meal per day in a DSU canteen and are exempted from paying tuition fees. The second group of students are defined as commuters because they are able to travel within one hour from their parental home to university by public transport and thus are supposed to live at home and commute to university. They are entitled to grants between 100 and 133 Euros per month plus one free meal per day in a DSU canteen and the exemption from paying tuition fees. The third group are the students whose parents live more than one hour (by public transport) away from their university. Hence commuting is more difficult or impossible. These students are eligible to receive a grant of 47 to 107 Euros plus two daily meals for free in DSU canteens plus free accommodation in a DSU hall of residence, and are exempted from having to pay tuition fees. If there are not enough places in these halls of residence to accommodate all the students who have requested it, the students can obtain financial contribution from DSU Toscana for renting an accommodation on the free housing market. The housing support paid to the students can amount to a maximum of about 130 Euros per month. In calculating the maximum amount of public funding which a student in Tuscany living away from home is entitled to receive we obtain a sum of 445 Euros per month: that is, 107 Euros as a grant, plus 130 Euros as housing subsidy, plus 183 Euros for two meals a

**Table 5.1:** Monthly grants from public agency for students in Florence and Bonn, in 2009

Florence (Italy), DSU Toscana			Bonn (Germany), Studentenwerk Bonn
<b>Living with parents in the city of studies</b>	<b>Commuters, living with parents</b>	<b>Living and studying away from home</b>	<b>Distance from university to parental home not relevant</b>
75-83 Euros grant, plus one meal per day (equivalent to about 90 Euros), plus exemption from tuition fees (about 25 Euros)	100-133 Euros grant, plus one meal per day (equivalent to about 90 Euros), plus exemption from tuition fees (about 25 Euros)	47-107 Euros grant, plus two meals per day (about 183 Euros), plus free accommodation in student hall or up to 130 Euros housing subsidy, plus exemption from tuition fees (about 25 Euros)	1-648 Euros (50 percent grant + 50 percent loan), on average 430 Euros for students living away from home (grant + loan, i.e. 215 Euros grant on average for students living away from home)
= max. 198 Euros	= max. 248 Euros	= max. 445 Euros	= max. 324 Euros

day,<sup>28</sup> plus the exemption from tuition fees of 25 Euros per months. Altogether, these students receive more than 100 Euros more per month than the maximum amount of the BAföG grant in Germany (the maximum amount of BAföG support in 2009 was 648 Euros of which usually 50 percent, i.e. 324 Euros, was given as a grant, and the other 50 percent was given as a loan).<sup>29</sup>

### **5.1.5 Generous student support in Germany?**

The comparison reveals that the support for students in Tuscany is not as meagre as one might expect in comparison to the student support in Germany (see also table 5.1). However, due to a lack of funding in some Italian regions (not in Tuscany), the number of actual beneficiaries is lower than the number of students who are actually entitled to receive scholarships in Italy (Elevati 2008: 478). As described previously, in 2006, 11 percent of the Italian students received grants from a public agency, compared to 20 percent in Germany. In comparing the percentages of beneficiaries, we need to bear in mind, however, that a part of the German students receiving state support obtain only low amounts of money, for example 40 Euros per month, or even less – of which 20 Euros are in the form of a grant, and the remaining 20 Euros are allocated as a loan. That is, the share of beneficiaries of state support in Germany includes students who only receive very small grants. This is not the case in Italy. For this reason, it is difficult to evaluate by comparing the shares of beneficiaries, how much the Italian or Tuscan state support actually lags behind the percentage of state support actually received by students in Germany.

Another salient difference between the two systems is the combination of grants and loans in Germany. On the contrary, in Italy the lack of public funding for student grants has not been compensated by the introduction of student loans on a large scale. Apparently, the German BAföG system reaches a greater number of students while keeping the share of public spending relatively low by combining grants with loans. This helps to increase the monthly sum received by each student as well as the number of beneficiaries. In Italy instead, loans only play a subordinate role in the financing of studies. For example in Tuscany, only advanced students (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of studies onwards) have the possibility to take out unsecured loans to finish

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<sup>28</sup> A full meal at a “DSU Toscana” canteen cost 3 Euros for the students enrolled at Tuscan universities in this period of time. Meals are also provided on weekends (<http://www.dsu.toscana.it/it/ristorazione/mense/firenze/index.html>; accessed April 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Students in Germany who are among the top 30 percentile of their year group and major who finish their studies within the standard period of their degree programme receive a waiver of 25 percent on their debts at the end of their studies. That is, for these students the maximum monthly BAföG support of 648 Euros in 2009 would contain 405 Euros grant and 243 Euros loan.

their studies or to continue their education at the master's or doctorate level if their own financial means do not allow for it. The high unemployment rates of young graduates are often given as a reason why Italian students prefer living with their parents instead of taking out a loan to live independently during their studies. On the other hand, higher education does pay off financially, especially in Italy, which would make the idea of investing in education individually by taking out a loan worthwhile. Italian university graduates have better chances of finding employment and have higher incomes than high school and middle school graduates. The differences in income between higher education graduates and people with lower education are stronger in Italy than in Germany or the Nordic countries (Cipollone et al. 2007: 262, fig. 11.3). This income increase suggests that individual investment in education pays off, as it is supposed to according to the general mentality in Germany or the Nordic countries, and even more so in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where the income differences between higher educated and lower educated people are still more pronounced, and student loans are very common.

Also in the housing sector, the strategy of the Studentenwerk Bonn in Germany differs from the Tuscan DSU housing support. While in Tuscany students usually live in DSU halls of residence for free; students in Germany, on the other hand, pay monthly rent to the Studentenwerk which is below the price of the free housing market. This way the Studentenwerk offers a higher number of affordable accommodations, and thus creates favourable conditions to a greater group of beneficiaries instead of providing accommodations for free to a smaller number of beneficiaries. Another major difference between the two systems of student support is that, in Tuscany, housing support is only granted to students living more than one hour away from the city of their university. The German agency does not make such distinction. In Germany, housing support is granted to the students who present a contract of tenancy.

Last but not least, we have to bear in mind that German students younger than 25 years of age receive indirect support from the state in the form of child allowance paid to the parents (164 Euros per month per child for the first and second child in 2009). Since students are regarded as financially dependent on their parents, this child allowance is granted to all parents with children who are still in education and have not yet reached their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, regardless of the parents' income.<sup>30</sup> In Tuscany, family allowance is means-tested, that is, it is not granted to all parents.

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<sup>30</sup> This means that, according to this regulation, German students are expected to finish their studies before age 25.

Moreover, it is only paid up until the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of the children who are still in education and only if more than three children under 26 belong to the family household.<sup>31</sup>

From this comparison it appears that the possibilities of Italian students to receive state funding for their studies are indeed lower than in Germany. On the other hand, student support in Italy is not virtually inexistent, as is frequently assumed in the literature, even though it is largely granted as services and hence may be easily overlooked when comparing it to the financial support allotted in other countries. In addition, we have to consider that student support in Germany is granted partly in the form of loans, and therefore less generous than it may appear at first glance. The major difference between the two systems of student support is that in Italy, only students whose parents live at a greater distance from the university are entitled to a grant in the maximum amount, whereas in Germany the distance between university and the parental home is not a criterion for receiving higher levels of financial support. Such a restriction, as in the Italian system, may have two opposing consequences: On the one hand, it may trigger the residential mobility of students over longer distances; on the other hand, it may prolong the co-residence between students and their parents. In a society in which early residential independence is normative, young people may be encouraged to choose a university that is farther away from the parental home in order to fulfil the criteria for receiving a grant. In contrast, in a society in which family ties are strong and early residential independence is not normative, students only receive full financial support from public funding if commuting from the parental home to university is impossible. Hence, the effects of state supports on the living arrangements of students may be mediated by the social norms for leaving home.

Another important factor that is often overlooked but clearly needs to be included in the comparison of the financial conditions of students are the housing costs of their parents, which are comparatively high in Germany due to low rates of home ownership. I will elaborate on this topic in the discussion section of this chapter.

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<sup>31</sup> Sources: <http://www.unifi.it/CMpro-v-p-5325.html>; [http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/nn\\_26546/zentraler-Content/A09-Kindergeld/A091-steuerrechtliche-Leistungen/Allgemein/Dauer-und-Hoehe.html](http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/nn_26546/zentraler-Content/A09-Kindergeld/A091-steuerrechtliche-Leistungen/Allgemein/Dauer-und-Hoehe.html) (accessed September 2012).

## **5.2 The financial costs as perceived by the interviewees**

### **5.2.1 Where there's a will there's a way**

The general financial situation of students living in both of the field locations chosen for the study does not necessarily coincide with how students and parents actually perceive and interpret their individual financial situations and opportunities. In this respect, for the purposes of this study, the following are a few of the questions and issues that come into play in the individual's perception and interpretation of his or her financial opportunities. Do they deem the money they have at their disposal sufficient for living independently or not? How relevant are material conditions and the standard of living in the individual decision to leave home? How do the interviewees perceive and evaluate the different factors involved, for example, the opportunity to seek student employment, to find affordable accommodations, to receive a student grant etc.? Do the Italian interviewees interpret similar economic situations differently than the German interviewees? Did the interviewees who stayed at home relate this to a lack of financial resources? Did the interviewees who left home link their behaviour to sufficient financial opportunities? Or, put differently, did sufficient financial opportunities lead nearly automatically to an early departure from the parental home in the interpretations of the interviewees?

Given the different living conditions of students in Italy and Germany, I expected that Italian students would immediately refer to high rents and low opportunities to get additional financial support in Florence when talking about the selection of their university. Analysing the respective interview passages it becomes clear, however, that the interpretation of financial issues given by the interviewees in both countries do not differ strongly from each other. On the contrary, they follow the same underlying logic. This underlying pattern can best be summarised by the proverb "Where there's a will there's a way." That is to say, most interview answers in this sample follow the logic of this statement: if you really want to achieve your residential independence you can do it.

This common pattern of interpretation becomes especially salient in the final part of the interview, when the interviewees were asked to reflect upon the fictitious situations in the vignettes (see appendix). The students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a girl who really wants to leave home, yet her parents would like her to stay for emotional reasons, in addition to not being able to afford the costs of an independent residence. In this case, all students

replied that if the girl really feels a strong desire to leave home, then she should, because otherwise she would regret it later. Interviewees in both countries held that she should get a student job and apply for a grant (or a loan in the German case) so as to be less economically dependent on her parents. The interviewees agreed that if the girl really wants to go to another city for her studies, she can make it work, even under difficult financial conditions. Apart from this general evaluation of a fictitious case, the autobiographic parts of the interviews also reveal this attitude.

### **Remaining at the parental home despite sufficient financial resources**

During the interview process, especially with regard to those interviews with students from middle-class backgrounds who live with their parents, it became clear that the interviewees did not generally interpret leaving home as a matter of money. This became particularly evident in the interviews of the students coming from families who could afford residential autonomy. Despite the abundant economic situations of their families which would permit such students to leave home and live on their own, this did not appear to be motivation enough for them to do so. Thomas, for example, a 20-year-old student in Germany, lives with his parents and commutes to university. His parents, a doctor and an engineer, who immigrated from Poland, are both employed in their respective professions. He is their only child. When asked about the financial advantages of living with his parents he says: “Yes, it saves money, but this wasn’t the decisive point. I just find it more pleasant this way.”

In contrast, Louise, a 23-year-old German student decided not to commute, although it would be possible, but moved to Bonn instead. Remaining at the parental home and daily commuting would not be an acceptable alternative to her. She would only accept such a solution if she were facing a very tough financial situation. Instead, she prefers to reduce her standard of living and work. Her parents pay for her rent and other basic expenses. For the purpose of saving money she once thought about changing university and continuing her studies in a region without tuition fees, which means moving even further away. She dropped this idea because changing university in the middle of one’s studies could cause complications and a loss of time.

In Italy, it sometimes happens that, when families inherit a flat, it is inhabited by their adult sons or daughters who rent out the other rooms to students. This was the case with Martina, a 27-year-old student in Florence. When she was 20, her mother inherited a second flat in

Florence, near the flat where the family was living, which Martina was allowed to take. Martina left her parental home at the age of 20 because she wanted to live independently. Her mother agreed with this plan. Martina pays her daily expenses from the rent income she receives from her flatmates. Moreover, she works to pay for additional expenses. Her parents pay the tuition fees for her studies. She admits that she lives in an economically privileged situation, but also explains that her living arrangement differs from that of many other young Italians, not only because of her property, but because of her mother who supported her residential independence. This support is not self-evident in Italy. According to her impressions:

[Italian] parents tend to try to keep the children at home as long as possible. Maybe now it's changing a bit, but to me it seems that the people ... it's unlikely that they leave home. I've clearly been lucky because I got this flat. I have the economic opportunity to leave home that others don't have. But to me it seems that even if there is this possibility, people always tend to postpone the decision, or the parents tend to say: No, stay here, it's better like this [...]. (Martina, 27, Italy)

Such an example of a student in Florence who prefers to live with his parents even though he has the economic opportunity to leave home is Marco (23 years old). About his financial situation he says:

From a financial point of view, my parents have always been willing to invest in us [he and his sister]. Thus no problems. They pay for everything. I don't even remember how much the tuition fees are. They take care of it; yes, I know, I'm lucky in this respect. (Marco, 23, Italy)

His parents, who own a family enterprise, would also support him financially if he moved away for his studies, as his sister did. His older sister decided to study in another city although she could have studied the same discipline in Florence. However, Marco preferred to remain in the family household, thus he enrolled at the University of Florence. Similar to Martina's case, his family owns another flat in Florence. At the time of the interview, he was thinking about moving there. When asked why he did not think about moving there earlier, he replied: "I didn't feel up to it."

The way these four students from middle-class backgrounds in both countries frame the financial aspects of their living arrangements reveals that they do not interpret remaining in the parental home as an economic necessity, but as a preference. Whether they want to leave home or not depends on their attitudes and values, and not on their budget. These students do not

experience severe financial constraints. Usually, they only have to adapt to a lower standard of living after leaving the parental household.

However, we need to bear in mind that leaving home under these economic conditions is not a great challenge and can be done easily from a financial point of view. Therefore, it is instructive to also examine how students from families who are less well off interpret the relevance of economic factors in the decision to leave home.

### **Leaving home at any cost**

A number of students in this sample, in both countries, left the parental home despite noticeable economic difficulties. Although their parents were not able to pay for their independent living, or could only partly afford it, these students were either not eligible for state subsidies, or received very small amounts of support which did not cover their expenses. These problems, nevertheless, did not stop some of the students from leaving home. In these interview texts, the underlying frame “Where there’s a will there’s a way,” becomes especially palpable.

A very characteristic case among these students who wanted to leave home at any price is Simon, a 23-year-old German. Having grown up in a small town 50 kilometres away from Bonn, he is happy to leave this place when he starts his university studies, even though daily commuting would be possible: “I really didn’t want to live in [my town] anymore. In the first semester, I wanted to live in Bonn.” However, his financial situation did not permit him to live on his own. His parents were only able to give him a part of the money he would need for his living and accommodations. Furthermore, the state support he requested turned out to be much lower than expected. All in all, the 350 Euros per month he obtained from his parents and his grant were not sufficient to cover his expenses which, according to him, amount to 550 Euros.<sup>32</sup> After accumulating rent arrears and other debts for a total of 2.500 Euros in the first year in Bonn, he needs to (temporarily) give up his independent way of living. He moves back into his family home and takes two student jobs to pay off the debts. He works day and night as a receptionist and in a bar, performing poorly on his exams as a consequence of the heavy workload. After repaying the debts, he moves back to Bonn, finds an affordable flat and continues working in his

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<sup>32</sup> The average living expenses of students living on their own in Germany in 2009, however, amount to 762 Euros per month (Isserstedt et al. 2010: 252). Simon thus belongs to the quartile of the ‘thriftiest’ students in Germany, who on average spend 572 Euros per month, while the quartile of the ‘wealthiest’ students have monthly living expenses of 988 Euros on average (see *ibid.*: 270, in 2009).

two jobs to support himself. He acquires basic knowledge of accountancy to manage his budget and, after awhile, achieves a better work-study-balance which helps him to do better on his exams.

Simon describes the town where he had been living during his school days as conservative and provincial. In his view, this was the main reason why he did not find many friends there. Moving to Bonn, a city he very much likes and enjoys, where he found people with similar world views, improved his quality of life remarkably. According to Simon, being in an urban environment, which he perceives as more open and more stimulating than the town where his family lives, is worth the effort of having two jobs in addition to his studies. Against the intangible benefits, financial considerations become secondary to him:

The people here [in Bonn] are similar to me. In a way, these are the kind of people that I expected to find here. And, err, yes, as I said, I've been really happy here, you know, [...] even though it is still sometimes difficult from a financial point of view. (Simon, 23)

What counts for him, from the beginning on, is the inspiring social environment of the bigger city:

During the first two semesters I completely ignored this financial aspect. It didn't play a role for me at all. I had gained the freedom not to be tied anymore to this small [town name] where you basically can't get anywhere without a car. Finally being in Bonn – having the possibility of finding something interesting at every corner and meeting new people – this is what was important to me. And this basically took priority over everything else, even the financial issues. (Simon, 23)

When planning his transfer to Bonn, Simon did not consider any possible financial constraints in his decision to move:

I was pretty unworried and naïve at the beginning. I simply thought: Yes, it's gonna workout somehow. I will certainly get a lot of BAföG [state support] and so on. And yes, my BAföG request was accepted – and then there was basically a series of rude surprises [regarding the unexpectedly small amount of state support that he actually received and the high expenses of his room in Bonn]. (Simon, 23)

The state support he is entitled to, according to the calculations of the BAföG office, is 90 Euros per month only. Later he even loses this entitlement. The money which he receives from his parents does not cover his monthly costs. Nevertheless, instead of giving up his idea to live in Bonn, he finds the two jobs and starts earning his own money to pay the rent. Despite severe financial difficulties he does not question his desire to live independently. Simon only mentions that he restricted his choice to cities which were nearby. He says that for financial considerations

he chose a university city in the proximity which, however, was also his first choice among all other alternatives.

His mother, a care worker, equally prioritises criteria of self-realisation over financial constraints with regard to making the decisions to leave home and selecting a place to live. In her view it is important for her son to live where he prefers. She thinks that financial constraints are secondary to these decisions, and that it is possible to find viable solutions in the case of financial difficulties:

Interviewer: How about the financial issues when Simon left home? Did they play a role in the decision or ...?

Mother: That he went to Bonn? No, [head-shaking], didn't play a role. For Simon, it was really just a matter of him choosing where he really wanted to go. Simon went to Bonn because he wanted to be in Bonn. Simon went to high school because he wanted to learn Latin. Simon went to school because he wanted to learn to read. He went to Bonn because for him it was THE city. He just liked it more than others. As I said before, Bonn isn't very big, it's manageable. It has atmosphere. It's possible to go out in the evening, there are bars. There are sports facilities. There is all you need. There are book shops. You have everything, but it's manageable. He didn't like the very big cities. [...]

Interviewer: That means your opinion was to consider all possible places and then you would find a solution for the financial issues?

Mother: Exactly! Yes, yes ... We couldn't help as much as we wanted. We would love to help more, but it's not possible.

Roberto, a 27-year-old student in the German sample (whose father came as a guest-worker from Southern Italy), earns his living completely on his own, independently from his parents. Before he decided to enrol in higher education he had received professional training which had lasted three years. At the age of 24 he moved to the city where he now studies because he disliked his home city, as he says: "I just had to leave [name of his home city]. It wasn't the most exciting place [laughs]." Like Simon, he works two student jobs to earn his living. During his first semester he lived on his savings until he found the jobs. At the beginning he applied for BAföG support. The BAföG office, however, only grants him 14 Euros per months, calculated on

the basis of his parents' income (a working class family). After being notified about how little support he would receive, he decided not to utilise it and gets two jobs instead. He would only ask his parents to help out financially if he were in an emergency situation. Luckily, he found a tiny room in a student hall which costs around 220 Euros per month, which he assures is a very good bargain. Similar to Simon, the unexpectedly small state support did not discourage him from moving away from his home city. He prefers to live in a different city, even though he can only afford a tiny room and has to work a lot to earn a living. He even retains this preference despite the fact that he could have studied the same subject in his home city. He says: "If money is the only problem [...] somehow things will work out anyway."

In Anna's case it is her family, precisely her parents, who make a great effort to allow her to study in Florence. She comes from the South of Italy where she could not find a school of comparable quality and reputation as the one she attends in Florence. Her parents are self-employed artisans without any additional employees. Despite the health problems of her father they work extra hours in order to pay for her tuition fees and her cost of living. Due to the "really great sacrifices" her parents make for her she feels at fault:

They make a lot of sacrifices for me. Being here is, nevertheless, great, but on the other hand it is a difficult situation for me because I'm afraid that if I don't find a job in this field I will disappoint them. I hope I don't disappoint them. It's very difficult. (Anna, 20)

During the interview, she repeatedly stresses the responsibility which she feels regarding her choice of studying in Florence at a renowned and expensive (state) school. The effort of her parents becomes an indirect pressure to her, but also a source of motivation to work hard:

You feel so much at fault for your choice, you know? But on the other hand I tell myself: no, I'm not twiddling my thumbs here. I'm studying. I commit myself. I almost never go out. (Anna, 20)

The reason to make these efforts is the situation in Southern Italy which, according to her, does not offer attractive future perspectives and competitive educational opportunities. She thinks that it is more beneficial for young people to leave the South than to remain there for their studies, even if it is difficult from a financial point of view:

You have to go away to find something. If your parents cannot help you, then perhaps you can try to find a part-time job. I think if you really want to, you can make it. It depends a lot on how much you really want it. [...] I would prefer to have a small room and worse conditions – because now I'm really fine, thanks to my parents – instead of not being able to do what I want. (Anna, 20)

Anna further explains that she is preparing to apply for a grant that is based on merit. It is a grant which is available to a small group of students with low incomes and excellent study results. This is another reason why she works hard at her studies. This, she hopes, can release a part of the financial pressure on her family. Anna adds that she still feels as if she is in a privileged situation since, in her perception, only a minority of young Southern Italians have the opportunity to move to the North for their studies. Nevertheless, she does not see financial limitations as the main reason why more young Southern Italian students do not migrate to the North. In her opinion, it is a mix of factors, with financial reasons being one obstacle among others:

It is more difficult for a number of reasons; as I said before, partly the parents [who do not want their children to leave], partly the economic situation, partly the fear of facing a bigger city, a reality which is different from the provincial reality. (Anna, 20)

Tommaso, the other Southern Italian interviewee in the sample, provides a very similar explanation, also based on his observations among friends and acquaintances. Living partly on his savings from a previous job and partly on parental support, he sees economic factors as one element of the explanation, but not as the main reason:

[The reason is] Partly this [economic opportunities], partly, I repeat, because the mentality discourages this kind of choice: ‘no, but where will you go? What will you do? Who knows what’s out there? But how will you manage? ...’ It’s a matter of ignorance, not because they are good or bad [...], but because you are used to these ideas and these ideas are so strong in your mind that you accept them as the only existing possibility. (Tommaso, 32)

The way in which these interviewees in Italy and Germany frame possible financial obstacles to the departure from the parental home all follow the pattern “Where there’s a will there’s a way.” The interviewees agree that working hard – for the studies and/or on student jobs – makes it possible to leave the parental home even if family support and state allowances are low. In their interpretation, the departure from home depends on one’s will and motivation for leaving. If the motivation for leaving is high, it is possible to overcome financial hurdles. Even students who describe their family income as low employ this frame. In the next section, I will examine whether this pattern of meaning can be also reconstructed in the interviews of students with low incomes who are living with their parents.

### 5.2.2 Ignoring alternative options

The previous examples show that, despite strong economic constraints, students leave their parental home if they are highly motivated. Are the students with limited financial means who remain with their parents, therefore, to be considered less motivated to become residentially independent? Other frames of interpretation, however, would also be possible, for example, that these young people ascribe more relevance to economic factors even though the motivation for leaving is equally as high as in the previous group. This would most probably imply that they tried to leave home, yet did not succeed because of economic limitations which were largely impossible to overcome. The following examples show that this is not necessarily the case.

Linda, a 22-year-old student in Germany, has a similar economic background as Simon. Both of her parents work as skilled employees in non-academic positions. Therefore her chances for receiving state support would be low, in her opinion, because students from two-income families are usually not eligible for BAföG support. Nevertheless, as Linda explains, her parents' incomes are not sufficient to fully finance an independent household for her. She lives with her parents in a small village 30 km away from Bonn and commutes to university. At the beginning of the interview she says: "I don't live in Bonn. I would not be able to afford it because I don't get BAföG support." With this statement at the beginning of the interview, Linda starts a narrative sequence which indicates that economic constraints prevented her from choosing another university instead of the nearby University of Bonn. Her underlying frame can be summarised as: I wanted to leave but it was impossible because I didn't have the financial means. In the following interview sentences this frame is reproduced homologously:

The reason why I came here was simple: In Koblenz they don't offer [her subject]: it is only offered here in Bonn. And I didn't want to go to Cologne because it is simply too far away. Then I would have had to rent a flat, and I don't get BAföG support because both of my parents work.  
(Linda, 22)

Then immediately afterwards, however, the meaning starts to shift in her interview and becomes less homologous to the initial framing. What had initially appeared as coercion has now been reformulated as a preference:

And Bonn was, in that sense, nearby because I only have to take the bus and then the train and in 45 minutes I'm here. I voluntarily accept this instead of spending so much money on a flat. [...] I have never moved away; I have always lived at home and I actually like it. (Linda, 22)

Later on, her preference for staying with her parents becomes more salient:

Interviewer: You said you study here for financial reasons and because of the reputation of the university.

Linda: Also because it's nearby; I can live at home, which I like. [...] I have nothing against moving out, but, if I don't have to, I prefer living at home.

Comparing these interview lines with the interview sequences in the previous section, it becomes apparent that Linda does not mention any motive for leaving home. Simon and Roberto, for example, say that they needed a change of environment. This motivated them to earn money for living independently. Anna wanted to enrol in a study programme which did not exist in her home region. Tiziana was fed up with daily commuting to university. In Linda's interview, in contrast, it is impossible to find a motive explaining why she would like to leave home. Instead, Linda says she likes living at home for several reasons, including a time-consuming and costly hobby (horseback riding), her engagement in a local association, and sports activities with her parents. None of her remarks point to a strong motivation for leaving home and moving to Bonn. Furthermore, she did not apply for BAföG support because, as she says, she assumed beforehand that she would not be eligible. However, her interest in receiving BAföG support is low since she prefers not becoming indebted before finishing education and starting to work in her profession. She uses the money she earns from her student job for books and leisure activities.

Compared to Simon or Roberto, Linda ascribes more weight to financial constraints in the decision to leave home. At the same time, possible motivations for moving out are less relevant in her opinion. Whereas Simon says: "I really didn't want to live anymore in [my town] in the first semester. I wanted to live in Bonn", Linda states: "I have nothing against moving out. But, if I don't have to, then I prefer to remain at home." A possible reason that she can imagine for leaving home is the legal clerkship that follows after her studies as part of her education: If she does not find a place for the clerkship in or around Bonn, she would need to move away in order to complete this part of her education (which is a two-year practical training, including subsistence allowance). Here again, Linda's underlying frame is not: 'as soon as I receive money from the clerkship I will leave home', but: 'if I don't find a clerkship nearby I will have to leave home.' The comparative sequential analysis of Linda's interview suggests that financial means alone are not motivation enough to induce her departure from home. Instead, there are other

triggering factors which influence whether the interviewees perceive financial hurdles as obstructive. In Linda's interview such triggering factors are absent. Her initial frame – 'leaving home is a question of money' – is contested by another frame in which she stresses her preference for staying with her parents in her home village.

A similar pattern of two competing frames can be reconstructed in Lidia's interview. She is an Italian first-year-student, 19 years old, who commutes by train to university. The economic situation of her family is more tense than that of the other interviewees in the sample, her father being unemployed, and her mother working part-time as a supermarket cashier. When asked why she chose the University of Florence Lidia says:

I've chosen this one because it is very close to my home. [...] I know that the more renowned universities are elsewhere, but I can't afford them. I can't afford to move. (Lidia, 19)

She explains that even paying for her train tickets to university is already burden enough for her family. On the other hand, Lidia did not apply for public support, nor for transportation or for canteen meals, simply because she was not aware of this possibility. She did not know about it, nor did she look into possibilities of receiving financial support, which could also be due to the fact that she is at the very beginning of her studies. In general, her opinion is pessimistic about possible additional sources of income, as well as about student jobs:

The job offers are crazy. [...] One add requested a "Young woman recently graduated from high school with work experience." How is it possible, coming from secondary school, to already have work experience? [...] At the moment there aren't any jobs available, there's just nothing out there. (Lidia, 19)

Her generally pessimistic way of interpreting the current economic opportunities may, understandably, be influenced by the difficult employment situation of her parents. In this regard she differs from the other students in the Italian sample who assess the opportunities to find a student job more optimistically. Francesco, for example, when asked whether it was difficult to find a student job in Florence, replies:

No, no. It depends on if you want to work or not. If you want to work, then you will find a job. [Short, slightly disdainful laughter] Everyone wants to be a doctor or an architect [or some other type of professional, already before their graduation, instead of doing student jobs]. But you have to work your way up. I've worked as a waiter, as a cook, a dishwasher cleaning in a restaurant kitchen, as a warehouseman and as a coach for kids. [...] However, quite frankly speaking, it must

be said there are no regular jobs [it's difficult to find a permanent job]. But for the rest ...  
(Francesco, 25)

Other Italian interviewees worked, for example, as waiters or private tutors for school kids. None of the university students in this sample, with the exception of Lidia, questioned the possibility of being able to find a student job.

Later on in Lidia's interview, a second frame emerged which sheds a different light on her interpretation of remaining at home for financial reasons. When asked whether she would like to study elsewhere if she had more money, she replies that she would not:

Interviewer: If you had the economic opportunities, would you move away to study at a more renowned university?

Lidia: If I had the economic possibility? I never thought about it. Thinking about it now, I wouldn't do it because the department of [...] in Florence, even though it isn't the most renowned, is pretty good. I'm lucky that it's close to my home. Therefore I wouldn't do it. [...] I have my friends, my family, everything here. So, if I had to detach myself, it would be traumatic for me. Very much, that is ..., I would feel it really strongly as detachment. I don't know how long I would be able to bear being away from here.

Similar to Linda's case, in this interview passage, the first frame 'leaving home is a question of money,' becomes overlaid by a second frame which reads, 'leaving home is unattractive and undesirable for emotional reasons, independent from other factors such as money.' This second frame relativises the importance of the first. Other passages from her interview, presented in the following chapters, support the second frame, so that it will become more evident how relevant this second frame is. For now, we can retain that, in these cases, the frame 'leaving home is a question of money' does not stand alone, but appears accompanied and contested by the frame 'leaving home is unattractive and undesirable, for emotional reasons, independent from money.' Lidia's answers suggest that she did not make a rational calculation about costs and opportunities when choosing her university. As she says, she never thought about moving away because she likes being at home and feels most satisfied with this living arrangement, nor did she look for information about other sources of income and support – something she would have probably done if she had felt a strong desire for leaving. From this perspective, the first frame about the

lack of financial resources appears to be a rationalisation a posteriori, that is, an explanation constructed afterwards to make sense of a rather intuitive decision.

Also Lorenzo, a 23-year-old Italian student in Florence, first explains that he cannot study away from his hometown, Florence, due to financial reasons. He has a middle-class background and five younger siblings who all live together with him in the household of his parents. Despite the number of siblings, he is not eligible for a grant. He says he would like to leave, but with so many siblings it is financially impossible. This seems to be a frame which is widely accepted. In this respect, one German mother, for example, also says:

Mother: [Leaving home and studying further away] is problematic if you have many children. [...] You should treat them equally somehow. You cannot say: the first child can go and the fourth is not allowed to, you know? Then you need to talk about it together and say: listen, we only have limited finances, therefore you should study nearby if possible, so that it works out financially.

Interviewer: So that they can live longer in the parental household?

Mother: Yes!

The difference between the suggestion of the German mother and Lorenzo's account is that she proposes to talk about it (which implies that the persons involved assume a general desire for leaving which needs to be discussed), whereas Lorenzo did not think about leaving. Due to financial constraints, Lorenzo not only did not ask his parents whether he could study elsewhere, but did not even think about the possibility of moving, as he says:

Interviewer: And you didn't think about alternatives to this university?

Lorenzo: No. Alternatives outside Florence? I didn't think about it because I couldn't; because I can't afford it, even though I have to say that I would like very much to study in another city. However, having a good university here, it makes even less sense to go away and to have to find a job, and take more time to complete my studies at a university which is maybe not as good as this one. It would be only for a change of scenery, to have a more independent life that is more my own, away from my family.

Different from Lidia, Lorenzo would like to live more independently and is not afraid of the experience of detachment. However, going away simply to have "a life of one's own" does not

seem to be sufficient for him to justify a departure from the parental home under financial constraints. On the one hand, this sounds plausible; on the other hand, other perspectives would be possible as well, as the previous examples showed. Simon and Roberto, for example, left home for the mere reason of living in another city, and not for reasons related to their studies. Simon even jeopardised the success of his studies by working on two jobs during the exam period. This comparison shows that the reasons which young people consider strong enough to justify the departure from the parental home are very subjective. They depend only to some extent on 'objective' financial means. Instead, there are other factors that influence the assessment of financial hurdles.

### **5.2.3 The subjective perceptions of economic constraints**

The interviews show that it depends on the relevance which the students ascribe to their motives for leaving home, whether they interpret financial difficulties as insurmountable obstacles. The students' motives for leaving or staying are influenced by their values and preferences. Martina, one of the Italian middle-class students introduced above, observed this too. In her interview, she compares herself to young Italians staying with their parents, who, according to her, have different preferences for using their money:

There are people who work and yet at age 26, 27, they still live with their parents. This way perhaps they can save up enough money to buy a car or other things. From my point of view this is an absurd choice because freedom has no price. That is ... by living independently, I might have renounced having more money to buy things or to go out in the evening; or I might have to work [...], but I prefer to have my independence. (Martina, 27)

For Martina, living independently has a greater value than consumption. She, therefore, considers money spent on residential independence as 'well spent' and not as a waste of financial resources. This example suggests that the assessment by the students and parents of having sufficient money for leaving home is influenced by the value they ascribe to an early departure from the parental home.

Following this frame of interpretation, it can also occur that parents who prefer to have their adult children living with them interpret the financial situation as more difficult than it actually is in order to convince their children to remain in the parental household. Letizia, for example, says that the main reason why she stayed with her parents until she was 25 was that her

parents, especially her father, wanted her to live with them. Letizia is a student in Germany. Her mother is German; her father came as a former guest-worker from Southern Italy to Germany. She describes her father as very protective who thinks of her as his “little daughter.” She perceives the relationship with her parents as very good. At the time of the interview she was in the process of moving in with her boyfriend:

Letizia: Now that I have told my parents that I plan to move out I was afraid that my father would become sad or that he would say, ‘but what about the finances? You will have problems and it’s not very easy to earn money while studying and here you have so much space.’ My father just doesn’t want me to be struggling for money. It was the same back then [when she started her studies]. That’s why I thought that I was getting along well with my parents and I stayed at home and that it’s not far away from [her university]. [...] Then you can spare financial problems, which you sometimes have as a student. But now it was time! I expected that I had to discuss with them about me moving out, but they took the news pretty well.

Interviewer: And how did you arrange the finances?

Letizia: I have a student job and I get BAföG support.

In Letizia’s example, it is interesting to see that her current economic situation is not more affluent than some time ago, when she started her studies. That is to say that she could be confronted with financial problems also now, like any time before. However, when she was younger, her father said he wanted to protect her from financial difficulties, whereas now, while being in the same financial situation, he accepts her moving out. This example shows again that the interpretation of economic conditions as the reason for staying with one’s parents can depend more on preferences than on actual economic hardship. Letizia’s account reveals how her father used financial arguments to convince her not to leave home. She let these arguments convince her, knowing at the same time that her father would be sad if she had left. Similar to Linda’s and Lidia’s cases, this example demonstrates how economic arguments can be applied to support emotional motives for staying at home.

Later on in the interview, Letizia explains that, on certain occasions, she even consciously used the argument of a lack of financial resources to justify her living arrangement, although her financial conditions were not the reason for her staying with her parents. In situations when she

felt she needed to vindicate herself in front of her fellow students and professors, financial arguments appeared to be the most convincing justification. Otherwise she would have felt ashamed of living with her parents while most other people she knew had left home:

Letizia: And I always had the feeling that I ...

Roberto: justify oneself ...

Letizia: Yes, exactly, that I had to justify myself because of living at home. And then I came up with the arguments that it's just easier in financial terms. I don't live very far away from [university city]. And what for? To make things more difficult for myself? And the stress ... Better to concentrate on my studies.

Roberto: In comparison, I think, in Italy, at least in our hometown in Southern Italy, nobody would have asked such a question: Why do you still live at home? Rather the question would be:

Letizia: What? You are not living at home? [She laughs]

Roberto: But why aren't you still living with ... [your parents]? [He laughs] Oh, you are married? [Both laughing] It's really a difference, for sure.<sup>33</sup>

Here we can see that not only does Letizia's father make use of economic arguments to convince his daughter to continue living at home, but also Letizia herself resorts to such argument – to justify herself, when criticised by other people who challenge her choice of living arrangements. It seems that, in her social context, emotional reasons alone are socially not acceptable to explain a late departure from the parental home. This might also explain why Linda and Lidia only disclose later on in their interviews that they have strong preferences for living with their parents, after initially stating that they remained in the parental household for financial reasons.

An interesting remark is made by Lorenzo (23), who criticises that policy makers only give low priority to public support for students:

Grants are small, and awarded for insignificant amounts of money. But this isn't even the entire problem. It is also very difficult to get one. Maybe in other regions in Italy they help you a bit more, but it's simply an issue that is not considered to be so relevant. (Lorenzo, 23, Italy)

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<sup>33</sup> Letizia and Roberto are laughing together about the different attitudes regarding residential independence in their German and Italian home contexts (i.e., leaving home as a student versus leaving home at marriage). Humour, apparently, is a way to reconcile the different perspectives in their lives.

This lack of relevance suggests that the public financial support for students in Italy follows the logic of prioritising the spatial proximity of family members. According to this logic, students are supposed to leave the parental home only when it is absolutely unavoidable, for example, when no university is available near the parental home.

#### **5.2.4 Leaving home and residential mobility as an investment**

In Germany as well as in Italy, the interviews reveal that most interviewees perceive the future prospects for students on the job market as being more difficult than some time ago. A German mother, for example, describes the current competition on the labour market as being more intense and creating more worries for the young people today with respect to the way things were when she was young:

I think the young people today, whether they are starting their university studies or their professional training, have to deal with much more pressure than we did. I didn't worry [about a lot of things that they have to worry about nowadays] ... I didn't have this pressure: Oh God, when I finish my studies, I won't be able to find a job. Or: I need to be particularly good, particularly quick to get a job. I didn't have this kind of pressure, and I don't think my generation had it. (Louise's mother, 54, Germany)

A similar interpretation is given by Francesco (25) in Italy. He too recognises that the chances of finding a job after graduation have worsened, even though he interprets the current situation more optimistically, as a challenge, not as pressure:

No, this is a world for people who should be active. [...] Now, there is a surplus of supply everywhere. There are so many architects, so many psychologists, so many people of all different professions. So if you want to do something, you should do it because you feel it [is your choice, your passion]. (Francesco, 25, Italy)

Francesco recognises that success on the job market nowadays requires particular commitment which ideally grows out of a strong passion for the job. As we will see in this chapter, a group of interviewees link strong commitment and success in the labour market to residential independence and mobility because they feel it increases their competitiveness.

At the same time, the interviewees in Italy and Germany perceive the economic situation of students as deteriorating. One reason for this is the introduction of tuition fees. However, while some students argue that the costs of tertiary education contribute to their decision of staying in

the parental home; other students perceive their increasing expenses as an investment in their future. Jens (24), for example, a student in the German sample who lives independently, recounts how he solved the problem of increasing costs with a loan. It is interesting to see that he does not even consider the possibility of living in the parental household as an alternative. Jens left home right after finishing high school, in spite of insufficient financial resources. He takes his residential independence for granted even though his family is not able to afford it, and even though he is not eligible for state support. Despite the financial limitations, it seems natural and self-evident to him to leave home. He interprets his lack of financial resources as a motivation to work besides his studies as a metal worker and, in addition, to taking out a loan. Jens sees this way of financing his studies as an investment, not as a waste of money:

Of course my mother supports me. From my biological father I have never received anything. [...] It wasn't enough. For this reason, I simply had to get a job. It worked out quite well. But when they introduced the tuition fees, we needed to find a new solution, like many people, I guess. Then the student loan became an option for me. [...] With this, I manage quite well. I can pay the tuition fees with it. I think, investing in education is always worthwhile, you know. Yes, if not I would probably have to work even more. It is a burden somehow. (Jens, 24, Germany)

This quotation and the fact that the public support for students in Germany (BAföG) consists of a loan, in combination with a grant, suggests that a group of students tend to interpret residential independence during higher education as an investment.

### **5.3 Discussion**

The comparison of the interviews with middle-class students, who have no or little financial constraints, reveals that economic conditions are not necessarily interpreted as determining per se the living arrangements of students. These interviewees, who consider their financial situation as affluent, do not frame their stay at the parental home as an economic necessity, but as a preference. They do not see themselves as constrained by money or other economic factors in the choice of their living arrangement. Instead, they decide to use their financial resources according to their individual preferences. These examples show that the choice of residential independence or coresidence with parents depends on many additional factors other than possible financial constraints.

I then analysed the various frames of interpretation common to another group of interviewees who are confronted with a tight budget and insufficient or no support from their parents and the state. The young people in this group who prefer to leave home interpret financial problems as minor obstacles that can be overcome. A second group, comprised of students who are less determined to leave home, adapt to the constraining economic situation by reassessing their own desire for leaving home as less relevant. These young people perceive their financial situation as more constraining than the students who have a strong desire for residential independence, even though their actual economic situations seem to be similar. A third group of students did not desire to live independently at all, due to a strong emotional bond to their parents and local community. In these cases, the economic argument appears as a rationalisation *a posteriori*. During the course of the interview, the economic argument is ruled out by other frames that express a strong preference for staying at home.

The very different subjective interpretations of rather similar financial constraints suggest that the departure of students from their parental homes is not a direct, 'automatic' reaction to 'objectively' favourable or unfavourable economic conditions. Instead, the subjective evaluation of financial conditions depends to a large degree on the motivations for living independently. The examples cited in this chapter show that financial arguments are also used to support other, more emotional reasons for remaining at home, even in cases in which the financial situation in itself is actually not very constraining. Depending on the perspective, for some interviewees, it appears more reasonable from a financial point of view to save money while pursuing higher education. This does not necessarily mean that there are actual financial constraints. Making use of this logic of interpretation, the parents who prefer having their children remain in the parental household also use financial arguments, among others, to convince their adult children to continue living with them.

It is important to understand that the students who have a strong preference for living on their own often consider residential independence during higher education as an investment. This means that they accept high expenses for housing and other costs because they also see benefits in these expenses. They would even go into debt to allow themselves to live independently. The German system of public study support is grounded in this pattern of interpretation. Students in Germany who receive state support are expected to return a large part of the funding that they receive for their studies, while, in Italy, student support is paid as a scholarship. Moreover, the

students in Tuscany who are entitled to public support can obtain housing subsidies or a place in a hall of residence only if the distance between their home locality and the place of study is considered to be unacceptable for commuting. As I will show in the following chapter, this regulation for distributing housing grants is in line with the prevailing norms of leaving home in the Italian context.

### **The role of home ownership**

In general, young Italians prefer to save money to become home owners instead of spending it on rent for residential independence during their studies. In contrast with the desires of young Germans, the Italians have a much stronger preference to become home owners at a relatively young age. In their underlying pattern of sense-forming, for the Italians, living independently during one's studies appears to be a luxury, and is of minor relevance compared to the priority of early home ownership. In Italy and Germany, residential independence during education and home ownership at a young age seem to be mutually exclusive. While most young Germans choose early residential independence in a rented dwelling and postpone home ownership, young Italians more often postpone residential independence but opt for early home ownership. The owner occupancy rate of the young population, ages 18 to 40, is 50,9 percent in Italy and 21,4 percent in Germany (Bičáková/Sierminska 2008: 2, data from 2002). The difference between the home ownership rates of the whole population in Italy and Germany is similarly strong: 80 percent of the Italians are home owners, while in Germany, this group amounts to 42 percent only (ibid.: 34, data from 2002; see also Ben Shlomo 2011).

Despite high home ownership rates and high home values, Italian households avoid taking out mortgages. The mortgage rate of 16 percent in Italy is similar to the German rate of 19 percent, compared to 62 percent in Great Britain, for example (Bičáková/Sierminska 2008: 31, data from 2002). However, while the German mortgage rate among the young population is low due to a low home ownership rate, young Italians have a low mortgage rate because they more often inherit a property or start saving money to acquire a dwelling as early as possible – usually at marriage – instead of paying rent during education and early career. Also, in Italy, financial transfers within the family help avoid the need to take out mortgages. This includes the fact that Italian parents and grandparents generally prefer saving money in order to be able to buy a home for their children or grandchildren, usually when these latter get married, instead of paying rent

for a student home. In the 1990s, more than 60 percent of the newlywed couples in Italy moved into their own home at marriage which, in many cases, would not have been possible without the financial help of the parents (Dalla Zuanna et al. 2008: 67, see also Barbagli et al. 2003). Young Germans, instead, become relatively early residentially independent at the expense of their chances to become homeowners since paying rent reduces their ability to accumulate savings. The main reasons, given by young Germans, to renounce or postpone home ownership are: high financial costs, insecure job prospects and expected spatial mobility for job reasons (Faller et al. 2001). As a consequence, Germans become homeowners – if at all – only later in life (Bičáková/Sierminska 2008). This means that many German parents of adult children are paying rent for their own home or are paying off their mortgage while, in addition, they are expected to financially support their children's independent household. Due to their own housing costs, German parents thus may experience serious difficulties in paying for the residential independence of their children in higher education even though incomes in Germany are higher than in Italy.

### **Subjective costs and benefits**

As the interviews reveal, the subjective evaluation of the housing costs of students in rental accommodation as either manageable or unbearable does not merely depend on the 'objective' rental prices but, to a large extent, on the interpretation of housing expenses as an investment or as a luxury. A study of the European Commission supports the view that the perception of housing costs can strongly divert from the actual expenses: The European Commission considers households whose housing costs exceed 40 percent of their disposable income as "overburdened". This applies to 23,6 percent of the German population and their households, but only to 7,6 percent of Italians. These data sharply contrast with the subjectively perceived burden of housing costs in these two countries. In Italy, more than 55 percent of the population perceive their housing expenses as a heavy burden, while in Germany, this is true of only a fifth of the population (Rybkowska/Schneider 2011: 7-8). Different from Germany, the prices of renting or purchasing a dwelling in Italy have strongly increased over the past decades. Due to a general income growth, on the one hand, and policy measures that made owner occupied housing more attractive as compared to renting on the other, the share of Italian families owning their homes has increased since the 1980s by more than 15 percent (D'Alessio/Gambacorta 2007: 31,

Baldini/Poggio 2010). The higher housing costs, however, did not influence the living arrangements of Italian university students, especially not those of male students (Modena/Rondinelli 2011). This observation underlines that the perception of housing costs as affordable does not exclusively depend on prices but is strongly influenced by one's motives for leaving home.

Another argument that needs to be considered in the discussion of these findings is the purpose or benefit of home ownership. Home ownership often serves as a form of individual provision for old age. The Italian preference for early home ownership can thus be regarded as a necessary or wise strategy to prevent old-age poverty. This argument, however, leads to the question of why young Germans do not reason in a similar way. This is especially surprising since young people's trust in the state pension system is lower in Germany than in the Mediterranean countries (Keck/Blome 2008: 89-90, data from 2003). It is generally known in Germany that the younger generations will not receive sufficient old-age pensions from the public pension insurance funds. From a financial point of view, it would thus make sense in Germany too to remain in the parental home during higher education and save money for home ownership, instead of spending it on student accommodations. This is another puzzling finding that shows that economic considerations are not as plausible and applicable to the departure from the parental home as they often seem to be at first sight.

Regarding the interview sequences about financial issues, it is possible to summarise the participants' statements by the proverb "where there's a will there's a way". This saying captures most of the underlying framings used by the interviewees when talking about the financial aspects of the departure from the parental home. From the findings presented in this chapter we can conclude that the subjective evaluation of financial costs depends on a variety of factors other than objective prices. In the following chapters, I will therefore take a closer look at the motives for leaving home or staying with parents, and pursue the question of why one group of interviewees interprets residential independence as an investment, while others consider it to represent useless costs and financial burden.

## **6. Norms regarding independence and adulthood**

### **6.1 Norms and feeling management**

In the interviews, it is possible to identify two patterns of norms and underlying meanings regarding the departure from the parental home. The first pattern can be best summarised under the notion of independence, the second under the concept of interdependence. In the independence pattern, normative expectations and underlying factors prioritise an early move-out from the parental home. Conversely, the norms and meanings in the interdependence pattern support the proximity of family members. This implies that, in the interdependence pattern, the separation from the parental home is only accepted for ‘inevitable’ reasons – such as moving in with a partner with the intention of forming a family or for important work or education related reasons. The German interviewees perceive the independence pattern as the prevailing norm. For the Italian interviewees, the interdependence pattern was normative.

#### **6.1.1 The intergenerational transmission of norms**

Most allusions to normative expectations about leaving home can be found either in the interviews with parents or when students discuss the expectations of their parents or other older members of their social circle. This would suggest that the norms about moving out or staying at home are handed down from the older generation, rather than being shaped by the current social and economic situation of the young. That is, young people learn these normative expectations from their parents and culture. For example, a number of German parents that I interviewed expressed their concern about the ‘late’ independence of their children. Their comments reveal their normative expectations regarding the ‘right’ age to leave home. For example, a German mother said of her son (who was 22 when he left home):

It was late...when he moved out. We [she and her husband] were already thinking, ‘do we have a “Hotel-Mum” situation?’ But then, when he was about 21 or 22, he said ‘now it’s time’. (Simon’s mother, 49, Germany)

The normative expectations are particularly evident in the interviews with students who do not follow the prevailing norms. In these cases, the interviewees position themselves in relation to the general expectations by evaluating their own behaviour in the light of the norms. My interview with Lena, a German student living with her parents in the city where she studies, illustrates this point. Although her parents could afford to pay the rent of a student home, Lena perceives this as unreasonable from a financial point of view. In addition, she has a strong preference for living with her family. While her parents do not interfere with her decision to stay, both parties are aware of the norms which prescribe an early departure, as Lena's formulations reveal:

I'm glad to live at home because my time is fully engaged with my studies. I don't feel like doing it [moving out] at the moment. But...you can't live at home forever...at some point you have to start to live your own life. [...] On the other hand, my father always said, 'when you are 18 I'm going to kick you out', equally knowing that he would probably be the last person to kick me out [laughs]. (Lena, 20, Germany)

It is the father, a member of the older generation, who reminds his daughter of the norm to leave home at an appropriate age – even if he is clearly happy to have her living with him. Roberto, a 27-year-old German student, also encountered the idea of being 'kicked out'. However, in his case it was not his father who 'threatened' this but a teacher at his vocational school, who was referring to his own children. Roberto, whose father came from Italy as a 'guest worker', remained at the parental home during his professional training after high school, before he entered higher education. In our interview, he recalled that this teacher, who he admired a great deal, had once said that his own children would have to leave home when they were 18, regardless of whether or not they had a good relationship with him. Roberto asked him why and his teacher explained: 'They have to leave! They have to stand on their own two feet'. Roberto perceived this as two 'worlds' clashing – the Italian and German cultures – although he enjoyed the debate. Another Italian-German student in Germany (Letizia, 25), who experienced a similar debate, initiated by a university lecturer, admitted that she felt 'a little ashamed' when she had to explain in front of the other students that she was still living with her parents. These examples highlight how parents and teachers in Germany transmit the value of early independence to the younger generation. Furthermore, they show that there may be social sanctions about not following the norm and leaving home 'late'.

In my Italian interviews, I did not hear prescriptive statements such as: ‘I’m almost 22. I should actually take care of myself’; ‘my father always said, “when you are 18 I will kick you out”’; or, ‘naturally, my parents want me to stand on my own two feet’. Instead, the students from the Italian group who had left home either said that their parents had been supportive from the beginning (although these students remarked that this was rare), or that their parents tolerated their decision to leave but did not fully agree with it.

An example of the first situation is Martina (27 years old) who explains that her mother supported her desire to leave home at the age of twenty, even though she studies in the same city in which her parents live. She adds that she finds this ‘atypical’ for the Italian ‘mentality’. Anna (20), a student from the South of Italy, said that because her parents trusted her they let her go to the North for her studies, but she emphasises that this is not the case for many young Italians. In her opinion, she was ‘fortunate’ because ‘many parents just do not allow their children to move away’.

An example of the second situation is Francesco (25) who had recently decided to leave home and was looking for an apartment with some friends at the time of the interview. When talking about his parents’ reactions to his decision he affectionately mocked his mother who had said ‘don’t go, don’t go!’ She was open about her feelings of attachment to her son, making it clear that she would be happier if he stayed. His parents then argued that he would find balancing his studies with running a home difficult, and that he would be spending time working in order to pay the rent, when he should be studying. Ultimately, however, they accepted his decision to leave. Marco (23), another student who was planning to leave home at the time of the interview, says that his parents can appreciate his decision to live independently and move into a small flat which the family owns, but they would equally appreciate it if he stayed with them. All in all, I did not notice any normative expressions in the Italian interviews regarding an early departure from the parental home. Although some Italian parents in this sample are supportive of the idea of their children’s residential independence, these formulations do not indicate norms prescribing early departure.

These findings raise the following question: if formulations indicating the existence of norms for an early move-out are absent in the Italian sample, is it possible, instead, to find evidence of norms for leaving home at marriage, as found in previous research (e.g., Holdsworth 2005, Van de Velde 2008)? For the sample of the present study, the simple answer to this

question is no. None of the Italian interviewees mentioned norms about leaving home at marriage, or plans for doing so. That is, they do not refer to a generalised other linking leaving home with marriage. Quite the contrary, when asked directly some of the parents explicitly denied the existence of such a norm. Nonetheless, it appears they prefer to have their grown-up, unmarried children living with them. Yet it is an emotional preference for close companionship within the family, rather than a coercive, strict prescription, that binds family members together.

### **6.1.2 Emotional attachment and feeling management**

Most of the students living with their parents that I interviewed, as well as most of the parents with grown-up children still living at home, mentioned the great emotional benefits of this living arrangement. According to a number of interviewees, it is mainly this emotional support that motivates them to continue living together. Some young interviewees who had left home comparatively late recount that they enjoyed the company of their parents very much while living with them. Roberto, for example, who moved out at the age of 24, said:

I think at some point everybody reaches the time when they say, ‘Now I need to leave.’ This has nothing to do with being angry, or arguing. Before, when I was 22, I thought that I didn’t want this yet, nor when I was 23. I wanted to be able to come home and talk a bit; it was nice...that somebody was there. Somehow you could already guess that one day it wasn’t going to be like that anymore. At some point it was all going to change. Then you want to be alone and you don’t need it anymore. (Roberto, 27, Germany, father from Italy)

For some students living with their parents, especially younger students, the emotional benefits are so strongly and clearly engrained that leaving home is not an option they take into consideration. For example, Lidia, a 19-year-old student in Italy, says that for her, leaving the parental home would mean a great loss of emotional security. When asked whether she would leave home and study elsewhere if she had the financial means she answered:

If I had the economic opportunity? I’ve never posed this question to myself before [...] I have my friends, my family...everything, here. Therefore, if I had to detach myself, it would be traumatic...very traumatic. I would feel [the detachment] very strongly. I don’t know how long I would be able to endure it. (Lidia, 19, Italy)

A father from the Italian sample also used the word ‘traumatic’ to describe the separation from his daughter Sonia, saying, ‘It was a trauma at the time.’ The main reason for his strong

emotional reaction was her ‘unjustified’ departure – she left home, at the age of 21, simply to gain independence, rather than for work or study related motives. Thus for him, his daughter’s decision to leave the family home was ‘unjustified’ and hurt his feelings.

As in this example, insisting that grown-up children continue living at home, sometimes appears to be a one-sided emotional need on the part of the parents for keeping the family together, whereas some young interviewees admitted that they would prefer residential independence. Some of these young interviewees explained that they found it difficult to share their plans for leaving home because they were afraid of hurting their parents’ feelings. Letizia (25) from Germany, whose father is Italian, did not think that her parents (her father in particular), would be happy about her decision to move out. She explains that it was not easy for her to inform them about her plans:

[My father] became very quiet and didn’t say anything. Nor did my mother...I was a bit afraid of how they would react. I didn’t know if it would hurt them...or whether it would be okay for them. I said ‘by the way, I have to tell you something’ but then I couldn’t really get the words out and my mother said ‘you’re moving out?’ and I said ‘yes’. Then I almost felt more like crying than my parents did ... [because] it is a big step in your life, to leave your parents. But, it was okay for [them]. (Letizia, 25, Germany, preparing to leave home at the time of the interview)

Among this sample of interviewees, it is more common for the Italian parents than the German parents to reveal their feelings of loss to their children when the latter move out. The German parents usually try to suppress these negative feelings and, above all, they try not to show them in front of their children. While, naturally, they usually *do* feel sad or emotional when their children leave, they attempt to manage these feelings by, for example, convincing themselves that an early move-out can have positive effects for personal development. They also interpret and accept the early move-out as a ‘natural’ step, or rite of passage. These interpretations help them to cope with their feelings of loss and attenuate painful emotional reactions. A German mother whose daughter left home at the beginning of her studies describes her feelings, and how she dealt with them, in the following way:

Mother: When she left home it affected me deeply. Actually, I didn’t expect it to be like that because it had always been clear in my mind [that she would leave]. But when she was gone, I became conscious of it: it meant she would not be coming back. And this is really like cutting the umbilical cord.

Interviewer: Did you share these feelings with her?

Mother: Yes, to some extent. Although...you try to contain yourself [laughs]. Yes, because I think that you don't want to make it more difficult for the kids. I always had the feeling that if I let it show too much, then I would make it more difficult for them. Because I think for them, it is also a process of cutting the cord. (Louise's mother, 54, Germany)

The generalised formulations of this mother ('*you try to contain yourself*' and '*you don't want to make it more difficult*' rather than 'I tried' or 'I didn't want...'), indicate that she sees her reaction as a common response to such a situation. Her attempts to 'contain herself' and not let her feelings show 'too much' had the intended effect. Her daughter perceived her parents' reaction as fairly unemotional: 'For my parents it was definitely okay [that I left]. But...I think it is always a bit strange for parents...But, it was okay' (Louise, 23, Germany). As the mother predicted, it was also a process of cutting the cord for the daughter. Although Louise felt happy about leaving home she says that initially she had 'strange feelings', which she likened to 'children's feelings', about being alone. It was only later that she revealed to her mother that, during her first semester, she found being on her own rather difficult (from an emotional point of view). However, Louise concludes that this was an important life experience.

This example vividly illustrates how one group of interviewees successfully attenuate their feelings of loss and loneliness in order to reduce potential obstacles and difficulties in the process of leaving home. Among the German interviewees in particular, this kind of feeling management appears to be common practice. By contrast, the Italian parents in this sample who do not agree with their children leaving home (because they consider it 'unjustified') disclose their negative feelings. These parents do not feel that they should 'contain themselves' and conceal their feelings in order to make it easier for their children to leave home. Such behaviour can indeed have a hindering effect on the child's decision to move out. In sum, the interviewees who follow the norm of interdependence are very much guided by the desire to avoid the possible feelings of loss and loneliness from the outset.

This behaviour is, of course, fairly natural: the separation from a loved one can be an immensely painful experience (Insel 2003). So why is a large group of interviewees in the German sample so convinced that it is beneficial to move out when young, despite the emotional stress which at least some of these interviewees experienced? This behaviour, which seems 'natural' to northern Europeans, may appear 'unnatural' and even heartless from a southern

European perspective. The goal of the following section is to investigate the meanings which the interviewees attach to the norms regarding the departure from the parental home, and how they justify the emotional and financial difficulties that can be associated with it.

## **6.2 Meanings**

The different norms described above and the different ways of managing emotions and feelings are rooted in diverse patterns of meaning which the interviewees use to interpret the process of becoming an adult. Here again, we can identify two different patterns. In the pattern of independence, young people are supposed to leave home in order to become adults. In the pattern of interdependence, the home is seen as the best place to learn about adulthood. In this latter view, young people are considered to be especially vulnerable or incautious, and therefore in need of the continued protection and control of their parents as they make the transition into adulthood.

### **6.2.1 Independence: leaving home to grow up**

A recurring motive for the early departure from the parental home, as stated by several German interviewees, is learning to ‘stand on your own two feet’.<sup>34</sup> This metaphor shows that leaving home is interpreted as an opportunity to increase personal independence – both in a practical and mental sense – and as an opportunity to gain experience beyond the parental home. One essential aspect of the definition of adult behaviour is the capacity to become self-reliant and responsible. The German mother of Simon, for example, explains that when her son lived at home, he did not do what she thought was his ‘share’ of the housework. She was, therefore, (unsurprisingly) very supportive of his decision to leave home because she hoped he would learn to become more responsible by living independently. Later in the interview, she stresses proudly that, by moving out, her son learned to organise his own life. In her opinion, he needed to leave home to become an adult: ‘He does everything alone. He has grown up.’ However, she believes that leaving the family home in order to live with a partner does not have such a triggering effect on reaching adulthood: ‘At some point you have to stand on your own feet. You cannot move from “Hotel Mum” to your girlfriend’s place’ (Simon’s mother, 49, Germany). Yet clearly, being supportive

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<sup>34</sup> The literal translation of the German expression is: ‘stand on one’s own feet’ or, ‘stand on one’s own legs’.

of early residential independence does not mean that these parents love their children any less, or do not get along well with them. In Simon's case, both mother and son emphasised how important and close their relationship is.

Another German mother sees a similar connection between leaving home and growing up. She explains that an individual becomes a 'grown-up' when they take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and actions, as well as by managing a household. According to her, it is more difficult to acquire this at home because, as a mother, she would often let her kids get away with not doing their household tasks. She explains that when her children are at home, she sometimes starts to pamper and coddle them (and they enjoy this). She sees this as a 'danger' (Louise's mother, 54, Germany) because, in her opinion, it obstructs the process of growing up. For her, the risk of becoming 'spoiled' and dependent as a young person is far greater for those living at home.

However, moving temporarily back into the parents' household due to financial issues or other difficulties is not perceived as contradictory to the norm of leaving home early. These so-called 'yo-yo transitions' (see Biggart/Walther 2006) are also seen as a part of the process of learning to be independent. Two German mothers among the interviewees had experienced this when their sons returned home for limited periods of time due to financial difficulties or due to a change of university. One of the mothers stressed that her son would always have 'his' room at home for emergency situations. The other mother also highlighted that her children would always be welcome to come home if they needed to. Nevertheless, she explains that the relationship between a mother and her adult children changes once the child has left home. This shift in the relationship occurs even if the child returns temporarily to the parental home in times of difficulty. The tolerance among the interviewees toward 'yo-yo transitions' suggests that the main goal of leaving home is not necessarily the permanent independence of the children. Instead, it is the *experience* of living independently in early adulthood that is considered important for individual development.

Interestingly, this is even the consensus among the German interviewees who, for various reasons, prefer to stay with their parents. The broad consensus indicates a prevailing pattern of interpretation that is shared by the majority of Germans. The frequent references in the German interviews to a 'generalised other' suggest that a significant share of the German society interpret the move-out as a necessary step in the process of achieving independence and adulthood.

Among the Italian interviewees, there is not such agreement. Only some of the Italian interviewees demonstrate the pattern of meaning that dominates the German sample. Nevertheless, the criticism from those who left home of those who remained with their parents appears to be more pronounced in the Italian sample. Some students in the Italian sample who live independently call those who live with their parents ‘pseudo-adults’ or ‘eternal adolescents’. They justify their own way of living by pointing to the negative effects of living with one’s parents. Anna (20, Italy), for example, who left home when she started university at the age of 19, states: ‘People who live with their parents at the age of 40 don’t even know how to wash a T-shirt because they have always lived in a certain way, the wrong way.’ On the other hand, this quotation suggests that Anna considers the age 40, but not necessarily 30 or 25, as late to be learning how to do the laundry – her age limit for leaving home contrasts with the statements of the German interviewees (cited above) who talk about ‘kicking the children out’ at the age of 18.

Similar to the German sample, some of the Italian interviewees who live at home also see a causal link between leaving home and acquiring adulthood. One example is Lorenzo (23, Italy) who says he would like to leave home, if he gets the opportunity, in order to ‘prove himself’ as an adult. However, he feels alone in his desire to prove his maturity by leaving home because he feels supported neither by his parents nor by the institutions. It is Lorenzo’s perception, as well as that of other Italian interviewees, that leaving home solely to become more ‘grown-up’ is not, in general, endorsed by Italian society.

### **6.2.2 Interdependence: leaving home when grown-up**

In many of the Italian interviews, there is a pattern of meaning that can be reconstructed which does not frame leaving home as a triggering factor for the attainment of adulthood. In this pattern, the interviewees interpret the family home as the ideal place for growing up. That is, the young person leaves home only when adulthood and maturity are achieved, not during the transition process to adulthood for the purpose of promoting individual autonomy.

Instead of promoting practical and psychological independence, the interdependence pattern is based on the maximisation of security. For example, Lidia (19, living with her parents) argues that she would need ‘certainty’ to leave her hometown. To her, this certainty implies that, ‘I know what to do there, that I can move forward there, that I can construct my future there. I

would do it only on these terms' (Lidia, 19, Italy). When asked how she imagines a life farther away from her hometown (if she had the financial opportunity to move) she replies:

I imagine a girl capable of making friends...but, who, at the end of the day is unhappy because she misses so many things. And above all, she doesn't know how to deal with money, with the household, with rent...everything. (Lidia, 19, Italy)

Lidia does not perceive leaving her parents' home as a challenge – something to 'prove herself' in order to grow up. In her mind, the family home is the best place to be during her studies and during the transition to adulthood.

Amongst the interviewees who follow the independence pattern in their interpretations, that is, those who interpret leaving home as a trigger for adulthood, there are some who remain at home and express similar concerns to those of Lidia (for example, Linda – in the German sample). However, these interviewees are convinced that their situation and also their desire to remain at home hampers personal development or even leads to 'pseudo-adulthood'. Interviewees like Lidia are different since they neither mention that they would be missing an opportunity for new experience and proving their maturity, nor do they point to potential norms conflicting with their attitude. It seems that Lidia's interpretation and behaviour is absolutely normal in her social context.

Lidia prefers to remain in a secure environment rather than face the difficulties that could arise if she were to live alone. Moreover, this secure environment saves her from loneliness. Conversely, a German mother explicitly emphasises that living away from home is important for the personal development of young people. Even though she missed her son very much after he had left home, she argues that it is important for young people to learn to be 'alone with oneself' and to be able to 'bear' one's own company when nobody else is around (Simon's mother, 49, Germany). In this mother's view, becoming 'autarchic', also emotionally, is an important step in the development of an adult personality.

This interpretation of the transition to adulthood starkly contrasts with the perspective of the Italian father, cited above, who experienced the departure of his daughter as a 'trauma'. His daughter Sonia (now 30) left home at the age of 21 because she wanted to 'have a different life'. She wanted to be more independent and make her own decisions. Her way of interpreting her situation comes close to the pattern of independence. However, for her father, her desire to leave home was immature and 'superficial', even though she had a job and could thus afford her rent

and support herself. By contrast, he describes the decision of her younger brother to move out, for study reasons, as ‘mature’ (Sonia’s and Paolo’s father, 54, Italy). He had also accepted the departure of his other daughter without any problems (she left home to get married). This interpretation contrasts with the views of the German parents, as discussed, about making their children leave home at the age of 18.<sup>35</sup> Many of the German interviewees interpret an increasing number of small conflicts between parents and adult children about everyday issues as a sign that it is the right time to move out. Sonia’s father, instead, considers the disagreement with his daughter as a failure, a ‘trauma’, because they could not sort things out and continue living together.

### 6.2.3 Different interpretations of ‘youth’

These two patterns of norms and meanings are related to perceptions of young people. In the pattern of independence, young people are seen as strong and capable of confronting challenges. As a consequence, remaining in the parental home as an adult is seen as a path that leads to the “spoiling” of the young person. In this pattern of meaning, the transition to adulthood is understood as a period in which young people learn to be fully independent; by solving problems on their own and, if necessary, by learning from their mistakes. Simon’s mother, for example, argues that it was good for her son to live away from the parental home – ‘without a safety net’ (Simon’s mother, 49, Germany), because it increased his self-responsibility. And Martina, who left home at the age of 20, found that living away from home offers the ‘challenge of a completely different life’ (Martina, 27, Italy). In this pattern of meaning, it is the *challenge* that young people should embrace in order to grow up.

In the interdependence pattern, the interviewees interpret the period between childhood and adulthood as a sensitive phase in which young people need to be protected or guided, or even controlled. Francesco, for example, sees himself and young people in general as especially vulnerable: ‘we are very fragile, as young people, very, very, very fragile in terms of self-esteem. You don’t know what you are going to do’ (Francesco, 25, Italy). This interpretation justifies a longer stay in the protective environment of the parental home.

Also Letizia in Germany recounts that her father, who came from Southern Italy to Germany as a young man, regards her as being in need of protection. For this reason, he turned

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<sup>35</sup> These sayings about ‘kicking’ a child ‘out’ of the parental home at the age of 18 are exaggerated formulations – usually meant to hint gently at the norms by saying it humorously.

down his daughter's wish to spend a year in Italy after high school. Letizia wanted to learn the language and get to know the Italian family members and Italian culture. Nevertheless, her father successfully changed her mind and argued that he wanted to protect her from Italian "Casanovas". According to Letizia, her father still thinks of her as his "little girl" who needs to be protected. Her father's argument about Italian Casanovas points to a possible gender aspect of the departure from the parental home. Seen from a historical perspective, the place that was deemed most appropriate for young unmarried women in Southern Italy was the parental home where they would live under the protection of the family to ensure their marriageability (Mitterauer 2004). References to possible gender differences, however, were extremely rare in the interviews. It is thus difficult to make any claim regarding gender differences on the basis of these data. According to Letizia, her father still sees her as needing protection because she is young and youth is associated with vulnerability in this view. This is a pattern of interpretation that other Italian interviewees apply also to male students, as in Francesco's example in the previous paragraph. It is thus not a gender specific view.

Other students in the Italian sample reveal that there are parents who simply forbid their children to leave home as young adults. Anna (20), for example, reports that she knows parents who would not let their children move away to pursue their studies because they think that, being far away from parental control, their children would not focus on their studies and, instead, would 'party' all the time. She criticises the tendency of some Italian parents to be over-protective, keeping their children 'underneath a glass cover'. Tommaso (32) says that parents who do this do not see the departure of their children as an opportunity but as a problem – they have a tendency to control their children and to assume that staying as close as possible to the parents, during the process of growing up, is the 'best' thing for them.

Hence, seeing young people as either 'vulnerable' or as 'incautious' supports the interpretation in the interdependence pattern that the parental home is the most suitable place for development. In the independence pattern instead, young people are expected to learn to be independent and self-sufficient. Therefore they should leave home early, to prove or fulfil this expectation.

### 6.3 Discussion

In sum, two different patterns of norms and meanings can be identified in the interviews. The first pattern, which is perceived as normative by the German interviewees, supports the independence of young people. It encourages the young to leave the parental home early on, and doesn't restrict the motives for leaving. In this perspective, leaving home is considered a challenge which promotes personal maturity and is, therefore, a necessary step in the transition to adulthood. In this pattern, young people are seen as capable individuals who should prove, and want to prove, their independence (see table 6.1).

Conversely, the pattern perceived as normative in the Italian sample supports the interdependence of family members. There are restrictions about what a justified motive for moving out would be. Leaving home is largely accepted if it happens for 'inevitable' reasons related to work, education or marriage. Residential independence, in itself, however, is not seen as a useful experience for reaching adulthood. Instead, the parental home is seen as the most suitable place for growing up. This view is based on the perception of young people as either

**Table 6.1:** Summary of meanings and country differences regarding the independence and interdependence pattern

	<b>Independence pattern</b>	<b>Interdependence pattern</b>
<b>Meanings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the parental home is not the best place for growing up</li> <li>- leaving home triggers adulthood</li> <li>- leaving home triggers independence which is a useful skill for later life</li> <li>- it is useful to have more distance, also emotionally, to become independent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the home is the best place for growing up</li> <li>- the move-out should take place only for job and study reasons or marriage, i.e. for 'mature' reasons</li> <li>- young people need protection and control</li> <li>- being together in the family brings vital emotional benefits</li> </ul>
<b>Normativity</b>	<p>Germany – norms and meanings of leaving home early are largely recognised, individuals adjust feelings accordingly</p> <p>Italy – an early move-out and a focus on the positive meanings attached to it are perceived as special and unusual</p>	<p>Italy – not only normative obligation for staying with the family, if possible, but also emotional desire, especially on the part of the parents</p> <p>Germany – a late move-out and a focus on the positive meanings attached to it are perceived as special and unusual</p>

vulnerable or incautious which, consequently, leads to the assumption that they need the protection and control of the parental home.

The norms and meanings of independence are largely shared by the German interviewees, even among those who choose to remain living with their parents. The Italian interviewees instead, perceive the meanings of independence as a minority pattern in their social environment. There is far greater support and recognition for the norms and meanings of interdependence in the Italian interviews. I did not find class or gender differences regarding the norms and meanings of the departure from the parental home.

The students interviewed, in both countries, frequently refer to the attitudes and comments of their parents or teachers when evaluating and explaining their own living arrangements instead of using economic arguments to justify their living arrangement. This observation suggests that the norms and meanings regarding the (“right”) pathway to residential independence are transferred from one generation to the next and supported by social sanctions – rather than being shaped only by the current economic and institutional conditions. Also because of this process of intergenerational transmission, the current patterns of leaving home in southern and northern Europe still resemble the historical pathways out of the parental home described by Reher (1998, see also Van Poppel/Oris 2004).

The independence pattern, prevailing in Germany, is characteristic for individualistic societies in which the family plays a minor role in social life compared to familialistic societies in southern Europe. In individualistic societies, the early departure from the parental home and the resulting spatial distances between family members contribute to the reduced relevance of the family. The promotion of self-sufficiency during the transition to adulthood can, therefore, be regarded as a means that triggers the enculturation into an individualistic society and, at the same time, fosters individualism. Similarly, in Italy, the prioritizing of family togetherness during the transition to adulthood is part of the ongoing enculturation of young people into a familialistic social context, characterised by a strong relevance of the family in fulfilling manifold social tasks.

Within the family, the preparation of young Germans, by their parents, to live independently from the family, and of young Italians to form strong family networks probably starts long before early adulthood or youth. German parents probably begin much earlier to prepare their children for the detachment from the family to become members of an individualistic society. Similarly, Italian parents foster interdependency and strong emotional

bonds between parents and children from early childhood on. In fact, the interactions of German (and northern European) mothers with their infants and toddlers tend to differ from Italian (and southern European) parenting styles, as studies in cross-cultural psychology reveal. German parents, for example, more often let their infants sleep in a separate bedroom and expect small children to dress alone and play alone, at least for awhile, because they appreciate self-reliance, also regarding the children's independent regulation of emotions. Italian parents, instead, tend to discourage autonomous behaviour. They show a greater preference for socially active children who turn to their parents for emotion regulation. This is also reflected by the higher emotional availability that characterises Italian mothers' interactions with their infants and a more frequent body contact between parents and children (e.g., Grossmann/Grossmann 1981, New 1988, Friedlmeier/Trommsdorff 1999, LeVine/Norman 2001, Hsu/Lavelli 2005, Valentin, 2005, Bornstein et al. 2012). Different parenting styles regarding autonomy and interdependence were also identified in the North-eastern Italian region of South Tyrol between families of Austrian ancestry and families of Italian origin. The Austrian/German speaking Italian participants of the study demonstrated a greater emphasis on individualistic socialisation than the participants with an Italian cultural background even though both cultural groups share the same state institutions (Taverna et al. 2011).<sup>36</sup> Thus, the norms and meanings of leaving home, which I found in the interviews, not only help to understand the diversity within Europe in the transition to adulthood, but may also shed light on the different parenting styles concerning the autonomy or relatedness of small children. Further research would thus be desirable in this field.

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<sup>36</sup> In the North-eastern part of Italy, comprising the regions Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the geographical distances between mothers and their over thirty-year-old children are larger than in the north-west or the central and southern parts of the country, where more adult children live less than 1 km away from their mothers (Dalla Zuanna et al. 2008: 55, data from 2005). However, a more specific comparison between Trentino-Alto Adige and the other North-eastern regions and, particularly, between young adults of Austrian/German and Italian origin within Trentino-Alto Adige would be necessary for further conclusions.



## 7. Coping with uncertainty

As pointed out in chapter 3, young people are confronted with augmented economic pressure and uncertainty regarding their professional future. The increasingly late residential independence of young southern Europeans has been explained as an adaptive strategy for a specific social and economic context – characterised by high youth unemployment and low welfare support for young adults. Conversely, the comparatively stable age of leaving home in northern Europe has frequently been seen as a result of extended welfare support systems and greater labour market opportunities (e.g., Jurado 2001). However, closer examination reveals that young adults in northern Europe have also adjusted their behaviour in light of greater uncertainty and less favourable social conditions, albeit in a different way. In the northern countries too, an increasing number of young people postpone moving out, although to a much lesser extent than in southern Europe. In fact, this tendency has been counterbalanced in northern European societies by a growing group of young adults who leave home earlier, and before marriage, as compared to the 1950 and 1960s, when leaving home for marriage at a relatively young age was more common in northern Europe. Different from southern Europe, the motive for leaving home in northern Europe changed from marriage to education and early career opportunities, in order to increase individual competitiveness. This suggests that premarital detachment from the parental home should not be regarded as the ‘natural’ or ‘default’ form of behaviour. Instead, the findings indicate that young people in northern and southern Europe adapt in different ways to the increasing uncertainty of their future.

The interview analysis also points in this direction. It reveals that it is not only the prolonged stay in the parental home that can constitute a strategy for facing uncertainty, but also the early, premarital, departure. Whereas in the former, the emphasis lies on remaining sheltered in order to gain time for orientation, the latter strategy is based on encountering new experiences outside the familiar home environment in order to develop an individual ‘sense of direction.’ The latter strategy can even include several returns to the parental home, as quantitative data reveal (see chapter 3). The interviews reveal how the respondents make sense of this phenomenon. On the basis of the interview results, I argue that returning home for a period of time – perhaps in

times of difficulty, differs as a strategy to that of never having left home at all during the transition to adulthood. The responses of the interviewees show that the strategy of remaining at home is rooted in the so-called ‘strong’ family ties of the Italian society, whereas the second strategy is embedded in the German ‘weak’ family ties. Moreover, it emerges from the interviews that while leaving home before marriage is regarded as a well-known pattern in Germany, it is perceived as a somewhat new trend by the Italian interviewees, who attribute it to more recent phenomena such as globalisation and the open borders within the European Union.

In the last part of this chapter, I argue that the early residential independence of the young is not only an adaptation to rapid social change but it also accelerates change. Following the terminology of Margaret Mead, the traditional pattern of leaving home for further education or job seeking in Germany triggers the *cofigurative* transmission of culture in German society. Therefore it not only helps young people to adapt to rapid social change, but also promotes and accelerates change. In Italy, conversely, the longer co-residence of families is an element of *postfigurative* cultural transmission. This pattern has two implications. On the one hand, it can decelerate change within society and consequently empowers the older generations. On the other hand, it can have the effect of hampering the young in the process of adaptation to the rapidly changing world and hence may provoke unease among them and eventually lead to protest. Before presenting the results and discussing how leaving home young helps to find orientation, the following section offers a summary of how the late move-out is interpreted as a strategy for facing uncertainty.

## **7.1 Staying at the parental home as a strategy of risk reduction**

Social scientists frequently explain the late departure from the parental home as a strategy of risk reduction in current societies that are characterised by individualisation processes and the destandardisation of the life course. Quadrelli’s study (2006), for example, offers evidence about how her interviewees in Italy explain their prolonged stay in the parental household as a strategy of risk-reduction. Instead of feeling constrained or forced to live with their parents, they emphasise that it is their choice to remain at home. The advantages they mention include having more time and energy for their studies; being able to pursue their interests; looking for jobs or thinking about their future careers, as well as spending time with friends and partners. In short,

they save time which they would otherwise need for casual jobs and housework. Moreover, in times of growing divorce rates, living in the family home while having a serious partner offers the opportunity to evaluate the quality of the relationship from a secure base.

Quadrelli (2006) further observes that personal autonomy can be increasingly achieved within the parental home, which reduces the incentives for moving out. Nowadays, as a consequence of modern educational methods and changing values, the relationship between parents and adult children is usually characterised by equality and a certain amount of negotiation or dialogue about household 'rules.' This offers young adults today a feeling of autonomy within the family home that previous generations did not experience. The greater mutual understanding between both generations reduces the desire of the young to feel they must leave in order to find freedom. Thus, only if the family climate of mutual understanding is missing will the motivation for leaving home be stronger. Quadrelli reports that the desire to live independently is often the result of latent conflicts between parents and children regarding the autonomy of the latter. In particular, when grown-up children disagree with the values, habits and rules of their parents, and cannot resolve these differences, they decide to leave. Growing shares of young people, however, experience favourable conditions in their parents' household. They recognise their parents' value system and the examples they set. At the same time, the modern values of their parents permit them to develop and express their individual identity while living at the parental home (Quadrelli 2006).

Quadrelli (2007) describes this model of supportive intergenerational relationships within the family household as a pedagogical dialogue between a 'guide', in this case the parent, and a 'disciple', in this case the young adult. In this kind of relationship, young people are considered to benefit from the sense of responsibility and advice of their parents who receive their legitimacy from their longstanding experience (Kellerhals et al. 2002). This ideal of intergenerational relationships constitutes the underlying structure of the Italian family. In this family culture, the protection and guidance of the parents helps the young generation to cope with increasing future uncertainty by preparing for, and thus minimising, risks: "Staying in the parental home is considered by many young people an investment that maximises opportunities and possibilities in constructing one's identity and planning one's biography" (Quadrelli 2007: 8). Holdsworth and Morgan find a similar pattern of meaning in interviews with young Spaniards living with their parents. These interviewees define freedom and independence as being "free within the parental

home ‘to be’ what they want to be” (2005: 89). In contrast, the interviewees from Denmark and Great Britain in this study understand freedom and independence as having privacy and being free from parental supervision which can only be found outside the parental home (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). This family culture offers protection as well as autonomy to the young – who are able to use the freedom they are given in the parental household for the exploration and construction of their individual identity. The results of my interviews support the view that those who remain at home with their parents often perceive this living arrangement as beneficial. In particular, they feel emotionally protected and enjoy the company of their parents. This also confirms the findings of other Italian studies (see Scabini/Cigoli 1997, Leccardi 2005).

From my interviews it emerged, however, that a second group of interviewees finds it inappropriate to interpret the prolonged stay in the parental home as a functioning strategy of coping with uncertainty. To them, instead, the investment in early residential independence constitutes a more suitable preparation for future challenges. In the following sections I will thus explore how leaving home can be regarded as a strategy for coping with uncertainty.

## **7.2 Leaving home as a strategy of risk reduction**

My findings reveal that interviewees who left the parental home early on, or parents who supported the early premarital independence of their children do not recognise the role of parents as experienced ‘guides’ for their children. These interviewees do not feel that it is possible, in the parental home, to have the kind of experiences they consider important for personal development and, thus, they advocate leaving home young. They believe that it is harder to individuate within the family home. This perception is unrelated to the quality of the relationship between the young people and their parents. Both generations simply concur that neither the parents nor the home environment can replicate the experiences which they deem instructive for future orientation and for coping with future challenges. The underlying logic of the argumentation of this group of interviewees is characterised by an awareness of the possible ‘shortcomings’ (and the possible absence) of parental guidance in an uncertain future.

This awareness of the possible shortcomings, and eventual absence, of parental guidance encourages parents and children to promote the early independence of the young generation. When discussing this topic, the interviewees not only refer to independence in terms of the practical issues of daily life, but also in terms of the capacity for independent decision making

regarding the future. Two main reasons were offered by the interviewees that explain why they consider the early acquisition of independence to be important. The first refers to the possible absence of the parents. The second relates to the possible incapacity of the parents to help their children (despite being present in their lives).

One German mother, for example, highlights that parents may die unexpectedly or become seriously ill – in which case children need to be prepared to manage their lives on their own:

Before [i.e. earlier in the interview], I also thought about something else [about] why I support the idea of the children moving out: It can really happen that a parent dies suddenly. And then it is better...that the children are already able to manage their lives independently. (German Mother, age 55, of Caroline, 20; both of her children left home at the beginning of their studies.)

Another issue about the absence of parental guidance can be reconstructed from the expectations which this mother has regarding the location of her children's future homes. When asked where she would prefer her children to live after completing their studies, she replied: “[laughing] I prefer [the name of the city in which she and her husband live]! And I think they have the same preference. But whether this will work out...I don't know.” Then she recounts that her son, who is approaching the end of his studies, has just finished an internship in China. He is now thinking of returning to China for several years after his studies for work opportunities. She adds: “I think they have to go where the job offers are. It depends...[but] I think they should just go where the job is.” It seems to be generally accepted among the German interviewees that job mobility is inevitable, as is the fact that it pulls families apart in a geographical sense (see also chapter 9). It implies that adult children and their parents need to be able to lead their lives independently from each other. This may be one of the reasons why the German mothers I interviewed were quick to emphasise the necessity for their children to learn to live independently as early as possible. As Caroline's mother put it: “I love both of my children, but I've always told them: you have to detach from your parents, you have to go your own way.”

Another German mother offered a reason why parents are not always able to advise and help their children – even when they live together. She argues that parents do not always have the specific knowledge and experience that can help their children manage their lives. This is also related to social mobility. Coming from a working-class background, this mother narrates that she had to make all the decisions regarding her education for herself. Her parents simply could

not help her with things like homework or offer advice about her future, even though, as she stresses, they were supportive and affectionate. Thus, she had to decide for herself which high-school to attend, what subject would suit her best at university, where to live when she left home, etc. She thinks that she may have passed on this attitude – of being self-reliant – to her daughter. For example, she notices that her daughter tends to talk about difficulties in her daily life only *after* she has solved any problems on her own:

Maybe I'm also a bit like that. I'm also someone who always thinks: I have to do it by myself, and I need to be *strong* in inverted commas. Maybe this has been transferred involuntarily. My parents only had a basic education. When I was in the fourth class at primary school, I was recommended by a teacher to go on to high school...and my parents said I had to make this decision on my own because they could not advise me.<sup>37</sup> Since then I have done everything independently. It was off the cards. This was just my situation. When I wanted something, I had to take charge of it by myself. (Louise's mother, 55, German. She, like her daughter, left home at the beginning of her studies.)

Her narration reveals how the experience of early independence can, involuntarily or unconsciously, become a shared value that is passed down to the next generation. She further highlights in her interview that her own experiences regarding education and the labour market are no longer relevant because job descriptions have changed, and the variety of subjects offered by universities today has increased significantly. In addition, her children have more experience and knowledge about the modern world as a result of growing up with the internet, etc. This is another reason why, in her opinion, children should make decisions about their lives independently; and why she, therefore, prefers not to interfere in their decision making.

A similar argument is raised by Roberto, a 27-year-old student in Germany, whose father arrived as a young man from Southern Italy as a so-called 'guest worker.' Roberto's father settled and married a German woman, and Roberto continued to live at home after high school while he undertook his professional training and vocational schooling. Then he decided to enrol in higher education. He left home at the beginning of his studies and moved to another city, even though he could have studied the same subject in his hometown. Roberto emphasises the generation gap between he and his parents:

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<sup>37</sup> In many German regions, primary school ends after four years and there is no comprehensive middle school. Teachers, parents and children thus have to take the decision of whether to go to high school or to a different kind of secondary school at a fairly early stage in the life of the children.

It is a different generation. Now because of the internet and so on...everything is so international. [...] It's no longer a world in which people say: okay, you are a baker, or you are this or that. You can also do something else and you can do it somewhere else. (Roberto, 27, Germany)

He argues that parents should encourage their children to gain experience in this changing, globalising world, which is characterised by new social and technological developments. According to him, it is a world that offers more opportunities than in the past, whether people like it or not.

Giulia, a 24-year-old Italian student living in Florence, perceives the social and technological changes as particularly significant. She left home during her undergraduate studies after having initially commuted to university. For her master's degree, she changed cities and enrolled in a post-graduate programme in Florence where she now lives – some 350 km from her hometown. She sees leaving home early as an adjustment to the requirements of modern society, which increasingly demands spatial mobility from its members:

At a certain point, a person needs to live his/her own life. And I would say that 20 is a good age for starting to do so. Also, if you only start at 28, in a society which is becoming increasingly more mobile, you may end up in a byroad. I think that society is also becoming more mobile because of the increased velocity of mobility and communication. I think [society] is much, much, more mobile than it was 20 years ago. (Giulia, 24, Italy)

These examples come from a group of interviewees who agree that gaining experience outside the parental home is greatly important for young people. In this pattern of meaning, young adults are supposed to make all the decisions independently regarding where they will live. This attitude is shaped by the awareness that the spatial proximity of family members does not ensure a long-lasting form of 'protection.' Furthermore, the idea behind encouraging the young to become independent is based on the perception that social and technological changes reduce the relevance of the parents' knowledge (that is, it becomes obsolete), as well as their capacity to give advice. Hence, early residential independence can be seen as a strategy to enable young people to cope with the uncertainty of the future on their own. The saying 'offence is the best defence' appears to be an apt summary of this strategy which opposes the idea of being sheltered in the parental home, as described in the previous section.

### 7.3 Different priorities: the unity of the family versus “seeing the world”

In the pattern of meaning which supports the interdependency of parents and adult children, the proximity and cohabitation of the family members is interpreted as the most suitable protection against future risks. Early residential independence is not primarily seen as an opportunity for experimentation which is supposed to help young people gain experience. Instead, it is related to concrete circumstances, such as a job offer or a specific educational programme which requires relocation.

The following passage, taken from an interview with an Italian mother (56) and father (54) clearly illustrates the opposition of these two patterns of interpretation. Their daughter Sonia (30) left home at the age of 21, when she was financially independent, solely to become independent, whereas their younger son Paolo (23) moved out to pursue his studies. While the parents, especially the father, accepted Paolo’s motives for leaving home, they did not, and still do not understand Sonia’s desire to live apart from them.

Mother: Paolo lived with us until he started university.

Father: (proudly) He continues to live with us.

Mother: He continues to live with us because he comes back on Friday evenings. Sometimes he comes back, sometimes he doesn’t.

About Paolo’s and Sonia’s move-out:

Mother: Paolo has always had very clear ideas about what he wanted. Ever since he was little he had his ideas. [...] You could say ah, ah, ah, but he went on with his ideas. [...] He’s very calm, but he’s very determined.

Father: We have never imposed anything, but we have talked extensively to each other. It [Paolo’s move-out] wasn’t a drastic choice or a drastic decision. The decisions were always made together, *as a family*, we arrange everything *together*.

With his sister it was initially a drama because it was a sudden and hasty decision. *She* decided at a certain point: ...enough, I’m going. By contrast, with Paolo it wasn’t an emotional event because it was planned and scheduled and then carried out.

Sonia left home to live alone because she thought that the family would not complete her, that the family would not give her everything. Her choice...was for different reasons, different in the way she went about it, in terms of the timing. If

the motive [to leave] was connected to work or studies, you could plan it and then move out. Sonia's choice depended on different circumstances. (Paolo's mother, 56, and father, 54, Italy)

This example shows vividly that in the patterns of meaning of the parents, the cohesion of the family is considered to be more important than the child's desire to gain experience outside the parental home. In their view, the family is the 'natural' place for children to stay, even for 'adult' children. The family is supposed to provide the grown up children with everything they need, not only materially, but also in terms of knowledge and experience. Decisions regarding future plans are thus made with the parents, as other authors have also confirmed: "Working out plans for the future is thus a developmental task that involves the entire family unit, in that it takes place within the network of family relationships" (Scabini et al. 2006: 90). Parents may, therefore, feel offended or rejected if their children make important decisions without consulting them. For this reason, the desire of the daughter, cited above, to leave home was interpreted by her parents as a criticism – as if her choice to leave was the result of some problem or deficit in the family. Her decision to leave, combined with her direct and rather undiplomatic way of communicating it, was a painful experience for her parents, especially for her father. He and his wife do not interpret the early move-out as an opportunity for their grown-up child to gain useful life experience. They believe the family home is, unquestionably, the most suitable environment for the personal development of young adults. In this view, experience outside the parental home is seen as of little use and even has negative connotations. In this pattern of interpretation, only practical reasons related to work or education can justify leaving the family home.

We can also find an opposing interpretation in other Italian interviews. A 57-year-old mother in Italy, for example, expresses her belief that leaving home is generally a beneficial experience for young people, especially nowadays, in the age of globalisation. She observes this in her 24-year-old daughter Tiziana who decided to move to the city of her university into a shared flat after commuting during the first year of studies. Tiziana's brother, a trained chef, also left the family home and worked in different restaurants throughout Italy and abroad to gain experience. In the opinion of this mother, the parental home has the function of being "a point of reference", a 'base' which her children can return to if and when they need to. This differs from the other pattern of meaning that considers the parental home as the best place for young adults to live. Making sense of Tiziana's independence, her mother says:

After leaving home, [Tiziana] comes back to our house less and less often. But I understand it, I understand it. [...] I read somewhere, or heard somewhere – I don't remember exactly – something I agree with very much: 'I taught my children to have roots, but I also taught them to have wings.' And this is a very beautiful idea...that they should also have wings. (Tiziana's mother, 57, Italy)

Tiziana's mother might be referring here to a saying often attributed to the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 - 1832): "There are two things children should get from their parents: roots and wings."

As with the students quoted above, Tiziana's mother interprets her children's wishes to be independent as a result of social change related to the process of globalisation:

I understand that nowadays, with open borders, with the opportunity to see the world, it is good that they have wings to see the world, which is the most beautiful thing to see, in my opinion. As a mother you need to learn to accept this. (Tiziana's mother, 57, Italy)

It becomes clear, from her interpretation of the children's wings, that their independence was not always something she found easy to come to terms with. As she makes clear, she would prefer to have her children nearby, but in the modern world it is no longer the role of the parents to teach the young. On the contrary, she recognises that her children have gained important experience on their own, for example by travelling, and may have more adequate knowledge of certain matters than she does. Furthermore, she admits that her children may have a way of seeing things that even enriches and corrects her own perspective as a mother:

I would have preferred that my children talked to me about their problems [...] so that I could have been a part of their daily lives. Instead, they became...autonomous; they solve their problems on their own. Perhaps more often I am the one who needs to talk to them to get a younger perspective on things. A younger perspective, an opinion, because I might be narrower in my vision of life. They...[she breaks off momentarily] Tiziana has travelled to so many places. [...] She has taken flights alone three or four times. I don't even know how to take the train, so to speak... [laughing]. They are young. They have a vision of things that is...more open. Hence they have an autonomy that comes at a price. (Tiziana's mother, 57, Italy)

This mother describes how she had to reconsider her own culture in order to accommodate the move-out of her children into her repertoire of meaning patterns. She perceives the move-out and residential mobility of her children as a *new* social phenomenon which diverges from the typical Italian behaviour:

With a more old-fashioned kind of parent, like the parents I had, who always wanted to know everything, one had to stay at home ...I carry this with me...the culture of my parents, my grandparents. I carry with me this idea of the family coming together in the evening. [...] As a *'mamma'*, clearly I would like this, I would like it, but perhaps because in our Italian culture of being a little more...attached, a little closer, also too much, maybe, of fully occupying all the children's time. [...] Maybe it is better to give them a bit more freedom. But...I'm like this [laughs]. For me it's a pleasure to be together. Or also maybe..., I ask myself, a form of selfishness. It can also be a form of selfishness, to want them close by, because it's a pleasure for *me*. And so I have to accept their desire to be away. (Tiziana's mother, 57, Italy)

She adds that she cannot find anything negative about Tiziana's life away from home, in Florence – where she has found good company and lives together with friends. Thus her mother concludes: “I have to change my ideas about being together in the family.”

As a final point on this topic, she explains that she let her children go because she loves them, and that she is ready to do whatever her children need her to do. Her interview refutes the view expressed by some of the interviewees, and by interviewees in Quadrelli's study (2006), that the departure from the parental home is a consequence of latent conflicts and a lack of understanding between young adults and their parents. The interview with Tiziana's mother is evidence that the 'unjustified' departure from the parental home can also occur within loving and supportive families. A mother may even redefine her patterns of meaning to let her children go in order to provide them with what they need for the future.

#### **7.4 The normalcy of “cutting the cord”**

In another interpretation, which is diametrically opposed to the pattern of meaning that the best place for growing up is in the family household, is that according to which the conflicts which arise during the process of detachment are considered to be absolutely normal. Hence, the early premarital move-out is not seen as a sign of discontent or dissatisfaction with family life, but as a normal development. Louise's mother in Germany, for example, interprets the conflicts she had with her daughter before leaving home as a normal consequence in the process of detachment, which initiates during the period of adolescence and continues throughout early adulthood: “I think it is simply a situation of crisis during adolescence, when they [young people] need to find themselves. And it returns to normal again, I would say.” When asked whether she had the

impression that her daughter was leaving home because she did not like living with her family anymore she simply replies: “No, Louise wanted to become independent.”

However, the interpretation of Louise’s mother not only differs from that of Paolo’s parents, but also from the perspective of Tiziana’s mother in Italy. Tiziana’s mother sees her children’s early (and hence for Italy, unusual) departure from the parental home as an adaptation to globalisation and recent social and technological changes. Instead, Louise’s mother in Germany interprets the move-out of grown-up children around the age of 20 as a general, natural, inevitability. She does not relate it to recent social or technological developments but argues more generally that young people need to become independent because parents are not always available for help. It is interesting to note that when asked for clarification as to why she thinks that “the process of cutting the umbilical cord” is important for young people she replies thoughtfully, speaking slowly, as if it was difficult to explain:

Well, because they will be responsible for their own lives in the future...and also, you can’t always be there as a parent. As long as you are there, you will always take care of them, that is a given. But you are not always there. I think it is important that they distance themselves a bit. Then you can also have a more equal relationship because you always see the children as children. And I think it is good when everybody is completely on their own for a while and ...yes, then you can also start to interact differently with each other or maybe on a different level, more equal. [...] I think you should withdraw as a parent, so that they can achieve this [the detachment from the parents] in their lives. This doesn’t mean that you don’t have contact with them, or that you don’t like each other. Not at all. But it becomes different. (Louise’s mother, 54, German)

The way this German mother tries to make sense of the early move out of her children is representative of other German interviews as well. It differs from the Italian interpretation because it is not related to recent social change such as globalisation. Instead, this interpretation evokes the impression that German family ties have been ‘weak’ over generations. It suggests that the absence of parents and other supportive family members must have also occurred in the past and thus due to this common experience, parents already understood that it was useful to teach their children to be independent. The use of metaphors underlines that this is probably deeply engrained cultural knowledge. The difficulty in explaining why the parents consider a relatively early move-out as a beneficial step for their children may arise from the fact that

leaving home at this age in Germany tends to be a habitual form of behaviour rather than a rational decision.

Unlike my Italian interviewees, who tend to interpret the seemingly ‘unjustified’ move-out – that is, the move-out which is not directly linked to job mobility or educational motives – as a form of adaptation to globalising economies and globalising cultures, the German interviewees often use rather well known metaphorical sayings to make sense of it. These metaphorical catchphrases are typically variations of either the ‘cutting the [umbilical] cord’ saying, or that of ‘standing on one’s own two feet.’ Phrases such as “at some point you have to stand on your own two feet” (Simon’s mother, 49, German) are typical among the German interviewees. Or, another example: “I think it is just a part of life that they cut their cord to the parental home [in German: *‘sich abnabeln vom Elternhaus’*] and that they go their own ways” (Caroline’s mother, 55, German).

Metaphors offer useful clues in the analysis of culture. They can be understood as “culture-laden” (Quinn 2005: 49). Quinn defines metaphors as “particularly salient intersubjectively shared examples of what they stand for” (ibid.). She holds that speakers who use metaphors often, justifiably, take for granted that this expression will be well known to their listeners. Metaphors help speakers to get their message across efficiently. Different metaphors that relate to the same topic can capture the various aspects of a shared schema, a shared pattern of meaning. Whereas ‘cutting the umbilical cord’, for example, refers to the separation from the parents, ‘standing on one’s own two feet’ denotes the ability to be self-reliant. Both meanings are two different aspects of a particular pattern of meaning describing adulthood. The fact that the German interviewees frequently use these metaphors to make sense of the departure from the parental home suggests that the interpretation of leaving home as a necessary step towards independence is deeply engrained in their culture. It is not a reaction to a recent social phenomenon such as globalisation; rather, it indicates that the cultural knowledge captured by these catchphrases is based on widely shared experience in the past.

## 7.5 Discussion

### **Limited confidence in parental guidance**

The patterns of meaning reconstructed in the analysis refer to the ability of the parents to provide their children with guidance. We can identify two opposing patterns. In the first pattern of meaning, which favours the interdependence of family members, the parents' experience is considered more valuable than in the second pattern where the focus lies on social change and the individual experience of the child. In the first pattern, parents are supposed to be able to guide and advise their children. This pattern of meaning needs to be seen in relation to another pattern of meaning which regards the availability of the parents. Even when these interviewees evaluate the parental capacity to give appropriate advice to their children as high, they may think that this advice may not always be available to the child. For this reason, they are convinced that children need to become independent. Thus, they favour an early move-out from the family home so that the children can learn to live autonomously. As described in chapter 3, greater spatial distances and fewer visits and phone calls between family members in northern Europe, including Germany, reduce their possibilities to help and advise each other (Höllinger/Haller 1990, Barbagli 1996, Jurado Guerrero/Naldini 1996, Holdsworth/Irazoqui Solda 2002, Kohli et al. 2005, Albertini et al. 2007, Kohli/Albertini 2008). Hence, the interpretation of the interviewed German mother, focussing on the possible absence of parents, corresponds to the German reality. Equally, the confidence of the Italian father, cited above, in the continuity of close family bonds throughout life reflects the Italian situation of family proximity observed by quantitative studies quite well.

In the second pattern of meaning, the interviewees show a greater awareness of the limited capability of parents to be able to advise their adult children. Social mobility and social change have meant that the knowledge which parents possess may, at least in part, lose its usefulness to the young. Hence, in this perspective, early independence from parents increases the possibilities of the young to build up and test their own 'sense of direction' in a more reflexive form of socialisation (see Veith 2002). Whereas in the view of the first pattern of meaning the parents constitute the main source of guidance, in this perspective more diverse sources of orientation are considered useful, such as peers and other adults from outside of the family.

That is, in families or cultures in which parents consider themselves as the most important and most competent advisors of their children, cultural knowledge is handed down, fairly unchanged, from one generation to the next. While in cultures in which the opposing pattern of meaning is more prevalent, more input from outside of the family is integrated by the children with the cultural knowledge that they learn from their parents. This allows new ideas to spread more rapidly and therefore accelerates social change. At the same time, it allows children to be more open and adaptable to change because they are encouraged to also use sources of help and information other than their parents.

### **Cofigurative and postfigurative cultures**

The anthropologist Margaret Mead (1978) calls this latter view the “cofigurative” transmission of culture. This form of cultural transmission refers to the socialisation by peers and other agents outside the family. In such cultures, the young strive for experience and knowledge which they cannot learn from their parents and grandparents, and yet feel is necessary and useful to them. The older family members largely accept their loss of influence over their children and grandchildren associated with this form of cultural transmission, knowing that they equally benefited from far-reaching independence during their own youth. Moreover, the independence of their children liberates them from providing guidance where they feel they are not able to fulfil this task.

Margaret Mead distinguishes between “postfigurative”, “cofigurative” and “prefigurative” cultures. The three concepts refer to the different ways in which cultural knowledge can be transmitted from one generation to the next. The opposed model to cofigurative societies are postfigurative societies. Prefigurative cultures can be seen as an intensification of cofigurative cultures, in which the knowledge of the older generations loses its validity so quickly that the elders have to acquire orientation from their children and grandchildren who constantly construct new knowledge. This form of society, however, is rarely found in the empirical reality.

Spatial mobility is an important factor that can foster the differences between cofigurative and postfigurative societies. Mead explains that one reason for the cofigurative transmission of culture is the absence of the parents and grandparents as a consequence of residential mobility, for example, due to workplace mobility. If young people move away, they will not be able to model their behaviour on that of their elders because the parents’ and grandparents’ advice is not

constantly at hand. These young people then have to construct their own way of dealing with the help of various sources of orientation. Hence, the incomplete processes of intergenerational transfer offer leeway for innovation. And this triggers social change. In conclusion, the early move-out from home and the residential mobility of young people accelerate social change. Luhmann argues that subsequent generations are not the perfect replica of previous generations, but differ from the latter to various degrees. These differences emerge as a result of the incomplete processes of intergenerational cultural transfer in which young individuals actively appropriate and refuse parts of the cultural knowledge that is transferred to them by the older generations (Luhmann 1987). As a result, inherited social structures and knowledge which young people perceive as incongruent to their own experience and identities may be subjected to change as soon as there is the possibility for introducing new solutions (Connidis/McMullin 2002). Thus, societies in which young people have fewer opportunities for leaving home, and for gaining new experience – and less support from their parents for residential independence – will also be more resistant to change.

The postfigurative model of cultural transmission corresponds to the first pattern of meaning identified in the above analysis. In postfigurative societies, young people follow the predetermined way of living of their elders. That is, the young acquire cultural knowledge mainly from their parents and grandparents. They are less exposed to cultural knowledge from outside the family and are less encouraged to search for it. Hence, they also have fewer opportunities to combine the knowledge of their elders with knowledge from other sources. This lack of external input may, as a result, hamper innovation and change. Social change must even be repudiated in this kind of social system, to assure that every generation sees their children raised in the same way that their parents and grandparents were raised. This kind of cultural system guarantees that inherited knowledge does not lose its validity. Only in this way, can the influential and powerful position of the older generations be conserved.

Indeed, the southern European countries appear to be more traditional and preserve the gender roles and family forms that, elsewhere, have been changing rapidly – especially in northern Europe where family members tend to be more individualised (see, e.g., González et al. 1999, Daly 2005, Knijn/Saraceno 2010, Mau/Verwiebe 2010, Moreno Mínguez 2010). Moreover, southern European societies have often been characterised as “gerontocratic” (e.g., Sgritta 2003). The institutionalisation of an early move-out and residential mobility of young people would

challenge the knowledge of the older generations and undermine their power. Hence, it is hardly surprising – not only from an emotional point of view – that Italian parents feel uncomfortable seeing their children leave home without a ‘justifiable’ reason.

However, I do not propose that Germany and Italy constitute opposing examples of cofigurative culture at one end and postfigurative culture at the other end. Instead, I understand both societies as cofigurative cultures, nonetheless with more postfigurative elements in the Italian society due to the longer coresidence of parents and adult children. Additionally, the Italian way of making decisions regarding the lives of grown-up children – that is, parents and children decide together, rather than independently, for example, where to study – constitutes an element of postfiguration in the Italian society. In cultures with more cofigurative elements, the older generations are more prone to accept a partial loss of power due to their knowledge becoming, in part, outdated. On the other hand, this type of society is more capable of adapting to social and technological change, which can be beneficial, also economically, for all generations, including the older age groups. Hence, the older generations may also have an interest in maintaining this form of cultural transmission, even at a partial expense of their social status.

### **Leaving home as a strategy for coping with uncertainty**

In cofigurative societies, which are usually characterised by rapid social change, identities are an ongoing ‘project’ throughout the course of life because individuals need to adjust constantly to rapid social change (Berger et al. 1973). This includes going through identity crises, especially during youth and early adulthood, in order to construct an independent identity (Erikson 1980). In line with the mechanisms of cultural transmission in cofigurative societies, a group of interviewees maintains that, for them, the construction of an independent identity would not be possible while living with their parents. Instead, they prefer to confront new experiences and cultural knowledge beyond the parental home. They are also aware that this process may include difficulties and crises. In this pattern of interpretation, remaining in the parental home is not considered an adequate strategy for coping with uncertainty because it is the input and challenge of a different social environment that allows young people to grow and develop individual strategies for facing uncertainty. The interviews suggest that the Italian society, where young people more often choose to stay with their parents during the transition to adulthood, comprises more elements of a postfigurative transmission of culture.

It is, moreover, interesting to note that most German interviewees in this sample resort to traditional sayings when asked to justify the early departure from the parental home. By contrast, the Italian interviewees who support an early move-out tend to interpret it as an adaptation to current change, such as globalisation and the increased velocity of spatial mobility and communication due to recent technological developments. This difference most probably results from the strong institutionalisation, over several generations, of the early departure from the parental home in Germany, whereas it appears to be a less institutionalised form of behaviour in Italy, where it is not widespread enough to become normative and runs contrary to other institutional structures, such as the housing market and the public financial support for students, and young people in general. In Germany, instead, leaving home to gain experience and to “see the world” has a long tradition (e.g., Reher 1998). In the past, the years of travel which young craftsmen undertook were appreciated not only for the new techniques and different conventions which the journeymen could learn, but because “the gain of experience and character building were undisputed” for the young person (Endres 1996: 390). As an eighteenth-century South German travel order highlights, “it is inevitably necessary for him (the young apprentice), to spend several years in the world, if he shall become a man and a valuable citizen” (Fürstlich Oetting-Oetting- und Oetting-Spielbergische Wanderordnung, 1785, cited in Endres 1996: 390).

## **8. Leaving home and identity construction**

The link between leaving home and the construction of an individual identity has been an important, though unexpected, topic which has come up during the interviews. It was frequently brought up by the interviewees themselves, even though it had not been included in the interview guide – which is one of the benefits that comes along with open interview questions. In this chapter, I therefore wish to investigate further these different aspects of identity construction that appeared in the interviews.

### **8.1 Identity construction during the transition to adulthood**

In the constantly changing environment of current societies, young people need to be able to make decisions regarding the future on their own, because a great deal of the knowledge and know-how of their parents and grandparents is losing its validity with respect to the modern day lives of the young people themselves. Formerly stable, encompassing norms of how to conduct one's life are disappearing to make way for a plurality of values and new options. The institutions that have standardised the structure of the life course in the past are weakening. Instead of following predefined life course patterns, individuals are increasingly expected to design their biography on their own (Kohli 2009, 1992, Mayer 2001). Social scientists therefore interpret modern individuals as the “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Rose 1989: 226). At the same time, the imponderabilities of the global economy make it difficult to foresee biographical developments and plan individual careers. Due to the diminishing influence of strict norms and socially prescribed guidelines, life courses increasingly depend on individual decisions which, at the same time, are restricted by stronger economic pressure and rapidly altering opportunities and constraints. As a consequence, young people need to take decisions concerning their biographies more and more individually from an early age on (Côté 2000). Furthermore, the probability for them to encounter failures and cul-de-sacs in their lives is greater than for the previous generations who grew up in the decades after the Second World War. An essential ability for living one's life is thus to know how to change direction when the initial life concept does not

work out. Individual identity and identity crises have become widely recognised concepts in the cultural repertoire of current Western societies. Young people need to acquire the ability to reinterpret and reconstruct their identities to make sense of biographic breaks in order to move forward (Furlong/Cartmel 2007).

During large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adolescence has been considered the period of life that is dedicated to the development of an independent identity (Erikson 1962, 1980). Western cultural knowledge informs us that adolescents start to claim their individuality and express their identities more strongly than children. Hence parents tend to tolerate the often rebellious behaviour of their adolescent offspring and accept it as a normal developmental stage (Marcia 1980). More recently, however, social scientists argue that the construction of identity is not limited to adolescence, but reaches beyond. They increasingly recognise that the period following adolescence is also crucial to identity formation. Many young adults do not characterise themselves as grown-up, but see themselves as still on the way to fully acquiring adulthood. This stage of life has therefore been denominated “emerging adulthood.” It approximately comprises the ages between 18 and 24 years (Arnett 2000).

Emerging adulthood is understood as an intensification of identity exploration and not simply as a prolongation of youth. The age between approximately 18 and 24 years usually offers more opportunities for identity exploration than adolescence and later periods of life. On the one hand, emerging adulthood yields more freedom than adolescence, due to greater independence from the parents. On the other hand, this life stage leaves more room for possible failure and crises than later life stages in which most people assume the responsibilities of long-term partnership and child bearing. The time of emerging adulthood can thus be used to explore relationships, living arrangements, group memberships, tastes, jobs, geographical spaces, world views, and much else. All this contributes to gaining experience and self-awareness as strategies of orientation and identity construction (Arnett 2000, 2004).

## **8.2 Residential independence and identity construction**

The departure from the parental home can be regarded as an essential element of emerging adulthood because it allows for an intense exploration of identity. Young people who leave home for college in the U.S., for example, see the departure from the parental home and their

integration into the new social environment at college as an opportunity to get to know themselves. Furthermore, they interpret their relocation as an opportunity to discard disliked identities from their adolescence. They expect a “fresh start” and appreciate this opportunity. The choice of college is a relevant issue for these American students because they are aware that they are choosing the environment which will influence the construction of their identity. Most of these students aim to find a college where they have the feeling that they “fit in”, that is, where the other students are similar to them. For this purpose, many high school graduates in the U.S. go on a ‘campus tour’ before they make their choice. This way they attempt to find out more about the colleges that they have shortlisted to make a better choice (Karp et al. 1998). This example from the U.S. demonstrates that the students do not simply choose the nearest university or the college which offers the preferred subject. The students employ ‘soft’ criteria in the process of selecting a higher education institution. These ‘soft’ criteria are related to the expression and construction of their identities. Karp et al. argue that, in times of rapid social change and growing complexity, independent living during university studies offers the possibility of a “liminal stage” during which the students have the opportunity to test alternative identities (Karp et al. 1998: 271). This liminal stage or moratorium has the function of preparing young people for adulthood and professional life by offering the possibility of probing different aspects of identity and adjusting them to changes in the current life situation.

Similar to these high school graduates in the U.S., young people in Germany also use the time of emerging adulthood for trying out different opportunities. Rieser (1997) observes that changing living arrangements appear to be characteristic for the age group between 18 and 25 in Germany. The participants of this study moved frequently, changing their housing situations – from sharing a flat, to living with a partner, to living alone, and so on. Similar to Karp et al. (1998), Rieser comes to the conclusion that this behaviour is beneficial to the development of the individual personality (1997: 88).

### **8.3 Metaphors to describe identity construction**

Also in the present study, the interviewees who favour independence consider the departure from the parental home as an important step for constructing their individual identity. They stress the importance of “finding one’s own way” as a goal in their personal development. Other recurring

formulations are “you should do what you need to do” and “you need to find out who you are.” The usage of these metaphors indicates that it is not only the detachment from the parents which is, in their view, important for growing up, but also the construction of an independent identity. The nearly standardised metaphorical wording of these phrases shows that they consist of largely shared patterns of meaning containing “crystallised” cultural knowledge.

The interviewees who talk about identity construction make clear that it is easier for them to “find out who they are” when living away from their parents. Even if the new home is located only a few blocks away, it makes a difference, as in Martina’s case. Martina, a 27-year-old student in Florence, left home at the age of 20 when she had the opportunity to move into the flat of her deceased grandmother in the same neighbourhood where she grew up. Her mother welcomed her daughter’s decision to move out and fully supported her desire to live independently. Looking back, Martina sums up: “I think it was a wise choice. I think that everybody should leave home at the age of 19 or 20 to find your own way in life” (Martina, 27, Italian). Nevertheless, not everybody feels the desire to “find his or her own way” at the age of 19 or 20. Marco (23), for example, living with his parents in Florence, also had the possibility to move into a flat owned by his family in the same city, but he preferred to stay with his parents. His interview was one of the shortest with clear and concise answers in which the desire to “find out who he was” was absent. He was happy with spending his life in Florence and was looking forward to working in his family’s company once he was finished his studies. This certainty about his future may have obviated the need for constructing an independent identity while living away from home.

Many interviewees who left home mention repeatedly that they wanted to “live their own life” or “find their own way.” The interviewees usually limit their explanations regarding their departure from the parental home to these simple metaphors without making their reasons for supporting residential independence more explicit. Only very few interviewees, especially in Italy, where leaving home without ‘coercive’ reasons is not very common, talk about this topic more extensively. I assume that one explanation for this is precisely the fact that leaving home in their social environment is not a ‘mainstream’ behaviour, and therefore triggered them to reflect upon it more extensively, whereas in Germany the move-out is more taken-for-granted and therefore does not require extensive explanations. One of these Italian interviewees is Anna, who moved from the South of Italy to Florence when she was 19. She explains at large why it was beneficial

for her to leave home and move to a city in the Central North of Italy. She enthusiastically notes a development of her personality which she finds very enriching:

I have improved so much. If I look at my friends who continue their life with the same mindset, and who see the same people ... I mean, for me now it is fundamental to meet new people, discover new things; to travel if I have the possibility. It's a preparation for the world, for the outside world, for the future, for reality. (Anna, 20, Italy)

As do many other interviewees as well, Anna interprets relocation during education as a strategy of learning to live a life that is characterised by diversity and change. In this pattern of meaning, gaining experience outside the well acquainted childhood environment is interpreted as a preparation for the time in the future in which parents will no longer be able to provide encompassing guidance and protection for their children. Therefore, a group of interviewees who support early residential independence interpret living on one's own in a new city as an enriching challenge for young people.

These interviewees think that the young people who remain living with their parents and stay in their hometown miss interesting and important opportunities for identity construction and finding orientation, as Anna's example illustrates:

[...] because they always keep a perspective that is based on what their parents taught them, which can also be right, this education, I mean. But it's also a bit necessary for one to live one's own life, isn't it? You should start at the age of 20 to understand who you are. I mean, search and find out what you want [out of life]. (Anna, 20, Italy)

On the other hand, the interviewees that use the pattern of interdependence in their interpretation of reality do not consider a possible desire to separate from the parents in order to develop and express their own identity. They exclusively think of work or study related motives for leaving home or unsatisfying family relations which may push towards an early move-out. In addition, the absence of a strong love relationship in one's hometown and unsatisfying relations with the larger social environment are mentioned by these interviewees as triggering factors for leaving home. Lidia, for example, a student in Italy, living with her parents and commuting to university, speaks in her interview about a friend who moved to Milan. This friend is the only person whom Lidia knows among her friends who moved away for her studies. She says that this girl went away because she already knew people in Milan and because she could afford it financially. The main reason, however, from Lidia's perspective, is that this girl was not happy in

her hometown and, moreover, that she did not have a boyfriend there. So she had to search for something new in a different place:

Apart from friendships, she has no strong emotional bond of love here. So she said: I'm moving away. I'm going to create a new life there. [...] As far as I remember, she didn't feel good at her school, with the people at her school. She had a bad time here. So she said: I'll need a change. I start again – everything new. (Lidia, 19, Italian)

In this pattern of meaning, which supports the interdependence of family members, leaving home is interpreted as the consequence of a deficit – a deficit in good relationships and in suitable opportunities at home. In this view, only a deficit can push young people away from their families and friends. Hence, leaving home is not primarily seen as an opportunity for acquiring useful experience and developing an individual identity, as in the independence pattern, but it is interpreted only as a reaction and a possible solution to an existing problem.

#### **8.4 What makes identity a reliable source of orientation?**

Identity, understood as a “sense of self-definition”, has the function of a “compass” which “navigates” the individual throughout the life course (Sneed/Whitbourne 2003: 313). Facing rapid social change, individuals need to continuously balance and adjust their identities throughout the life course. The question is how young adults can improve their capacity to maintain and re-construct an identity which serves as a compass for navigating in uncertain circumstances. The interviewees interpret the departure from the parental home as beneficial to identity construction and individual orientation in three ways. First, they feel they benefit from the extension of their repertoire of concepts and shared meanings that the experience outside the context of the parental home can bring. They therefore feel better prepared for interacting in different social contexts and for interpreting their own situation from different angles. Second, they argue that the new experience outside the familiar context helps to augment self-awareness. This reinforces their capacity to take decisions and make realistic plans for the future since a precise knowledge of themselves helps them to anticipate their own possible future reactions to certain circumstances. Third, choosing a new place of living is seen as a relevant opportunity for exercising their capacity of individual decision making and expressing their identity which increases their capacity of independent agency.

### **8.4.1 Experience extends the individual repertoire of shared meanings**

The interviewees who left home stress the importance of gaining experience in environments other than the one in which they grew up. Anna (20), for example, stresses that being in another place is not only beneficial due to the job offers and educational opportunities one may find there, but also for the mere fact of getting to know a different reality. The most important benefits, however, are those she sees in relocating from a provincial region to a larger city:

It is important to look around: it doesn't matter whether the person comes from Florence, even coming to Southern Italy and having ..., how shall I put it ..., collecting experiences that are diverse from those that I can collect here. [...] But moving there, according to me, is not beneficial. It is more beneficial when a person, like I did, moves here, because it gives you an edge because of living in a metropolis or because of living at least in a bigger city. Here, there are people with diverse goals, with diverse cultures, that you can compare and measure yourself against. (Anna, 20, Italy)

From this quote we can see that, for this interviewee, it is not only the outstanding study programme which offsets the financial costs and emotional 'costs' of leaving home. It is moreover the large variety of experience that can be collected by living in a different and bigger city. It is the confrontation of self with diversity, with the new and unknown, which is perceived as enriching in the personal development.

Similarly, experience abroad is interpreted as highly valuable for the development of one's personality. Tommaso, for example, a 32-year-old student in Florence, coming from the South of Italy, worked in Austria for several months during his professional life before enrolling at the university. Based on this experience, he is convinced that living abroad is highly beneficial for the development of the personality in times of social change and general uncertainty. He stresses the value of personal experience over the knowledge received from other people: "It [living abroad] helps you to think differently. It helps you to understand things of which you only had second-hand knowledge before" (Tommaso, 32, Italian).

Roberto, a student in Germany, also elaborates on the effect of learning "to think differently" when living in another country. He argues that experience abroad helps in self-development by increasing one's capacity of understanding diverse ways of thinking. According to him, this not only has positive effects on the individual, regarding the professional career, for

example, but it is also beneficial to everybody because it augments tolerance and mutual understanding:

You also learn ... I think, when you do this, going abroad, Japan, it doesn't matter where, as long as it's someplace different, something new, and as long as you come back healthy; then it is always a good experience, and you know it was the right thing to do, and that you have improved yourself. And this is actually not only important for your career, but also for getting to know new cultures; you are better able to put yourself in other people's shoes – others who may think differently. [...] When you always remain in your [original] environment, you only have one perspective. And like this [going abroad] it is easier for you to understand other perspectives. In fact, it would basically make everything better if everybody did this. (Roberto, 27, Germany, father from Italy)

Roberto and his fellow student Letizia are convinced that this positive effect not only occurs when a person goes abroad, but also by moving to another place within the same country. Letizia says that a person who has lived away from her hometown is considered to be “more open and can adjust more easily to new situations” (Letizia, 25, Germany, father from Italy). Thomas (20) in Germany says that students not only leave home for coercive reasons related to the educational system or for the desire of independence, but also because they want to “broaden their horizons.” His formulation is a metaphor for the acquisition of new patterns of meaning that also Tommaso, Roberto and Letizia also described. In this underlying pattern of meaning, leaving home is interpreted as enlarging the individual repertoire of meaning patterns which is seen as preparing young people for their life in a complex, globalised, rapidly changing world. This idea of preparation, in turn, is part of the pattern of meaning in which the early, premarital departure from the parental home is interpreted as an investment in the future and not as a luxury.

These examples show that acquiring new patterns of meaning helps to interact in a greater variety of situations. That is, the more shared patterns of meaning individuals achieve to integrate into their perspective, the better they will be able to understand other situations and other individuals and interact with them in a productive way. In the conceptual approach which I am suggesting here, culture is understood as a “tool kit” (Swidler 1986: 277), consisting of the patterns of meaning and interpretive templates which individuals acquire from interactions. This interpretation of culture implies that not everybody acquires exactly the same patterns of meaning and, therefore, disposes of different “tools” for interpreting and predicting other people's

behaviour, and of different tools for organising one's life and managing one's feelings. Individual interpretations depend on the shared meanings passed down from previous generations. These shared meanings, however, are shaped by individual experience too, which leads to a reinterpretation and modification of the inherited patterns of meaning. As explained in chapter 4, individuals test their inherited patterns of meaning against reality. That is, exactly like scientists, they test acquired meanings against individual experience, trying to figure out the "predictive efficiency" of the meaning patterns (Kelly 1991: 9). Hence, meanings are always 'working hypotheses.' They are not static, but can be modified, abandoned and rediscovered. Leaving the home environment is an opportunity for testing the meanings learned from family members and friends during childhood and youth. Leaving home thus offers the possibility to extend and adjust the individual repertoire of meanings. Kelly explains that "man seeks to improve his constructs [i.e. his patterns of meaning] by increasing his repertoire, by altering them to provide better fits, and by subsuming them with superordinate constructs and systems" (Kelly 1991: 7). This suggests that a large repertoire of shared patterns of meaning, integrated into the individual identity, increases the chances of acting appropriately in new and non-routine situations. A rich repertoire of constructs augments the individual ability to make accurate predictions of other people's behaviour. It helps to interact in unfamiliar situations. Thus new experience in different social contexts can help to increase the individual skills of agency and orientation by providing alternative interpretations.

Not only do a number of student interviews reflect this idea, but the parents who support the early independence of their grown-up children also follow this logic. Thus, experience in new and different contexts is perceived as enriching and instructive. A German mother, for example, says:

If I were young again, I would go away. I would be in Berlin, Hamburg, Rome. But I would certainly not be [in her small town]. Yes, the bigger, the better. And I have wanderlust [=Fernweh (in German)] anyway. (Simon's mother, 49, German)

This statement illustrates that also mothers fully recognise the idea that leaving home and moving to a different environment can be beneficial for a young person. This and other quotes reveal that the parents' understanding and support for their children who desire to move to a bigger city derives from their own experience.

### 8.4.2 Experience helps to find orientation from 'within'

Many interviewees favouring residential independence during the transition to adulthood interpret the move-out as an occasion to gain self-knowledge. One illustrative example of this, again, is Anna (20). According to her, gaining new experience outside the home environment has the effect of getting to know oneself which helps for future planning and decision making:

You should start to understand who you are. [...] If you don't start to become interested in the world, that is ... you should not cling to the same habits, exactly, not clinging to daily routines, you should try to understand ... to look around, to get to know different things. Having thirst of curiosity, only this way you can understand: ah, this I like, and that I don't like [...]. (Anna, 20, Italy)

These interviewees believe that getting to know individual preferences is essential in a rapidly changing environment because individual preferences are the only source of orientation in an insecure future in which rational planning becomes difficult, as one German mother explains:

I find it important that the children do what they are interested in – what comes natural to them and what they like, and not be so preoccupied with whether or not they will actually find a job or not. Because in my experience, if you do what you are able to do well, or do what you want to do, then opportunities will somehow present themselves. Also because today you can't be sure about the future. Therefore, it is not important what you study. You can't be one hundred percent certain that you will get the job that you plan to get. (Louise's mother, 54, Germany)

Moreover, some interviewees regard the experience gained outside the parental home not only as a source of self-knowledge, but also as a source of self-confidence, which helps to confront future challenges. Letizia, for example, who remained in the parental home during her professional training and during her studies, observed that a friend who spent a high-school year with a host family in the USA returned from this stay abroad with stronger self-confidence:

Of course there are persons for whom it wasn't easy and so on. And they came back home unhappy because they were homesick or because they did not come to terms with it. But those who continued and stayed abroad for a long time were stronger when they came back. [...] For sure, because then you are simply stronger in certain situations in life. And then you think of it, what you have experienced, and you think: I was at this and that place and mastered everything, why should I not be able to master this problem now, when there are bad times and so on. (Letizia, 25, Germany)

This view, that experience outside the parental home can increase self-confidence, is supported by other students as well who observed a similar effect without going abroad, simply by leaving home and moving to another city. Paolo (23) in Florence, for example, reports that leaving home made him stronger in the sense that he is now more capable of coping with everyday challenges than before leaving home: “It has helped me to grow and strengthen my personality” (Paolo, 23, Italy).

In sum, experience not only helps to increase the individual repertoire of shared meanings, but it also helps to get to know oneself and to enhance self-confidence. The resulting enhanced self-awareness increases the capability of individuals to plan and project their biography in a changing environment because greater self-awareness helps to anticipate individual reactions to an unknown social context. Gaining experience with different people in various contexts can thus be a good ‘training’ for constructing and reconstructing one’s identity. According to George H. Mead, a well-adjusted self can only be maintained if individuals expose themselves to interactions which challenge their identity and even unbalance it. Only through the interaction with other people can individuals experience their own selves and build up a balanced identity (Mead 1962, Krappmann 2010). Self-awareness through experience is the key in this ‘strategy’ for developing an identity that serves as a reliable compass through the imponderabilities of modern life. Since identity is built on the autobiographical memory of personal experience, it also provides a self-image of one’s individual abilities and helps to find a suitable place in the social world. It can therefore help to narrow down choices. More generally, the memory of previous experience influences current choices at all times (Damasio 1999).

Marcia (1980) agrees that the construction of a stable identity depends on the ability of the person to integrate disparate experiences and personality features into a flexible but robust unit. He suggests that this ability is fostered during youth, in the transition to adulthood. He regards this period as crucial for acquiring the ‘compass’ to find and retrieve orientation in adult life. During the transition to adulthood, identity changes its focus, away from the expectations of others, mainly the parents, towards one’s own ideas and interpretations. In this process, identity can lose its balance. One strategy for young people to re-establish the balance consists of constructing an independent identity by taking decisions concerning important life events independently. Therefore decisions such as going to college, or starting a job, or the choice of a college and the selection of a subject, have identity-forming implications. “The better developed

this [identity] structure is, the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world” (Marcia 1980: 159). Hence, getting to know one’s individual reactions and being able to make use of this knowledge in independent decision processes increases the individual capacity of agency and, therefore, the capacity to find suitable solutions when the validity of certain social norms is diminishing.

### **8.4.3 Leaving home supports identity expression**

As pointed out before, one criterion of U.S. students for selecting a college is that the college where they enrol at should suit their intended future identity. It is possible to find similar subjective goals related to identity construction in my interviews with Italian and German students too. The subjective focus of these interviewees, however, does not primarily lie on finding a university environment where they “fit in”, but also a city environment that matches their interests and personalities. When these young people visited universities during the application process they also paid attention to the cities where the universities were located and imagined whether they would enjoy living there. As several interviews reveal, the search for a suitable place for residence during one’s studies turns out to be a relevant part of identity construction in the transition to adulthood.

Simon (23) in Germany, for example, wanted to move from the very small town where his parents live to a bigger city. He began to feel bored in his town when he was a teenager looking for new input. Above all, he started to notice how conservative his town was in his opinion, and that it was more and more difficult for him to find coevals with similar interests and world views to exchange ideas. On a trip to Bonn, he had a positive experience and concluded that people in this city appeared to be interesting. He liked the mentality of the inhabitants which he found to be more open-minded than in his town, and friendlier and more sophisticated than, for example, in the bigger city of Cologne. However, he also sent applications to several other universities in case he did not get accepted in Bonn. These universities were situated in cities which he also liked. Among them, there was Berlin, which he perceived as a very inspiring city. He, however, decided not to study there because of the quality of the university, which to him did not seem to be as well-organised as the University of Bonn. Moreover he found the higher costs for travelling and the greater distance to his parents’ place very inconvenient. Bonn, instead, was close to his

parents. Especially at the beginning of his studies, before his two student jobs became an integrated part of his daily routine, he could use his parents' home as a safety net and move back there temporarily when he was short of money. Another reason, related to identity construction, why Simon wanted to leave his parents' town and move to a bigger city, were the stereotypes attached to the region where his parents live. According to him, people generally associate a mentality of rural backwardness with this region. He wanted to leave these stereotypes behind by moving to an urban centre. As we can see, the choice of city can be an important part of a young person's identity construction. Simon had pretty clear ideas about what he wanted to find and what he wanted to leave behind when he was choosing his university.

A similar example is Roberto (27) in Germany who moved from the city where his parents live to another city where he enrolled in higher education even though he could have studied the same subject in his hometown. As many other interviewees, especially in the German sample, he says that he needed a change of environment and was looking for new experiences, despite enjoying living with his parents and being with his old friends:

I chose [the city where he studies and lives] because I simply needed to get out of [my hometown]. [My hometown] isn't the most fascinating city [laughing]. Then I visited [the city where he studies and lives] and saw the Rhine. It was ..., I liked it so much. Then I said, okay, this is where I actually want to be. (Roberto, 27, German)

Roberto explains that he needs a quiet place where he can sit down and reflect. For this purpose the riverside of the Rhine appeared to be perfect to him: "In [hometown] you can hardly find such places where you can sit down quietly. This I noticed immediately here at the Rhine. The Rhine convinced me" (Roberto, 27, Germany). He adds that he needs such a place also for his work, to think about the projects he works on.

According to the interviews, it is often the first impression of a city – a good feeling or a positive experience – that convinces the interviewees when choosing a place for their studies. Roberto's and Simon's example constitute quite typical examples of the German sample and give illustrative insight into the way in which various criteria usually apply in the selection process, besides the quality of the university and entry restrictions. It is not only financial criteria, nor solely the conditions of the educational system, that dominate the choice of which university one will attend. Instead, the students attempt to balance financial constraints and entry restrictions

with their personal preferences. Finding a city which they hope would complement their interests and personality is an integral part of the selection.

Also parents, especially in the German sample, agree with this way of choosing a university and a place of living for one's studies. Louise's parents, for example, advised Louise to "listen to her feelings" when deciding where to study. She recounts that her parents gave her freedom and support to decide independently: "They were really like: Find out what you fancy, where you will feel good" (Louise, 23, Germany). A quote which summarises the different aspects of leaving home and choosing a new place of living comes from Simon's mother. It reveals how she is torn between her desire for togetherness and emotional proximity with her son, on the one hand, and the understanding for her son's wish to be autonomous, on the other. Eventually, she lets her son make his decisions on his own and tries to be neutral and supportive of his decisions despite her desire to be close to him:

It would be nice, if he remained nearby, but only for me or for us, for my husband and me. But he [her son] needs to do what he wants. That is, when he says, he is moving to Münster or Osnabrück or Rome or somewhere else, then he needs to do it. And none of us will hold him back. [Low voice:] Then he needs to do this. [Loud again:] And if he remains in Bonn, I would be happy. Then he would not be so far away [laughs]. But if it doesn't work out like this, then it doesn't. I don't know what I should wish him. Yes, ... I would love to have him still living nearby, [low voice] but ... [thoughtful silence] (Simon's mother, 49, Germany)

This quote furthermore illustrates that giving freedom, as a parent, to a grown-up child in deciding where to live does not depend only on financial costs. According to the interviews, what carries more weight than the financial costs of residential independence, is the emotional loss of closeness and company experienced by the parents. It would be reductionistic to conclude that the freedom offered by these parents to their children depends mainly on their financial means. Instead, the willingness of the parents to pay emotional 'costs' – to feel lonely or old, as some mothers said, when the kids leave home – makes it obvious that moving away and choosing a new place to live is not simply a luxury of wealthy families. It has a deeper meaning which is, according to the interviews, the preparation for an uncertain and challenging future. The parents interpret it as a valuable step in the personal development of their offspring, that is considered to be worth the financial investment and the loss of proximity. In the view of this group of interviewees, the choice of a new place to live constitutes an opportunity for the balancing of

one's self. It is seen as an occasion in which young people have the chance to look 'around' as well as to look 'inside' to find or create an environment in which they can develop and express their identities. Early premarital residential independence is regarded as an opportunity to experience individual agency, which means to have the opportunity to exercise independent decision making in order to enhance the young person's ability of coping with uncertainty.

## **8.5 'Yo-yo transitions' and identity construction**

The interviewees who argue in favour of an early departure from the parental home tend to accept a temporary return to the parental household under certain conditions (see also chapters 3 and 6). They accept what social scientists have denominated as 'yo-yo transitions' (Biggart/Walther 2006) or 'boomerang kids' (Mitchell/Gee 1996) if it does not interfere with the inner detachment from the parents and the accomplishment of identity construction. One example of this is demonstrated in the interviews with Louise in Germany. For her (23 years old), it was essential to leave home early, at the age of 19. At the beginning of her studies, it was unimaginable for her to remain in the parental home. She says that she refused to commute to university, even though it would have been possible considering the distance, and she would have saved money. "On this point, I was relatively uncompromising." She explains that leaving home right after finishing high school was important for her because it was an opportunity to express her own identity by living her life on her own. Moreover, the spatial distance to her parental home transformed the relationship with her parents. It became more relaxed and more equal:

I also think that, over the distance, you develop a better understanding for each other, so that you don't think anymore, this is getting on your nerves and that is getting on your nerves, but that there are reasons for it too. So for me it was simply important to separate: okay, this is MY life. Of course, this life has a certain origin, and this is not a problem and it is also beautiful like this, right. But you just cannot continue like this forever. (Louise, 23, German)

Now, after having experienced four years of residential independence, she can imagine moving temporarily back to her parents' household, for example during her job search after her studies to reduce housing costs:

But on the other hand, NOW I wouldn't have a problem with it; if I don't find a job immediately, or if I know for sure, okay, that I want to do a Masters or something similar, and I would like to

save money for half a year or so and I could do casual jobs near my parents' home, then I wouldn't mind. Well, I would probably rather move in with my boyfriend. But anyway, NOW I don't find it to be such a bad idea to move back in with my parents, in this case for a few months. I would rather find it quite amusing and quite nice even. I think, back then, I would have found this terrible, I would say. (Louise, 23, German)

The attitude of the parents in this group of interviewees also corresponds with this view. They define their own parental role as being 'assistants' who support independence, which means they financially support the residential independence of their children as much as they can while they interfere as little as possible with the young people's decisions, and if possible they provide shelter at the parental household if their children need it.

## **8.6 When family proximity weighs more than individual experience**

It is important to understand that the benefits for identity construction and personal development which these interviewees attach to leaving home and moving to another city are not self-evident but depend on the standpoint of the individual. Leaving home and moving away for the sole purpose of gaining new experience and "broadening one's horizons" is not approved by all interviewees in this sample, and in particular, not by some Italian parents. They regard the emotional interdependence and proximity of family members as more important than the possibility to extend the individual repertoire of meaning patterns by moving away.

Paolo (23), for example, in Italy, said he preferred a "change of scenery" when he started university and therefore wanted to move away from his small town to Florence. Little by little, he was able to convince his parents to finance a student accommodation for him in Florence. This was not an easy endeavour because his parents, despite having sufficient financial means, initially did not recognise the benefits of studying and living in Florence as opposed to his living at home. They favoured the option for him to enrol at the University of Pisa which is closer to their hometown. This would have allowed him to commute and continue living in the family household. Paolo disliked this option for various reasons. First, the course programme offered at the University of Florence suited his interests much better than the courses offered in Pisa. Furthermore, after visiting both universities, he found that the department and the courses in

Florence were much better organised than in Pisa. And second, he strongly desired to leave home and live on his own. By being away from home he aspired to

be able to create a future beyond the reality where you come from [...] which means to detach yourself from the family environment in order to understand how you can organise your life, to live alone, to give yourself a future perspective outside your environment, outside your natural habitat. (Paolo, 23, Italy)

Last but not least, he preferred to move to Florence because he needed “a change of scenery”. He found Florence “more stimulating” than the smaller city of Pisa and his hometown, especially with regard to the cultural life of the city. The town where his parents live is rather small. The cultural life there is mainly directed towards middle-aged and older people, as he explains. “Thus at the age of 20 you get a bit bored and you prefer to move to Florence or somewhere else” (Paolo, 23, Italy). His parents, however, initially refused to let him move away despite the better study opportunities in Florence and despite having sufficient financial means for renting a student accommodation. He describes their reaction as follows:

Let’s say, the initial reaction was not so much focussed on the purely economic aspect of the undertaking, but was merely affective. [...] On the part of my mother, immediately ‘No!’ because according to her there was no motive and she didn’t want me to go away. My father was more open to the idea. (Paolo, 23, Italy)

In the end, he convinced his parents with diplomatic skills and by asking for as little money as possible. When he returned home on weekends, his parents became more and more aware of the benefits of having a more independent son when he helped with household chores and knew, for example, how to operate the washing machine. So, after a while, they started to evaluate his residential independence more positively.

The underlying pattern of meaning that contends that leaving home and moving away from one’s parents should be justified by coercive motives related to education only and not by individual preferences becomes also evident in the interviewees’ judgements of what they regard as selfish motivations for leaving home. Giulia (24), for example, an Italian student who moved from northern Italy to Florence for her studies, calls it “selfish” when a student wants to move to a distant city even when there is an equivalent degree course available at a university near the home of the parents. It is interesting to note that Giulia maintains this opinion even when money is not an issue and the family could easily afford it. I asked her to reflect and comment on a

hypothetical situation in which a girl would like to move away from Florence to Turin simply because Turin, as a city, appears to be more interesting to her even though she could study the same subject in Florence.

Interviewer: And if the motives of the girl for moving away are not related to her studies but because she prefers Turin as a city?

Giulia: [laughing] Well, in this case it's selfishness on her part. It's selfishness on her part. I probably wouldn't do it. If there is a good university near home, I would stay with my parents. Only for the city? Really? Only for this? [laughing] Then you can maybe find a compromise. They are an affluent family – but to let your parents finance you by all means, because I want to change cities, is really a bit selfish, but everybody is different. Maybe she can find a compromise, for example, 'I'll get a job and every other week I'll come to visit you'. I think this would be a good compromise. You should not expect your parents to support you in everything you do. (Giulia, 24, Italy)

Giulia's laughter and amazement about this interview question reveals the unusualness – in her social context – of the idea of leaving home just to change cities. In this perspective, leaving home to change cities is nothing but a selfish whim. Giulia applies a frame that supports the togetherness of family members despite her subjective impression that the Italian society is becoming increasingly spatially mobile and that early residential independence is a useful preparation for a mobile life. It is interesting to compare this quotation, in which she argues in favour of family togetherness, to her quote in chapter 7 (section 7.2), in which she defends early residential independence. Both statements appear to be somewhat contradictory to each other. First, she argues that residential independence, in general, is beneficial for young people but then, towards the end of the interview, she argues that leaving home should only take place for 'compelling' reasons related to education and career. It seems that her own positive experience with early residential independence does not fit the normative expectations that she learned to recognise in her social environment. This kind of contradiction is characteristic for several interviews with Italian students in this sample. These young people appear to be torn between their own positive experience with residential independence or their desire for it, on the one hand, and their respect for prevailing norms and their parents' expectations, on the other hand. In the pattern of meaning of family togetherness, according to which parents are morally obliged to

support a move-out only if it is motivated by study-related reasons, other motives, such as identity construction, gaining self-confidence and new experience, are not acceptable.

Another illustrative example with regard to the desire of changing cities is Ramin (26), a student born and raised in Germany, whose parents immigrated to Germany from Afghanistan. Ramin's move-out from his parents' home was also characterised by tensions between the two opposing patterns of meaning; on the one hand his own view supporting independence and on the other hand his parents' attitude promoting interdependence and togetherness:

I live like this. I don't change places quickly, but I stay only a few years. And I think as long as I have the possibility and I am young I will do it like this, even though my parents do not like it that much. Especially as an Afghan, it is always like this ... In the past, Afghans always have ... In Afghanistan, almost all Afghans know each other. They simply know each other. [...] In Kabul, everyone somehow knows one another. It's terribly strongly interconnected. [...] Very sociable people ... (Ramin, 26, Germany)

In Ramin's view, it is a cultural characteristic that Afghans prefer to stay close to their family members:

It is simply not socially acceptable for an Afghan boy or girl to live far away from the parental home. (Ramin, 26, Germany)

His parents did not appreciate it when he moved to a city in the south of Germany at the beginning of his studies. In Ramin's opinion, the fact of being a migrant reinforces this cultural pattern because migration reduces the large family networks common in Afghanistan, so that family ties become even more important within the reduced kinship group in the country of migration:

[Migrant parents from Afghanistan prefer to live close to their adult children] because when [...] this is the only family you have, and when the cultural context implies it to be like this anyway, it implies that you always remain close to the family, bound, not directly ... no coercion, but an indirect mandatory postulate: 'Hey kid, you are our kid. Everybody is together here.' (Ramin, 26, Germany)

Ramin deliberately chose his first university because it was at a greater distance from his parents' place and because he liked the open-minded atmosphere of the city. After a year, however, he changed his subject of study and moved to another city and another university which was closer

to his parents. The parents did not understand his initial choice to move far away from the family on his own free will:

My brother studied in [south German city]. But the problem with him was that he did not want to go to [this city] deliberately. It was the ZVS [Central Office for the Distribution of Study Places] that had sent him there. Hence, my parents, of course, said: ‘Well, it’s not his fault.’ But I went voluntarily to [name of the city]. I wanted to go there and I also wanted to go farther away. (Ramin, 26, Germany)

His parents reacted on his first decision by showing their disagreement and expressing their feelings of loss to him:

My father was not happy at all during that year because I went there voluntarily. [...] we did talk during that year, but I always noticed that he had a certain grudge against it [against his living on his own]. (Ramin, 26, Germany)

Also his mother expressed her sadness openly when he and his siblings left home:

My mother was crying. I saw this also when my brother and my sister left. When my brother left, she was crying. When my sister left, she was crying, even though my sister only went to [name of a city nearby], and when I left too. (Ramin, 26, Germany)

After a year, Ramin decided to change subjects and moved closer to his parents who appreciated this decision. Nevertheless, he stresses that he enjoyed the first year away from home very much despite the disagreement with his parents during that time. As in Paolo’s example, Ramin’s patterns of meaning contradict the view of his parents. In these cases, young people need diplomatic skills and perseverance if they intend to leave home and want to maintain good relationships with their parents. Cases like Giulia’s example differ in that they comprise contradictory patterns of meaning held by the same person. These contradictions point to a difference between the individual experience of these interviewees and the norms and patterns of meaning learned from their parents.

## **8.7 Discussion**

The interviews reveal that a group of interviewees relate the departure from the parental home to the construction of an independent identity. It appears to be crucial since many interviewees brought up the topic of identity by themselves without specific questions from interviewer. These

interviewees associated a positive influence of residential independence during education on the personality of young people. They interpreted relocation and residential independence as a preparation for a future that they perceived as uncertain and challenging.

It was possible to reconstruct various reasons why they thought residential independence was conducive to identity construction. First, living in a different place exposes them to new experience which helps them to deal with unforeseen situations in the future. Furthermore, it is an occasion to meet people who interpret and do things differently, because they come from different backgrounds and have different perspectives. Living away from the parental home is regarded as an 'exercise' to practice empathy and understand unfamiliar mentalities. Young people living away from their well-known home environments have thus greater possibilities, in this view, to become more open-minded and tolerant. They acquire a larger repertoire of patterns of meaning which provides them with valuable orientation skills.

Second, young people gain more knowledge about themselves by being exposed to new social environments and the challenges of residential independence. They have greater opportunities to find out what they like and dislike and what they are able and unable to do. This self-knowledge too is a valuable source of orientation, especially in rapidly changing societies. Furthermore, these young people are supposed to gain self-confidence because they get a sense of achievement when coping with problems on their own, without parental help. Thus, they can test the limits of their strengths and abilities and learn from their mistakes.

Third, the relocation to a new place of living increases young people's agency and therefore also their self-confidence. By choosing a new place of living, they have the opportunity to influence their living conditions. This means that they not only adjust themselves to a new environment, but that they also have the possibility to find an environment that suits them and gives them new input or more freedom for individual development. Ideally, these effects of living away from the parental home during education give young people more confidence to face uncertain and challenging situations in the future.

In this view, residential independence does not necessarily need to be uninterrupted, or permanent from the start. Temporary returns to the parental household can be a part of this experience too. What counts is the experience gained from living independently before getting married and starting a family, even if it is only for awhile. The value that these interviewees

attribute to this experience also influences their willingness to incur the financial and emotional costs that are associated with residential independence during education.

This interpretation of the benefits of residential independence is not shared by all interviewees or by all of their family members. The students, for example, who prefer living with their parents do not mention the topics of identity, gaining self-knowledge or finding orientation in their interviews. Instead, they have rather clear ideas about their future lives and enjoy being close to the people they know. The students whose parents do not understand their children's wish to live independently or to move to another city need strong diplomatic skills to convince their parents of their housing plans. These parents have more difficulties in accepting the financial expenses and loss of proximity which comes along with the residential independence of their children.

### **Identity as a 'compass'**

What the interviewees articulate on the basis of their subjective experience can be described in theoretical terms as well. Societies characterised by unpredictable life courses and rapid social change require from the individual a clearly delineated identity as an internal 'sense of direction' to provide orientation when external guidelines blur. Berger et al. describe this condition of modern individuals in pluralised, secularised societies as "homelessness" (Berger et al. 1973: 82). In the state of "homelessness", life course structures and the social world embedding them are no longer taken-for-granted. Instead, individuals become more aware of the various possibilities and diverse interpretations for constructing their biographies. To find orientation "the individual seeks to find his 'foothold' in reality in himself rather than outside himself" (Berger et al. 1973: 78). That is, individuals need to look 'inside', into their feelings, thoughts and experiences, to find out how to construct their individual life courses.

The idea to look for orientation from the inside of the individual personality is not a new idea. The Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal (\*1874 †1929), for example, wrote more than a hundred years ago: "But the character of our epoch is ambiguity and vagueness. It can only lean on movement and there is movement where other generations believed in firmness" (von Hofmannsthal [1907] 1979: 60, own translation). Hofmannsthal was convinced that humans had the capacity to benefit from the complexity of the world when using their inner sense of direction to find orientation 'from within', as he explained in a letter in 1895: "And fortunately the

marvellous thing is countered from within with equal force by our marvellous inner character (von Hofmannsthal 1935: 155-156, own translation). In his opinion, an inner strength is necessary to forge the path through life, as he writes: “you compel from within the falling of the cards” (ibid.: 131, own translation, cited in: Kathöfer 2008: 137-141). Approximately a hundred years later, the idea that orientation needs to come from ‘inside’ seems to be widely recognised in Germany. A German pedagogue, for example, gave the following advice to young people during a radio interview in 2011: “my message to young people is – hold on to yourself! You have nothing else and nothing smarter and nothing that is more competent than yourself. Hold on to this and don’t give it up!”<sup>38</sup> As explained in the previous chapter, the idea that there are no prefabricated guidelines and the inability of many parents to advise their children how to live their lives can reinforce the parental support for the curiosity that is related to the early residential independence of their children.

### **Identity as a precondition for agency**

Orientation ‘from within’ does not develop independently from the respective social environment but in a mutual relationship with the latter. Even highly individualised human beings are social beings who take into account the reactions and feedback from their social environment. The patterns of meaning used for interpreting reality and the individual biography are constructed in interactions with other people: “As the individual plots the trajectory of his life on the society ‘map’, each point in his projected biography relates him to the overall web of meanings in the society” (Berger et al. 1973: 76). Different perspectives and patterns of meaning thus allow for alternative evaluations and projections of the individual biography. Being exposed to a new environment outside the parental home can thus open up new perspectives for young people on their biographies.

G. H. Mead (1962) suggests that the self consists of two aspects which need to be integrated in order to fulfil their function of providing orientation. One of these aspects reflects the socially shared environment. It comprises internalised meanings, values and the general expectations of others. Mead calls this aspect of self the ‘me’. The second aspect contains inner reactions – drives and impulses that depend on the mental and bodily constitution of the

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<sup>38</sup> “Haltet euch an euch selber fest”, Wolfgang Bergmann, Deutschlandfunk, 18 April 2011, 08:15, [http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/interview\\_dlf/1438249/](http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/interview_dlf/1438249/) (accessed April 2011).

individual. This aspect of the self is called the 'I'. The 'I' is a key element in explaining individual agency. Individuals are not mere executors of social norms who passively adopt the patterns of meaning and values which they are socialised into. Instead, they need to integrate the external aspects of self with their individual reactions, impulses and capacities. This happens through a constant dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me' that aims at finding a balance between these two aspects within the self (Mead 1962).

Similarly, neuroscientists speak of s-identity and i-identity. This terminology reflects the inseparable link between shared social experience and the experience of individual uniqueness. S-identity stands for a sense of sameness with other individuals. Essential elements of s-identity are intersubjectivity and empathy, which means the capacity to understand intuitively what others do and feel. Whereas i-identity differentiates the individual from others and makes it unique, s-identity is based on the similarities of the members of a larger community or society. The development of i-identity depends fundamentally on the development of s-identity, since s-identity is a precondition for a meaningful dialogue with others. Only in such dialogue can i-identity develop (Gallese 2003). In order to understand a person's identity, we therefore need to understand the patterns of sense-making of the social environment in which the person lives and has been socialised (Berger/Luckmann 1991).

Individual behaviour and decision making are the enactment of identity. Human individuals interpret the world from the perspective of their identity. Personal maturity is achieved when they are able to act on the basis of their experience while conforming to future expectations (Damasio 1999). They need to maintain the integrity of their identity over time, despite the experience of social change, crises, and contradictory social expectations. Only the continuous balancing of the different elements allows the individual to engage in productive social interactions (Krappmann 2010). A greater repertoire of patterns of meaning can help to readjust identity and experience. Psychological research, for example, reveals that elderly people who dispose of a greater variety of meanings for redefining their selves during the loss of physical ability have greater capacities to prevent depression (Staudinger et al. 1996).

This process of integrating the different aspects of self constitutes a source of agency and development (Staudinger/Greve 1997) in two ways. First, the "self-as-agency" becomes the "architect" (Heinz 2002: 59) of the individual biography as explained above. Second, the self-as-agency can also constitute a source of social change. The process of integrating the 'me' and 'I'

can lead to structural change if a group of individuals perceive similar contradictions between their 'me' and 'I'. If the inner process of balancing the self becomes too difficult when the readjustment to external structures is not feasible, individuals are able to jointly implement changes in their social environment by changing public discourses and eventually institutions to re-establish the integration of the inner self and the outside structures.

In sum we can say that, during the life course, human beings continuously "test" their self-perception and their empirical and cultural knowledge against reality (Luhmann 1987). In this process, feelings of being a misfit and increased self-awareness occur if experience strongly diverges from expectations. The coping process can lead to redefine the individual self-perception or to a change in the direction of the life course, or even to collectively initiated structural change.

Nevertheless, not every perception of being a misfit, especially not of a temporary nature, requires the immediate adjustment of self or the redirection of the life course, even less a structural change. Such temporary contingencies can be regarded as "the lability of structures" (Luhmann 1987: 76). According to Luhmann, these short-term variations in socially shared patterns of meaning and behaviour can be better described as temporary fashions, rather than long-term social change. The adjustment of identity to these kinds of variations is thus not always recommendable since it would rather reduce the individual orientation skills. Identities, therefore, need to be "strong" to avoid short-term adjustment to temporary fashions regarding shared worldviews (ibid.).

Being exposed to different worldviews can help, as the interviewees explain, to construct a balanced identity that enables them to exert agency and be open to new ideas. Identity construction is thus one important reason why a group of interviewees interpret the premarital departure from the parental home during education as more suitable for the transition to adulthood in modern societies than growing up in the bosom of the family. This also contributes to their interpretation of residential independence during education as an investment in young people's future.



## **9. Anticipated future mobility**

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the spatial proximity of different generations within the family is regarded by a group of interviewees as a strategy to reduce uncertainty in times of rapid social change. In this perspective, which is more prevalent among the Italian interviewees, the interdependence of family members constitutes a source of protection for young people. In an alternative view, more typical for the German respondents, leaving home and residential mobility before starting a family are interpreted as a strategy of coping with uncertainty and rapid social change. Besides these strategies of adaptation to the changing conditions of modern life, the move-out from home and residential mobility can also increase the competitiveness of the young people on the labour market, under certain conditions, as we will see in this chapter. In this perspective, the departure from home is also a way to face economic difficulties – not by saving money while living with one's parents, but by investing in education and training in various places away from home to become more competitive. Another strategy to face the growing competition on the labour market is greater spatial flexibility in search of employment. As already pointed out in chapter 7, the expectation of residential mobility for job reasons after one's studies have been completed triggers the subjective necessity to learn to live independently which begins already during higher education in order to prepare, mentally and practically, for a mobile life in the future.

### **9.1 Preparing for residential mobility in the future**

In this interview sample, it is possible to observe that those interviewees who anticipate living away from their home region after their studies also have positive attitudes regarding the departure from the parental home as students. To them, residential independence during higher education is an anticipation of the residential mobility they expect in the future, either because they find it personally enriching to work, and live, in different places after their graduation or because they perceive it as a requirement of the job market.

### 9.1.1 Residential mobility as a welcome part of future life

Paolo (23) in Italy studies international relations. He expects to work outside Florence after his studies, maybe even abroad. Having this in mind, he considers it important to learn to live independently from the family. Paolo says that for him it is useful to live away from home as a student

also to be able to create a future beyond one's own reality from where you come, especially for us studying International Relations, which means to detach oneself from the family environment to understand how to manage your life [...], how to live alone, how to give yourself a future perspective outside your environment, outside your natural habitat. (Paolo, 23, Italy, living away from home)

Tommaso (32) left his home city in Southern Italy to attend business school in Florence because he was generally unsatisfied with how things work in the South, even though he had a job there. His future expectations follow an underlying desire to improve his life situation and for personal development. He sees Florence as a stepping stone on the way to moving yet even farther away from home towards more promising opportunities:

I would like to get experience in the North. In Florence, we Italians still feel a bit like in Middle Italy because Florence has some characteristics of the North and others of the South – and brings them both together, [...]. I know the North East because I did my military service there, [...]. And it's very interesting regarding work, society, and the quality of life. [...] That's why I would like [...] to have the opportunity to move there and work there for a short period of time or longer. (Tommaso, 32, Italy)

Also Roberto (27) in Germany sees the place where he studies as a temporary station in his life and expects to move again to another place. He moved away from his parents as a student because he wanted to change cities and finds it interesting to get to know different places:

I don't want to go back to [hometown], but I don't want to stay in [the city where he studies] for much longer either. I really like it, but after this, there should be something new. [...] Something that is different, maybe abroad, even if it's not for long. Just to give it a try. (Roberto, 27, Germany, living away from home, his father emigrated from Southern Italy to Germany)

The interviewees in this group have in common that they are expecting to be spatially mobile after their studies because they are curious about getting to know different places. They

deliberately choose to move away for a job after their studies, and see their relocation as students as a preparation for a mobile, and perhaps even international, professional life.

### **9.1.2 Spatial flexibility as a normal requirement of the job market**

There is another prevailing interpretation regarding the choice of residence after graduation from university, especially in those interpretations of the German respondents. The German interviews reflect a great readiness to move away from family and friends for the mere reason of finding a job. Many German students and parents in this sample declare to be ‘open to everything’ regarding the place of living in the future. Different from most Italian interviewees in this sample, they more strongly hesitate to determine the place they would prefer for their future residence, as the example of this mother shows:

Of course, as a mother, I hope that they [her children] don’t get a job that is too far away, [...] so that we can [...] see each other frequently. Of course, I would like it this way. But I would never try to influence them. (Louise’s mother, 54, Germany, children left home and live in cities nearby)

Very similarly, Simon’s mother, who also supports the residential independence of her son during his studies in Bonn, replies:

Interviewer: What do you think, will Simon remain in Bonn after his studies?

Mother: I don’t really think so. I think it depends on what he will do afterwards. (Simon’s mother, 49, Germany)

The predominance of this interpretation among the German interviewees becomes apparent in the way the young Germans talk about their future plans. That is, the German students use very similar, almost standardised formulations to express their willingness to be residentially mobile in the future as regards the job search. Their formulations usually are very similar variations of the sentence “I’m flexible, I’m open to everything.” Thomas, for example, says: “I’m not completely bound to [hometown]. There are also other cities where you can find something interesting. I would be absolutely open to this” (Thomas, 20, Germany). Similarly, Simon formulates: “I’m open to everything. [...] I’m not at all determined, very flexible” (Simon, 23, Germany). Also Louise, even though a bit more carefully, says: “it completely depends on whether I find something here. [...] And then I’m relatively open” (Louise, 23, Germany). The standardisation of these formulations suggests that this interpretation is strongly shaped by the

prevailing social discourse and social expectations in Germany which advocate relocating for a job, especially among the young generation.

Even the students in the German sample who feel closely attached to their families and to the place they come from agree that residential mobility is a useful strategy on the job market:

If I only find a job in another region, then I will have to move there. This, well, yes this ... [serious silence] I don't want to be on welfare or have a bad contract and get little money, because I didn't study for this. Yes, I'm not afraid of moving away. (Linda, 21, Germany)

Also in this quotation of a respondent who prefers to stay close to her home it is possible to reconstruct an underlying pattern of acceptance regarding spatial mobility as a career strategy.

In the Italian interviews, a comparable pattern of meaning and standardisation of formulations regarding this topic is absent. Some Italian interviewees even openly declare that they see no sense in moving away from their families and friends for job reasons, like for example Lidia, who clearly does not interpret residential mobility as a viable strategy for avoiding unemployment:

Last year there was a crisis all year long. My fiancé, with a degree in computer science, couldn't find a job; it was impossible. The only opportunities were far away from here – “away” meaning in Puglia [about 700 km away from Florence in Southern Italy], and there was even an offer in Miami! [speaking in a loud and indignant voice] What a silly idea! [to expect from somebody to go so far away for a job] I wouldn't go there [so far away]! (Lidia, 19, Italy, living with her parents)

### **9.1.3 Avoiding residential mobility, but acknowledging its usefulness**

Not all students however who prefer living with their parents during education and who feel strongly connected to the place where they come from reject residential mobility completely. That is, they recognise the benefits of residential mobility. Nevertheless, they hope to avoid it. In order to reconcile these two views (mobility as a useful strategy vs. their preference for staying) they tend to interpret the situation on the job market as rather positive so that they would not need to move away.

Letizia (25), for example, who has a very close relationship with her family and lived with them during most of the period in which she studied at university, because she enjoyed it, says:

Well, I think that I will remain living here in the area. I don't plan to move to Berlin or somewhere else. [The place where she studies and lives nearby] is actually a good place for [her

professional field]. There are many agencies here. [...] Apart from [city where she studies], there are Berlin and Hamburg, where the big agencies are, Stuttgart maybe as well. (Letizia, 25, Germany, father from Italy)

Also Linda (21), a German law student, enjoys living with her parents in a village near Bonn and would like to remain close to home after her studies too. Lawyers, however, have difficulties in finding a job in and around Bonn, as she explains. Thus, she plans not to work as a lawyer but to apply for a job at the police station so that her chances of getting a job in the region will be better:

Bonn is THE city of jurisprudence [...] and to get a job here as a lawyer is pretty difficult. You need to [...] be a straight A-student. Or you try getting a job as a lateral entrant somewhere else. That is what I aspire to do. But if not you need to go away. I don't know anybody who's trying to find a job here, except if you have connections to a law firm. Many students are also thinking about going abroad, of course. (Linda, 21, Germany)

For her, going abroad is not an alternative even though she has relatives abroad and speaks English fluently because one of her parents comes from the UK:

I'm already noticing that I'm quite attached to my home. [...] I also have all my friends here ... don't know. [...] That's why ... friends from school, friends with whom I played in the sandbox. Only if I were to get a job which is, let's say, really attractive – then [I would move to another country], but in any other case I wouldn't. (Linda, 21, Germany)

Francesco (25), in Italy, who is planning to go away only for some time to increase his chances in the job market also feels very much attached to Florence where he studies architecture and lives nearby at his parents' home. In general, he is optimistic to find a job in Florence. In his opinion, young Italians leave the country mainly for political reasons and not so much because of economic difficulties:

[They leave] because Italy is a difficult country at the moment [...], politically more than economically – not economically because the good people work. Those who are motivated work. Maybe they work their ass off but they work. It's not true that there is this high unemployment, not even in architecture. If you are good, you work. (Francesco, 25, Italy)

This group of respondents, to which Letizia, Linda and Francesco belong, tend to leave the parental home later than the first group – towards the end of their studies or when they start to work. Furthermore, they intend to stay in their home regions because they feel emotionally

attached to it. Nonetheless, they agree that spatial mobility helps to increase individual competences and opportunities on the job market. They seem to be particularly optimistic concerning the situation of the labour market in their home region or they develop special strategies, such as looking for jobs that are more easily available in their region but are not necessarily the job they studied for. This optimism permits them to consider residential mobility for job reasons only as a last resource.

The pattern of meaning reconstructed in these three subsections – apart from Lidia’s opinion, in which she completely rejects residential mobility over longer distances – is characterised by the idea that spatial mobility forms a valuable strategy for finding employment. In this sample it is possible to observe that the interviewees who expect or plan to relocate for their future job are also curious about living independently during education. They see their move-out from the parental home as a preparatory experience for the residential mobility to follow in their professional lives.

## **9.2 Residential mobility as a resource**

The interviews show that the subjective expectations of the respondents regarding their future professional lives influence their ideas of residential independence and geographical flexibility during their studies in various ways. For one thing, residential independence as a student is seen as a form of preparation for workplace mobility in the future. For another thing, a group of students interpret residential mobility during education as a chance to increase their skills and capacities. In this interpretation, residential independence and mobility are part of an investment into better training and future employability.

### **9.2.1 Different places – new knowledge**

Some interviewees interpret workplace and study mobility as helpful to extend their professional know-how, to broaden academic training and to improve the quality of education. Francesco (25, Italy, planning to leave home), for example, who studies in Florence and commutes from a small town in close proximity, says that he plans to write his final dissertation in the U.S. where he expects to get to know certain technologies that are not available in Florence.

Thomas (20) in Germany argues that a change of university within Germany can improve one's academic training:

In order to get a good job, it's important that you have good marks, good references and maybe that you've studied in various universities, that you've done internships and so on, and that you didn't stick to one university only. [...] You see this in the careers of various great personalities; they studied at more than one university. [...] Every professor has a different focus, so every university has its own speciality. (Thomas, 20, Germany, planning to leave home during his studies, parents from Poland)

Also Anna (20) in Italy argues that mobility within the country can help to augment one's professional qualifications, especially when moving from Southern Italy to the Northern parts of the country where universities have a higher standard:

[...] this school [in Florence] has given so much to me. It's because of the people who I have met here, the professors, who are very, very special people. They really give you so much. Down South it's more difficult to find this kind of person. (Anna, 20, from Southern Italy)

### **9.2.2 Different places – more creativity and independence**

Besides the improvement of one's training, the interviewees argue that leaving home and residential mobility are sources of experience that expose young people to new perspectives, which makes them more creative and more interesting, and therefore more competitive on the job market. Anna, for example, perceives her relocation not only as beneficial for her education, but also as favourable regarding the development of her personality and her creativity:

It is necessary to look around. It is necessary to have something to say, to tell. If you don't do anything, what can you tell? Nothing! You don't have anything to tell. (Anna, 20, Italy)

Very similar interpretations can be found in the interviews of some German respondents. Letizia, for example, explains why she thinks that spatial mobility within Germany, for example moving to Berlin, constitutes an advantage for her professional career in the creative industries:

[...] in any case, it looks good on your CV. People see that this person is more open and can adapt to new situations, instead of wearing blinders and being always at the same place, or always working in the same agency next-door, without being interested in what is going on in the world. Especially in [my] job, it is so important [to be] always curious about the things that are happening everywhere. (Letizia, 25, Germany, planning to leave home, father from Italy)

Louise (23, Germany, left home) adds that the capacity to work independently is a required skill on the labour market. In her view, independence is not only important in daily life, when managing one's own household, but also in professional life. Living away from the parental home during education is seen as a suitable way of acquiring independence and self-responsibility before entering the labour market.

In the interpretation of these interviewees, residential mobility is thus not only a useful strategy for expanding young people's knowledge and skills; it is also considered to promote individuality, independence and creativity. All these qualities are believed to increase young people's competences and chances on the job market. Residential independence and mobility during education hence constitute an investment in the future that is worth its financial and emotional costs. This perspective, however, requires the subjective perception of the existence of meritocracy. If individuals did not perceive the job market as meritocratic it would not make sense to them to invest in residential independence and residential mobility during education to improve their employability.

### **9.3 Residential mobility regarded as useless and counterproductive**

The interviewees presented in the above have in common that they agree on the usefulness of geographical flexibility during education and job search as a strategy to succeed on the job market. However, not all interviewees apply this strategy, as we will see in this section. Another group of interviewees do not even recognise its usefulness. In the following, I will describe three patterns of meaning, in which residential mobility is perceived as unnecessary, useless or even counterproductive as a strategy on the job market. In the first pattern of meaning, meritocracy is considered strong but competition is perceived as weak due to the availability of suitable job offers. The other two patterns of meaning are characterised by the perception of a lack of meritocracy.

#### **9.3.1 Certainty about the professional future**

In the first of these three patterns of meaning, future employment is perceived as a certainty because of the possibility to work in the family business. Hence, the strategies that include residential mobility to improve one's education and chances on the job market, as described in the sections before, appear less necessary. A student who follows this pattern of interpretation is

Marco (23) in Florence. His family owns a company where he wants to work after his studies. He enjoyed living in the family household during his undergraduate studies. For his Masters he plans to remain in Florence, too. He also plans to carry out the internship, which is required for his degree, in the family firm. Only if the university does not accept this placement will he look for another company with which to do the internship. He recognises that a placement in another company could be even more interesting. Nevertheless, he prefers to focus on the perspective of the family firm:

Well, maybe it would be even better to gain experience somewhere else. So at least you get a more general idea of the matter by working with somebody else before working there. But ... well ... (Marco, 23, Italy, living with parents)

He does not interpret residential mobility as a means to increase his chances on the job market. Instead, he trusts in the know-how gained in his studies of nutritional science and by working in the family company. Competition is rather absent from his interpretation:

Interviewer: What do you think is important for finding a job in your professional field?

Marco: In this field, the fundamental thing is that ... you have the necessary knowledge. It's not important that you got a certain mark, but that you've understood it, that you know well what you are doing because there needs to be a certain trust. It's not something to be taken lightly – because it is food. [...] You need to be competent and the university gives you this competence because there are so many laboratories. So you are able to do analyses, [...] everything. That's good. (Marco, 23, Italy)

For Marco, signals on the CV, which can be important to future employers, such as good marks and internships in various companies, are irrelevant because he has a secure future prospect in the family business.

Similar to Letizia and Thomas, cited above, Marco recognises that residential mobility can be beneficial to education and training, but prefers to remain close to the family. These students are particularly optimistic about their chances on the local job market and thus permit themselves to avoid residential mobility during education and for work reasons while enjoying the proximity to their families and old friends. Thomas studies a subject that offers excellent job opportunities throughout the whole country. Letizia considers her hometown as particularly

favourable regarding the job opportunities in her professional field, and Marco has the secure prospect to work in the family firm. These interviewees thus do not feel the need to be spatially flexible to increase their competitiveness even though they consider residential mobility as a useful strategy for finding a job and also perceive the labour market as meritocratic.

### **9.3.2 Fatalistic attitudes regarding the job search**

In an opposing pattern of interpretation, employment is seen as depending so strongly on luck and arbitrariness that individual efforts to improve one's employability become pointless. Lidia (19), for example, who lives with her parents and commutes to Florence for her studies, has this fatalistic view on her reality. When I ask her what she thinks is important for finding a job she replies that the place in which one lives is important because greater distances between one's home and the workplace cause "problems of travelling", as she says. Referring to her own situation, she continues:

But in general, at the moment, regarding myself, I think that qualifications don't count for anything in the working world. Even if you have them, but, at least in Italy, you can basically have two, three, four university degrees; you can have five degrees, but if you are too old, if the boss doesn't like you, or if you have a number of other issues then they fire you and hire someone new. Maybe somebody has recommended you, you are younger, you are more beautiful, your presence is more beautiful ... It depends. [...] I know how to use a computer and I took language classes. Basta! (Lidia, 19, Italy)

In Lidia's interpretation, acquired qualifications that would distinguish a candidate for a job from other candidates are not relevant because, in her perception, the result of the selection process depends on factors that she cannot influence. Hence, residential mobility during education or for job reasons appears as a useless effort.

In this fatalistic view, trust in personal relationships and family bonds becomes a source of stability which is not worth putting at risk by geographical distance:

Lidia: Prato, Prato! I stay in Prato.

Interviewer: And is it the same for your boyfriend?

Lidia: Yes, he told me, 'I hate Florence'. We don't like Pisa, we don't like Pistoia. – Prato!

[...] Simply because my life is here. I don't have anything objectively against people from Pistoia or from Pisa. But it's just not the same as in my city. There is nothing in Prato. It's ugly. There's nothing. It's very ugly. But I have my life there. So I'm going to stay there. I could move a bit up into another neighbourhood of Prato. But I won't move farther than this. (Lidia, 19, Italy)

### **9.3.3 Local networks limit spatial mobility**

The importance of family networks and so-called “strong” social ties (Granovetter 1995 [1974]) in the allocation of jobs obstruct leaving home and spatial mobility too, because family networks tend to be limited to a certain geographical area. Geographical mobility over longer distances would have the consequence of leaving the reach of one's network and thus reduce the chances of finding a job through the family network, as Tommaso's (32) example shows. He explains that he could benefit from his local network in Southern Italy to find a job after his studies, but prefers to move from Florence, where he studies, to the north, where he hopes to find employment on the basis of his qualifications:

I would only go back if I really don't ... don't find ... don't have a job or if I lose too much time to ... that is ... in that case, yes. In that case, I would go back because it's perhaps easier. Perhaps you know a friend who can tell you something or who can introduce you to somebody because in the South it works like that. [...] So from this point of view it's easier because I'm not searching alone because lots of people know me there [back home] and this means that the opportunities multiply. [...] So this would be my alternative if things really ... [don't work out in the North.] But I don't think this will be the case. I've seen that it's not so difficult [...]. (Tommaso, 32, Italy)

Strong local family ties on the labour market not only prevent young people from moving away from their network but also constitute an obstacle for ‘outsiders’ to enter this region and become integrated into the local job market. For this reason, Tommaso chooses long-distance mobility to a region where, as he hopes, family ties are less influential, in the North East of Italy. His view is grounded in his own experience and his observation of other people's experiences. Tommaso's case suggests that strong family ties reduce spatial mobility but, in certain cases, can also trigger long-distance mobility.

## 9.4 Different types of networks

Also in the German interviews, networks play an important role in the job search, albeit a different kind of network that is independent from family contacts. The interviewees differentiate between private networks and work contacts. As mentioned above, this distinction corresponds with Granovetter's concepts of "family-social" contacts and contacts "known from a work situation" (Granovetter 1995 [1974]: 41). Family-social contacts, so-called "strong" ties, are persons known from outside the work context, usually family members, friends, neighbours, and other members of the personal network. The interviews illustrate that networks of strong ties are more difficult to access for newcomers and, therefore, limit spatial mobility.

### 9.4.1 Weak ties – contacts known from work situations

The kind of networking that the German interviewees describe as most useful depends on the initiative of the students, on the connections that they build up on student jobs, internships and at university, as Linda (21) explains:

During law school you have to do two internships; one with the public administration and one at a law firm. So you can try to get in touch with a lawyer and intern there. And, of course, when you know what specialisation you want to choose you can try to do an internship in a law firm where you would like to work later on as well if they are looking for someone. This way, you can make contacts. Or you can work for professors in the various departments as a student assistant, and they, of course, have contacts to law firms. But in general, it is quite easy to get in touch with these people. (Linda, 21, Germany)

Roberto (27) and Letizia (25) in Germany also stress the importance of contacts for finding a job in their field as graphic designers. Similar to Linda, they see student jobs and other types of practical experience during one's studies as a forceful strategy to build up contacts that help to find a job after graduation. Letizia, for example, recounts how a professor once liked the piece of work which she had produced for a seminar together with a colleague. The professor subsequently invited them to work in one of his project teams. Later on, the professor needed a helping hand in his office and asked them again. As a result, they now work as his assistants in addition to their studies. Letizia describes this process as "slipping into the job" with the help of the good relationship with this professor. She stresses that other students are as good in their

work as she and her colleague are, but did not participate in this particular seminar, and therefore, did not have the opportunity to work more closely with this professor:

Well, yes, it was also because of the contacts. [...] We did a good job and were in the right place at the right time. This is also quite important. [...] It's always a bit of luck. (Letizia, 25, Germany)

This kind of contact differs from the definition of contacts as personal relationships within a local network of family members and friends, as in Tommaso's example. The "weak" network of work contacts, instead, can be expanded according to the students' interests and according to the places where the students study or work. Spatial mobility during education can thus be beneficial to the students' job prospects. It allows them, for example, to build up contacts in regions that are economically more prosperous than their home region. Moreover, it can help them to make suitable contacts that better match their individual interests than, perhaps, their family contacts.

#### **9.4.2 Strong ties – family-social contacts**

The problem in Italy is, in the view of several Italian interviewees, that labour markets dominated by strong family ties are nearly inaccessible to outsiders. Young people basically have two options in this situation: They either adjust their interests and professional goals to the (often limited) possibilities of their own network or they move further away and try to find a place where family connections play a less dominant role and the labour market is more open to outsiders. Anna (20) in Florence, coming from Southern Italy, gives a concrete example from her home environment to illustrate this:

[In her home region] Many people who study medicine did not go to [name of Southern Italian city] where we have a very important polyclinic—there are very good doctors—but preferred to come to Pisa [...] because last year there were a lot of problems: professors, doctors who manipulated the admission process in favour of grandchildren, nephews and nieces or children of good friends and so on. This situation is very common.

[...] they first give the jobs to the offspring and then they see whether there is somebody else. (Laughing) It's ugly to say but it's the reality. Leaving Italy though is probably the best. (Anna, 20, Italy)

Not only the Southern Italian interviewees, but also some interviewees from Tuscany show a strong awareness of nepotism in their region. Paolo (23), for example, who comes from Tuscany, is rather pessimistic regarding the existence of meritocratic criteria in recruitment processes:

I see it very often, also at internal levels, that there is a profound lack of meritocracy [...]. (Paolo, 23, Italy)

Lorenzo (23) agrees that, in Florence and in Italy in general, it is important to have family connections to find a job. He says that it is essential

Lorenzo: [...] to know certain people. I'm realising that, in reality, it's this. I'm not saying that I like it but it's like this, according to me.

Interviewer: That the family knows these people?

Lorenzo: Exactly.

Interviewer: Or could you also do an internship and this way you get to know ...

Lorenzo: No, that's it! That would be an esteemed way, doing an internship and like this you show what you are able to do, how you are, that you are good. This would be the best thing [...]. (Lorenzo, 23, Italy)

Lorenzo would prefer “weak” ties for finding a job through individual effort and not through family connections. At the same time, he is convinced that finding a job without family connections is extremely difficult in Florence and Italy in general.

Anna reports that importance of family connections can be so strong that some young people even feel forced to study the same subject as their fathers in order to take advantage of the fathers' professional connections:

[...] the parents strongly constrain the children to study a subject only because [for instance, it is the field in which another family member works, for example,] the father is an engineer, so they say: “Go and study engineering and then I will insert you into the working world.” It works like this. Lots of families do it this way. (Anna, 20, Italy)

Thus, the influence of strong family ties on the job market can not only limit the incentives for young people to become residentially independent and spatially mobile; but it can also constrain

their career choices, such that young people are pressured to choose a profession in accordance with their family contacts, and not in accordance with their interests, which, in the end, may reduce their performance on the job.

## **9.5 Discussion**

The interviews reveal that the expectations regarding one's future professional life and job search after graduation influence how the respondents interpret the usefulness of residential independence and mobility during their studies, and whether or not they consider it worth spending money on. The interviewees who perceive the job market as relatively meritocratic interpret residential independence and mobility as a means to improve their employability. For them, residential independence and mobility are an investment in their skills and personal development. It is possible to find this interpretation in all German interviews of this sample and also in some of the Italian interviews. However, moving away from family and friends for job reasons seems to be more socially accepted among the German respondents. For the Italian interviewees, it appears to be more acceptable to refuse residential mobility, even if the consequence is a longer period of unemployment, as in Lidia's boyfriend's case, who did not want to move away from his hometown for a job (see section 9.1.2 of this chapter). The Italian interviewees, moreover, stress the importance of family contacts on the Italian job market, while the German interviewees are more confident to build up their own individual network of contacts through work experience.

### **'Subjective' perceptions and 'objective' conditions**

Considering the results of quantitative studies investigating the labour market conditions for young people in Italy and Germany, these subjective interpretations of the interviewees appear rather realistic. Data from the Eurobarometer surveys prove the Italian interviewees to be right in their perception of the Italian labour market as not being very meritocratic, as well as being strongly subjected to the influence of family networks. The majority of young Italians (65 percent in 1990) find employment through family contacts or are employed by family members. In Germany (West Germany), this applies only to a fifth (21 percent) of the young population (Eurobarometer 34.2 1991: 39). Moreover, the Italian economy is characterised by a high number

of family firms (OECD 2007), which may contribute to the large group of young Italians who find employment through the family.

Another feature of the Italian labour market, which makes it less meritocratic, is a strong 'insider' protection. Bernardi and his colleagues show that neither the level of education, nor the class of origin, nor the attendance of vocational training have any influence on the duration of the first job search in Italy. The authors explain this as an effect of the "collectivist mechanism of exclusion" operating against first time job seekers in Italy (Bernardi et al. 2000: 237). This is different in Germany. Here, an increase in education enhances the chances of first-time job seekers to find employment (Buchholz/Kurz 2008). The integration of young people into the labour market thus appears to be more meritocratic in Germany than in Italy. This suggests that investing in better education and training pays off in Germany. The investment in spatial mobility can contribute to the quality of education because it allows choosing among a wider range of universities and places of training. By contrast, in Italy, where the labour market is less meritocratic, increasing the costs of education through residential mobility to receive better and more competitive training may appear pointless. Whereas German students consider a change of university as a common strategy to increase their employability (Multrus 2007), Italian students more often continue their education at one institution only (Lindberg 2009).

Quantitative studies reveal that work experience during education, for example internships and student jobs, helps German graduates to find employment relatively quickly (Briedis/Minks 2004). It is a useful strategy for obtaining contacts to overcome the insider-outsider barriers, which also exist in the German job market (Kurz et al. 2008). Italian students, in contrast, gain less work experience during their studies (Lindberg 2009). For Italian students, it may not make sense in their social context to "lose time" on student jobs or serve poorly paid internships if family contacts are more effective for finding a job while practical training does not contribute much to overcome insider-outsider barriers.

While family ties constrain the spatial mobility of southern Europeans, northern Europeans more often get pushed away from their homes by another cultural feature: In Germany and other northern countries, it is considered a negative signal for employers if young people spend a prolonged period of time in search of their first employment (Bausch 2006). Young people, therefore, feel strongly motivated to relocate if this helps avoiding a long 'gap' in the CV between education and employment. Graduates who feel strongly attached to their hometowns

may thus move away for their first job and then try to come back when they have better chances on the labour market at home. In Italy, instead, a long period of job seeking between the end of education and the first job usually has no negative consequences on further career prospects. 'Waiting' can thus be an appropriate strategy until getting the desired entry job into the labour market (Kurz et al. 2008). Under these circumstances, young Italians have fewer incentives for moving than their German peers.

All in all, the living arrangements of young people in Italy and Germany are not a mere consequence of youth unemployment rates but result from a variety of interconnected characteristics of the labour market that accelerate or decelerate the departure from the parental home. Leaving home and residential mobility as a strategy may be suitable in the German labour market but can be of little use or even counterproductive in the Italian context.

#### **'Weak ties' for economic success**

It has been frequently argued that the long stay of young southern Europeans in the parental home is a result of insufficient financial resources at the individual level and also at the societal level due to the late industrialisation of the Mediterranean countries and the related delayed development of the welfare state. This supposed causal relationship, however, needs to be reconsidered. Strong and weak family ties are not only a reaction to the given institutional and economic conditions. They also contributed to the evolution of these conditions.

Low residential mobility on the labour market, however, is not only typical for young people and students in southern Europe, but also for southern European societies in general as compared to northern Europe (OECD 2000, 2005, Bičáková/Sierminska 2008). This can even be observed in second-generation immigrants of southern European origin; they are less inclined to relocate than second-generation immigrants from northern Europe. Economists point out that second-generation immigrants with strong family ties in the U.S. are more often unemployed or have lower wages than second-generation immigrants with weak family ties, who are more inclined to relocate for a job (Alesina et al. 2010). Spatial mobility helps balance supply and demand on the labour market. Since strong family ties limit residential mobility, employees with strong family ties are more at risk of remaining unemployed if they lose their job than employees with weak family ties. As a consequence, countries with strong family ties, such as the Mediterranean countries, tend to have more rigid labour market regulations to protect workers

against unemployment. These regulations help individuals avoid relocation for job reasons and allow close-knit family networks to flourish so that they benefit their members. At the same time, however, low spatial mobility makes economies less efficient and less productive so that countries with strong family ties have a lower GDP per capita than countries with weak family ties (ibid.).

Over a long time span, the spatial mobility of young people has been contributing to an increase of general trust and the weakening of family ties in northern Europe, while in southern Europe, family ties have remained strong and general trust low. I argue that the spatial mobility of young people has a very direct influence on the way people interact within society: If the majority of young people leave home early to live without the protection of the family there will be more willingness among the whole population to support them because more people will be aware that the young adults living away from home could be ‘their children’. This awareness was used, for example, by the Senator of Science in Berlin, in 1989, to help students during a period of housing shortage. With the intention of motivating more inhabitants of the city to rent out rooms to students, the senator initiated an advertisement campaign using the slogan: “Do you know where your daughter will sleep tonight? [...] We need your support – so that parents can have peace of mind!”<sup>39</sup> In societies in which leaving home during higher education is exceptional, as in familialistic societies, such slogan would not make much sense: Fewer people would feel addressed because they take it for granted that young people live with their families. The residential independence of young people who leave the parental home and move beyond the sphere of their home network can thus be regarded as a key element in promoting a form of generalised empathy that generates social trust – not simply because spatial mobility weakens family ties but also because it can help increase the fairness, empathy and solidarity with unknown people. It increases the awareness among the population that the lack of family support needs to be compensated by more general forms of trust and cooperativeness.

In addition, the persons who move away from their familiar community often join voluntary associations, which also contribute to a greater generalised trust because leisure clubs and voluntary associations facilitate the interaction with non-family members. The membership in such associations is a means to compensate loneliness and the absence of established social

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<sup>39</sup> “Studenten. Stubenrein und kehrgeil”, *Spiegel*, 02 October 1989, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13496257.html>, accessed June 2011.

ties. Leisure clubs and other kinds of civic associations help making friends and building up social connections at the new place of living after relocation (Reher 1998). This contributes to the emergence of so-called bridging social capital which, in turn, produces generalised social trust and eventually economic growth (Fukuyama 1995, Putnam 2000). Northern European societies not only display a greater residential mobility of their members, but they also have higher membership rates in voluntary associations (Fukuyama 1995, Curtis et al. 2001). Hence, family ties and generalised trust tend to substitute one another, instead of complementing each other (Fukuyama 1995, Alesina/Giuliano 2011).

Fukuyama (1995) identifies two primary forms of social organisation: societies that are based on family and kinship networks, and societies whose basic unit of cooperation and interaction are voluntary associations instead of close-knit, extended kinship networks. Putnam (2000) describes two types of social capital that are related to these different forms of association: while close family and kinship networks yield so-called bonding social capital because they are based on close emotional bonds, voluntary associations provide so-called bridging social capital because they facilitate social connections that reach beyond the family network. He argues that bridging social capital correlates with economic growth. Putnam observes that societies and regions with weak family ties and higher levels of bridging social capital are more prosperous than regions and societies with higher levels of bonding social capital, that is, with strong family ties (see also Beugelsdijk/Smulders 2003, Alesina et al. 2010).

Furthermore, many interviewees perceive the departure from the parental home and their relocation to another city as an enriching experience. They find that living independently and in a new place broadens their mind and increases their creativity because new input enriches the imagination. They therefore feel better prepared for their jobs and for the competition on the labour market. In this regard, it is interesting to note that northern European economies are more innovation prone than the Mediterranean countries (Roxburgh et al. 2010). Rodríguez-Pose argues that the exclusion of young people from the labour market in southern Europe “constitutes a serious social barrier to the assimilation of innovation, since younger, more dynamic, and frequently better prepared prospective workers are kept out of the labor market” (1999: 96). The interview results of the present study, however, suggest that it is not merely the labour market participation of young people, but particularly of those people who have developed an

independent identity and gained widely varied experience by leaving their home environment during the transition to adulthood, that helps increase the innovative strength of a society.

In sum, residential independence and mobility yield benefits to the society as a whole because they can trigger generalised trust, innovation and economic growth. As a consequence, the socially shared positive experience of these effects reinforces people's inclination to support the residential independence and mobility of the young, and invest in it. I argue that the tacit shared knowledge of this causality underpins the northern European norm of early premarital residential independence. In contrast, southern Europeans capitalise more on the proximity of family members and invest in the strength of kin networks because of their specific, socially shared historical experience.

### **Causes and consequences**

The interviewees who were in favour of residential independence during higher education often interpreted it as an opportunity for increasing their skills and competences. This shared interpretation is neither a recent phenomenon nor is it a consequence of modern welfare states. In the German speaking areas, there is a long tradition in favour of residential independence, dating back to medieval times (Laslett 1977). Moreover, spatial mobility reduced the influence of strong family ties in the past and enhanced trust in other people. German medieval cities, for example, preferably employed legal advisors and counsels who came from other cities because they were less involved in local networks and, therefore, were supposed to be more impartial in their work. The cities offered a sort of social security, in turn, for example the payment of pensions, to make relocation more attractive (Kintzinger 1991). As already mentioned, not only legal advisors were geographically mobile in northern Europe. Most young people of all social classes have travelled during their education or for work reasons since the middle ages. A similarly widespread tradition of spatial mobility during education and early career did not exist in southern Europe (for an overview see, e.g., Mitterauer 2004, Reher 1998, Van Poppel et al. 2004, Fauve-Chamoux/Wall 2005). The results of the historical studies in this field reveal that the early departure from the parental home and the spatial mobility of young people in the north of Europe preceded industrialisation and the development of the welfare state. Thus, the premarital residential independence of young northern Europeans can not be interpreted simply as a consequence of economic growth and welfare support. The departure from the parental home and

spatial mobility before marriage more probably contributed to the economic development and also the evolution of welfare state institutions in the northern parts of Europe. The support for young people with economic difficulties in higher education, for example, was initially provided by local self-help associations organised by students. These voluntary associations, founded at the beginning of the 1920s also offered accommodation in student homes (DSW 2002). Similarly, travelling workers and journeymen in search of work could receive so-called ‘travel support’ (in German: *Wanderunterstützung*) which was usually provided by the various associations of journeymen, workers or craftsmen and was meant to prevent young men from begging until they found new employment while being away from home (MGKL 1909). Public support in Germany for young people in education and at the beginning of their professional careers thus developed out of voluntary and self-help associations. They were a reaction to the growing demand resulting from the residential independence and the mobility of young people, who could not use their family home as shelter. Only later, did the state start to assume responsibility in these areas.<sup>40</sup> The public support for young people living away from the parental home thus developed according to necessity because the protection that family ties could provide was already weak. Hence, this kind of welfare support was not merely an ‘invention’ of affluent welfare states. Weak family ties and the premarital departure from the parental home already existed before public welfare support for young people was established.

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<sup>40</sup> Another example of public welfare support that developed out of private initiative was family allowance in France. During the 1920s, French industrialists established welfare funds to benefit workers with small children. As this system proved to increase the competitiveness of French industry, it soon was included into social legislation (Pedersen 1993, see also Lynch 2003).



## **10. Conclusion**

The scope of this research was to reconstruct the patterns of meaning related to the departure from the parental home in interviews with Italian and German higher education students and their parents. A question of particular interest in the analysis was whether the interviewees took the decision to leave home or remain in the parental household according to a conscious analysis of financial costs. This was clearly not the case. In none of the interviews was the decision to leave home exclusively contingent upon the calculation of the expected economic costs. Instead, many other factors influenced the decision, often in a habitual, less explicit way. The analysis revealed that there are two different interpretations of reality that result in diverse evaluations of financial costs, and in different preferences regarding living arrangements during higher education.

### **10.1 Two ways of interpreting reality: a typology of meanings**

The meanings identified in the interviews can be subsumed under two overarching patterns: a pattern of independence from the family and a pattern of togetherness or interdependence within the family. In the pattern of independence, the detachment of young adults and their departure from the parental home constitutes an important educational goal. In the pattern of family togetherness, the unity of the family, also in a spatial sense, is essential and more important than the detachment of the offspring. In the independence pattern, the rental costs of residential independence during higher education are interpreted as an investment in the future of young people. In contrast, in the pattern of family togetherness, the rental costs of student accommodations are seen as a useless financial burden, and not as an investment. In this view, an independent student home is considered a luxury which means that the willingness to spend money on it is much lower than in the pattern of independence.

Meanings can be best understood in the context of the surrounding concepts to which they are linked. Together, they form a specific view on reality. As summarised in table 10.1, there are several concepts or themes related to the departure from the parental home that were interpreted

**Table 10.1:** Typology of shared meanings related to residential independence during higher education, either supporting the independence of young people or supporting the togetherness of the family

INDEPENDENCE	TOGETHERNESS
<b>The financial costs of residential independence</b>	
- are an investment → Rental costs perceived as bearable	- are a useless financial burden → Rental costs perceived as constraining
<b>Transition to adulthood</b>	
- can be better achieved being away from the parents	- can be better achieved within the family
<b>Parental home</b>	
- temporary shelter, emergency support, last resort	- best place for growing up
<b>Preferred reasons for leaving home</b>	
- desire to prove independence → also if leaving home is unrelated to job, education or marriage	- leaving home only for 'compelling' and 'inevitable' reasons → marriage, job, education
<b>Young people</b>	
- regarded as competent - can be easily spoiled by their parents → should live in their own household	- regarded as vulnerable and impulsive → need the protection and control of their parents
<b>Parents</b>	
- withdraw from the role of being a 'guide' → let their children take decisions alone	- regarded as experienced 'guides' → are involved in their children's decisions
<b>Experience and social change</b>	
- strong awareness of social change, experience of older people less helpful - young people need their own experience → leaving home to gain experience	- less emphasis on social change - experience related to older age - young people learn from older people → staying at home to learn from parents
<b>Future expectations regarding family support</b>	
- family support not always available (due to higher residential mobility, smaller family networks and lower frequency of interaction) → learning to live independently is important	- family support taken for granted (available due to lower residential mobility, large family networks, frequent interaction with family members) → independence not important, even harmful
<b>The normalcy of leaving home</b>	
- leaving home before marriage perceived as normal, common behaviour, also by older generations	- leaving home before marriage perceived as a new phenomenon, associated with contemporary, globalised, mobile societies

<b>Identity construction</b>	
<p>- residential independence and spatial mobility increase (1) the individual repertoire of possible interpretations and therefore action alternatives, (2) self-knowledge and therefore orientation skills, (3) the capacity of agency and therefore self-confidence → leaving home helps construct an independent identity</p>	<p>- identity construction is taken for granted in the context of close family relations and rather clear future perspectives OR - young identities are seen as fragile and therefore need protection → leaving home not perceived as beneficial to identity construction</p>
<b>Feelings of loss and loneliness</b>	
<p>- seen as part of the transition to adulthood → parents try not to show sadness when children leave home to make the departure easier - the children's desire for residential independence is seen as parental 'success'</p>	<p>- fear that the unity of the family is in danger → parents show negative feelings to convince their children to stay - the children's desire for residential independence is seen as parental 'failure'</p>
<b>Parental love</b>	
<p>- the parents who love their children give them freedom, even if it includes spatial distance → allowing and supporting spatial separation can be an expression of love</p>	<p>- the parents who love their children want to stay close to them, also when the children are adults → spatial proximity is the only way to express love</p>
<b>Selfishness</b>	
<p>- the parents who do not want to let their children go are regarded as selfish</p>	<p>- the children who want to leave home without 'compelling' reasons (e.g., for independence or a change of city) are regarded as selfish</p>
<b>Residential mobility for job reasons</b>	
<p>- seen as a useful strategy for finding employment OR - seen as part of the job → residential independence and mobility during education seen as a preparation for future mobility</p>	<p>- perceived as a threat to close relationships with family members and friends → to be avoided as long as possible</p>
<b>Meritocracy on the labour market</b>	
<p>- labour market perceived as meritocratic → spatial mobility and residential independence during education help increase competences and competitiveness</p>	<p>- labour market perceived as not very meritocratic → spatial mobility and residential independence during education to increase competences would not help find a job</p>
<b>Contacts for finding a job</b>	
<p>- contacts develop through work experience → spatial mobility helps collect work experience and establish contacts</p>	<p>- contacts come from kinship and friends → spatial mobility should only take place within this network, mobility beyond this network would be useless or even harmful</p>

differently by the interviewees. These themes emerged from the consistent comparison of interview sequences until saturation was achieved. Each concept or theme can be interpreted in two opposing ways, either supporting the independence or interdependence of family members.

In the pattern of independence, young people are supposed to leave home in order to grow up because, in this view, full adulthood can be better achieved outside the parental home. Sometimes, the parents' household conserves the function of a last resort or shelter to which young adults can return for awhile if they need to. Young people are socially expected to leave home even if there are no 'compelling' reasons for it. That is to say that it is regarded as normal to become residentially independent even if it is possible to commute to university or if financial resources are scarce.

In the interdependence pattern, instead, the parents' home is considered to be the most suitable place for the transition to adulthood. This belief is underpinned by the idea that young people are supposed to benefit more from being in a family environment than from being on their own away from the family. Therefore, there needs to be 'compelling' and 'inevitable' reasons for the departure from the family home, in order for such behaviour to be acceptable – reasons such as marriage, long term unemployment in the home region or the absence of educational opportunities close to home. In this view, the roles of young people and parents are more hierarchical with regard to experience. Young people are seen as vulnerable and impulsive due to their youth, whereas parents are regarded as competent guides and advisors due to their older age. For this reason, young people are supposed to benefit from the care and experience of their parents who, for example, help them make important decisions.

In the independence pattern, in contrast, parents withdraw deliberately to leave room for their children's own decisions. Young people are not primarily seen as being in need of protection or guidance but should gain their own experience by living on their own. In this view, intergenerational coresidence during the transition to adulthood may even entail the risk of spoiling grown-up children and thus weakening their abilities to manage their lives on their own. In this view, parents see themselves as more equal to their children in terms of life experience and do not primarily consider the parents' longer life experience as an edge that enables them to be the advisors and guides of their adult offspring. Different from the interdependence pattern, they are strongly aware that the life experience of older people loses validity due to social change. Hence, they support their children and encourage them to gain their own experience instead of

expecting them to consult their parents. Moreover, they tend to anticipate larger spatial distances between parents and adult children in the future. Thus they favour a parenting style oriented towards independence instead of interdependence.

Leaving home before marriage is interpreted as a normal and habitual part of life in the independence pattern, whereas it is seen as something new and rather uncommon in the interdependence pattern. In the latter view, premarital residential independence is more associated with global competition, increasing internationalisation, and the development of the European Union. Thus, to the traditional Italian family, it is seen as a form of behaviour coming from 'outside' influences, while, in the independence pattern on the other hand, it is taken for granted, and thus, a traditional form of behaviour.

In the independence pattern, individuals see residential independence and mobility as beneficial for the construction of an independent identity which is expected to provide inner orientation in a rapidly changing society. These interviewees argue that it helps enlarge the repertoire of patterns of meaning and therefore enlarges the repertoire of action alternatives; it increases self-knowledge and therefore orientation skills; and it enhances the capacity of agency and therefore self-confidence. In the pattern of togetherness, in contrast, which is characterised by a low awareness of social change, identity construction is either taken for granted as taking place within the family without the need for external input, or young people are regarded as especially vulnerable during this process, and therefore, should experience this period of life, if possible, in the protective environment of the parental home.

The concept of parental love can also be interpreted in two ways. The parents who think that love can be best expressed through spatial proximity support intergenerational coresidence until the child moves into a new household with a partner. They may interpret an 'unjustified' departure from the parental home as a lack of love and question their abilities as loving parents. Another group of parents believe that love and spatial distances are not mutually exclusive. They are convinced that the detachment from the parents can be beneficial to young people. In this view, parents need to 'let their children go' because they love them and want to support them in everything they need. The parents, who favour the early premarital departure from the family home, even attempt to hide their sadness when their children 'leave the nest'. They focus on the benefits that residential independence during education and early career brings to their children which helps them cope with feelings of loss and loneliness. The late departure of their children

from the parental home may equally evoke worries because parents would interpret the prolonged stay in the parental home as a loss of opportunities for their children. Due to these opportunities related to education, career and identity construction that can be missed by remaining in the parental household, it is regarded as selfish if parents try to hamper the residential independence of their children, for example, by using emotional arguments. In the pattern of interdependence, instead, the expression of sadness and dislike if grown-up children announce their ‘unjustified’ departure from the parental home is seen as a sign of love and care and as an understandable attempt to conserve family togetherness. Due to the attitude that the family is the ‘best’ place for growing up, the pursuit of early premarital residential independence comes close to connotating the failure of the family and the parents. Hence, parents may try to change their children’s mind if the children strive for an ‘unjustified’ departure from the parental home. In this perspective, children who leave home without ‘compelling’ reasons – if they want to get to know another city during their studies, for example – are regarded as being selfish towards their parents.

Another interesting relationship within the patterns of meaning that I reconstructed from the interview texts is the link between the interviewees’ preferences for leaving home and their ideas of the labour market. The interviewees who perceive the labour market as meritocratic interpret residential independence and spatial mobility during education and early career as strategies to increase their chances for finding employment. In this view, living in a student accommodation is a preparation for residential mobility in the future if the situation in the job market requires it. Moreover, spatial mobility offers opportunities to get new ideas, to prove independence and learn by experience and, therefore, helps increase individual competitiveness. It also helps to connect to new people and enlarge the network of contacts in the professional field and region that are of interest to the student. In the opposing interpretation, the labour market is seen as less meritocratic and more dominated by close family networks. In such context, the investment in residential independence and spatial mobility does not pay off. Instead, it is more useful to remain within the family network to increase the chances for a job. Furthermore, the reassurance conveyed by close family relations is an important source of stability if the labour market appears to be arbitrary and unfair.

In sum, the residential independence of young people has a strong positive connotation in the independence pattern because it is considered to promote adulthood and maturity and it is expected to increase the young people’s competitiveness on the labour market. This positive

connotation of early residential independence leads to interpret the financial expenses related to a student accommodation as an investment. Due to this interpretation, the parents and students who follow this logic are more willing to accept the financial costs of residential independence. In the pattern of interpretation that supports the interdependence of family members, in contrast, premarital early residential independence does not yield these benefits regarding personal development and individual competitiveness because a united family embedded in a strong family network is seen as the most important unit of society. In this context, a departure from the parental home that takes place for no 'compelling' reason does not make sense. From this perspective, paying the rent for a student accommodation is conceived as a waste of money, and not as an investment.

The meanings presented in table 10.1 form two ideal-typical perspectives: one that favours early independence while the other supports family togetherness. It is not possible, however, to find all meanings sustaining togetherness in every Italian interview and all meanings supporting early independence in every German interview. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the Italian interviewees tend to be more familiar with the interpretations related to family togetherness, while the German interviewees mainly share the meanings related to independence because a number of interviewees classified certain interpretations as typical or untypical in their social environment or country. Also the use of metaphors indicated that certain interpretations were more widespread or taken for granted in the respective social context. How widespread these patterns of meaning actually are among the German and Italian society, and to what extent they influence the departure from the parental home can only be determined with the help of quantitative methods and a larger sample. This interview analysis based on a small number of cases, however, shows that it is indeed possible to reconstruct two opposing views regarding the departure from the parental home, and that these two interpretations of reality did correspond to the behaviour of the respective interviewees.

These results illustrate, on the one hand, that the interpretation of reality is not merely a consequence of current economic conditions but is transmitted from the past through intergenerational exchange. On the other hand, the interviews showed that young people were also able to influence the ideas of their parents, for example, by convincing them to support their residential independence despite initial scepticism on the part of the parents. These parents,

however, did not completely change their preferences for family togetherness but, at least, accepted their children's wish for residential independence.

## **10.2 Value-rational, habitual, affectual and purpose-rational action**

The findings revealed that the choice of living arrangements for students is not merely a rational cost-benefit-analysis in which individuals in different countries have equal preferences and evaluate their opportunities and constraints consciously according to the same criteria of judgement. Instead, the decisions of the interviewees were based on various sources of orientation and motivation. In terms of the classical typology of human action by Max Weber, it was possible to observe a combination of all four Weberean types of action in the process of leaving the parental home: value-rational action, affectual action (also: emotional action), traditional/habitual action and purpose-rational/instrumentally rational action (see Weber 1978).

Value-rational action could be observed, for example, when the interviewees left home because of the importance that independence had to them for their personal development or, when they remained at the parental home, because the (spatial) unity of family and friends was crucial to them. The relevance of these values became particularly obvious when interviewees left home to gain independence despite their scarce financial resources or when they remained at the parental home in spite of having the financial means to afford residential independence.

Traditional/habitual behaviour could be observed, for example, when some interviewees justified the early premarital departure from the parental home by using common metaphors and by referring to the generalised other instead of providing longer and consistent explanations for their departure. Habitual behaviour could also be observed when the interviewees said they never actually thought about leaving home before the interviewer asked them about it.

Affectual action could be observed, for example, when young interviewees felt absolutely comfortable in the parental home or when they feared homesickness and loneliness or felt intuitively that they would hurt their parents' feelings by leaving home so that they did not even consciously consider residential independence as an option. Other parents started to have an uncomfortable feeling when their children stayed with them 'too long'. As in these examples, feelings often endorsed the values of the respondents. So, strictly speaking, it is not always possible to separate value-rational, habitual and affective behaviour.

These three forms of action have in common the fact that they are not based on the conscious evaluation of all possible alternatives regarding their advantages and disadvantages. Instead, they are largely based on mental shortcuts and intuition. Many interviewees followed their intuition and mental short-cuts with regard to their living arrangements as university students. That is, they did not think of all the options that were available to them and did not evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each option before making a conscious decision. Defining the departure from the parental home as purpose-rational action thus is too simplistic and can be misleading.

The behaviour of the interviewees depended on their patterns of meaning, which they used consciously or implicitly to make sense of reality. Their interpretation of reality shaped their values, their feelings and their habitual way of thinking and behaving. None of the interviewees interpreted their living arrangements purely in financial terms considering only the monetary costs in relation to their income opportunities as students. We therefore need to see the departure from the parental home as embedded in a complex socio-historical context and the individuals involved not merely as rational market participants.

Purpose-rational or instrumentally rational action could be observed when the interviewee's preference for leaving home was already clear and decisions about the financing needed to be taken, for example, whether to work on a student job or to take out a student loan, or whether to rent a single room or a bed in a shared room. Also when some interviewees decided consciously to leave the parental home as students for career and education-related reasons in a normative context of family togetherness they took a purpose-rational decision, discussing all opportunities and constraints with their families. Purpose-rational decision making can thus be seen as the 'last' strategy when other, more intuitive forms of behaviour do not work because of contradictory feelings and conflicting values.

Most probably, the combination of different types of action is an important reason why the patterns of leaving home in northern and southern Europe have been so persistent over long periods of time and generations. The decision to leave home or remain in the parental household is not simply a reaction to current financial incentives but is deeply embedded in largely taken-for-granted patterns of meaning and engrained in the feeling reactions of the actors. The interview results suggest that a cultural and social change regarding this issue can neither be achieved through changes made only in the institutional and economic conditions, nor

exclusively through the intergenerational discussion and negotiation within the families, but requires a combination of these two elements, in addition to an increased public awareness and discussion in the public discourse about the advantages and disadvantages of early or late residential independence. Furthermore, it takes time to transform the feelings that individuals have regarding the departure from the parents' household. This does not mean that cultural and social change is impossible; it does, however, require a complex strategy that goes beyond the change of one or two details of the institutional fabric of society.

### **10.3 Shared meanings as the basis of norms and institutions**

#### **10.3.1 Congruence between meanings, norms and institutions**

In the phenomenological research tradition of the sociology of knowledge, as well as in the perspective of symbolic interactionism, shared patterns of meaning, as the interpretations of young people's realities summarised in the previous section, are the basis for the explanation of human behaviour. Not only individual decisions but also norms and institutions are grounded on the socially shared interpretations of reality prevailing in society.

In the interview data, it was possible to identify normative expectations regarding the departure from the parental home of university students. Some interviewees talked directly about the social sanctions they experienced regarding their living arrangements. Furthermore, it was possible to reconstruct implicit normative expectations in the wording and formulations of the interviews because many participants used references to a generalised other in order to make sense of their behaviour. Also in the interview passages about the respondents' feelings during the process of leaving home, it was possible to observe which behaviour the participants perceived as normal and normative. Through this evidence, it became apparent that, in the context of the German interviewees, the early premarital departure from the parental home was a general social expectation, in contrast with the Italian context where the coresidence of parents and unmarried children was perceived as normal and normative during the transition to adulthood. These norms result from the diverse interpretations of reality, as presented above. A norm prescribing the early premarital departure from the parental home, for example, only makes sense if it is common sense among most members of society that full adulthood can only be achieved through residential independence from the parents. In contrast, a pattern of meaning describing

the parental home as the best place for growing up supports a norm for remaining home until marriage.

Not only norms depend on underlying meanings; institutions also accrue from the prevailing interpretation of reality. There is congruence between meanings, norms and public institutions regarding the financing of higher education, for instance, as shown in chapter five. The allocation of public student support in Germany follows the logic of the independence pattern in that the residential independence of higher education students is taken for granted and, at the same time, seen as an investment. This means that parents are usually ready to finance student accommodations. Child allowance in Germany is paid for children in higher education (until the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday) so that the parents can use this additional source of income to finance the residential independence of their children. Moreover, in this cultural ‘logic’, students whose parents’ income is considered as insufficient to finance the residential independence of their children in higher education are eligible for public subsidies for students, regardless of the distance between the university and the parental home. Half of the money allocated to needy students in Germany is dispersed in the form of a loan that must be reimbursed after they have completed their studies. In Tuscany, the distribution of student support matches the interpretive pattern of family togetherness. That is, only those students whose parents live at a distance from the university that is too far for commuting are entitled to public housing support, taking into account the parents’ income. The subsidy is given as a grant and does not have to be reimbursed. Thus, this form of housing subsidy supports the unity of the family and familial interdependence, and not the early independence of young people.

### **10.3.2 Are German parents more altruistic than Italian parents?**

The intergenerational transfer of financial resources from parents to children plays a key role in the living arrangements of young people in Italy and Germany. Italian and German parents, however, use their resources for different purposes. In Italy, parents prefer to help their children acquire a home near that of the parents’ – usually when the children get married. In Germany, instead, parents are more inclined to support their children with renting a more provisional home during education, even if this entails longer distances between the parents’ and the children’s households. There is an ongoing debate in the sociological and economic literature as to whether intergenerational transfers are motivated by altruism or by the expectation of reciprocity. While

reciprocity is based on the exchange of services and time, altruistic action does not pursue a direct purpose, but is rooted in affection or general moral duty (Kohli/Künemund 2003).

Referring to these differences, Viazzo (2010) argues that northern European parents are more altruistic than southern European parents because they support the residential independence of their children even at a great distance, which offers more opportunities for the children's education, career and self-fulfilment, instead of expecting them to remain in the proximity. This view, however, does not take into account that close intergenerational relationships are vital in southern European societies where the labour market is less meritocratic and the welfare state is less developed. From this perspective, it is not only in the parents' interest but in the children's interest as well to remain close to their families and invest financial resources in early home ownership close by to fortify family relations, instead of early residential independence during the transition to adulthood. Laferrère, therefore, uses a different terminology. She speaks of 'emancipating altruism' (or 'standard altruism') and 'protective altruism' (alternatively called 'proximity altruism'). She shows that, in France, high parental incomes can have positive or negative effects on the departure from the parental home, depending on the attitudes of parents regarding 'emancipating altruism' or 'protective altruism'. She stresses that, in either case, parents take into account their children's utility (Laferrère 2005). As the discussion of the interview results reveals, 'proximity altruism' is more adequate in the context of southern European societies than 'emancipating altruism'.

From this point of view, the question of which came first – the institutional context or the prevailing norms and meanings regarding the departure from the parental home – still seems to be a chicken-and-egg problem. The following section will delve more deeply into this problem to summarise the causal relationships that emerged from the interview results.

The discussion of parental altruism versus exchange and reciprocity still points to another aspect of the Italian society. Even though 'proximity altruism' is a form of parental protection for young people, it also increases the power of the older generations because young people are directly dependent on their parents and grandparents. The importance of kinship ties on the labour market additionally enhances the power of older people because they are usually more influential within kinship networks than younger family members. Hence, the norms and meanings of family togetherness in Italy are part of a social mechanism that supports the well-known Italian 'gerontocracy', that is, the dominance of older people on the labour market, in

politics and in other spheres of society. The parents, by contrast, who support their children in leaving home early tolerate and accept that their children have other socialisation agents besides the parents and, thus, accept a loss of authority because it may encourage young people to do things differently and be more critical about their parents' attitudes. In addition, the exchange of ideas beyond the borders of local kinship networks can trigger social change, which implies a loss of power of the older generations because it devaluates parts of their experience. Nevertheless, they may be inclined to accept their weaker power position because of the positive effects of greater social trust and economic efficiency that come along with weak family ties. From the latter point of view, the socially shared value of early residential independence in northern Europe has a social justification. It is neither a superfluous 'luxury' for individuals nor for society. At the individual level, it enhances competitiveness and personal development; at the social level, it reproduces 'weak' family ties and, therefore, helps generate social trust and promotes economic development. The parents who support the early, premarital residential independence of their children, thus, benefit from their altruism in the long run.

### **10.3.3 The causal link between meanings, norms and institutions**

At a first glance, it seems possible to argue that the interpretive patterns of independence and togetherness developed in response to already existing public support for university students and other institutional structures. This argument, however, can be refuted for two reasons. The first reason lies in the historical development of these institutions. The patterns of early premarital independence in northern Europe and family togetherness in southern Europe predate the existence of the current public support for university students. This suggests that the development of subsidies was a reaction to the strong pre-existing demand for support before a mutually reinforcing relationship between these institutions and behavioural patterns developed.

The second reason derives from the interview results. One goal of this interview study was to understand the possible processes of decision making concerning living arrangements during higher education. The interviews showed that the actors were not determined in their preferences, their patterns of meaning, and their behaviour, by certain economic opportunities and constraints of their institutional environment. They did not examine their financial conditions and the housing market first, and then negotiate and reformulate their preferences and their interpretations of reality. Instead, the interviewees referred to people from older generations

when they talked about norms. They learned about prevailing social expectations through the comments and reactions of parents and teachers and through social sanctions which, for example, either evoked a sense of shame for appearing immature or a sense of responsibility with regard to the negative feelings of their parents. In many cases, the patterns of meaning and preferences regarding premarital residential independence were taken for granted which means that they were implicitly acquired in the process of socialisation. Moreover, the interviewees pointed to cultural and social change in relation to globalisation which influenced their decision to leave home. These considerations included the interviewees' future expectations regarding the job market. Economic considerations thus were important besides habitual behaviour and normative expectations. The interviewees, however, referred to future expectations regarding the competitiveness on the job market, and not merely to their income and current cost of living. The narrative character and biographical focus of the interviews revealed that the norms, meanings and preferences of the interviewees were not determined by an economic 'basis', as Marxist social scientists or neoclassical economists – who think in terms of short-term financial incentives – would assume. From this point of view, it was worth the effort to conduct qualitative interviews because they indeed extended our knowledge about the way individuals interpret the departure from the parental home.

#### **10.3.4 The influence of leaving-home patterns on network structures, welfare regimes, markets and other institutions**

In the countries in which premarital residential independence and the residential mobility of young people during education have a long tradition, such as in Germany, these two norms have also been influencing the development of related institutions, for example, the housing market and the labour market sector for students, or the development of public welfare support. As previously pointed out, the culturally embedded patterns of leaving home evoke a demand for these institutions.

##### **Network structures and trust**

The different patterns of meaning and the norms regarding the departure from the parental home are the basis for two diverse forms of network structures within society. Following the pattern of family togetherness, family members attempt to stay close together throughout their lives. This behaviour allows them to help and support each other in practical and emotional concerns, for

example, with child care and all kinds of every day issues. Young adults who remain living in close vicinity of their family members during education, and later during their professional lives, help extend the family's local network, which strengthens already existing ties with benefits for the whole family. This type of network structure is based on kinship and close friendship. Trust in this form of society emerges from consanguinity, long-lasting relationships and the personal recommendations by other members of the network.

In contrast, the interpretive pattern supporting early, premarital independence weakens kinship networks. Due to higher spatial mobility, the distances between family members are greater and the frequency of contact between them is lower than in familialistic societies. The resulting lack of support and protection needs to be compensated by other kinds of relationships, for example, with housemates, or by membership in voluntary associations. In this form of society, people need to be able to rely on others who they barely know. Generally binding rules of fairness, equality and solidarity beyond kinship networks, combined with an efficient, non-clientelistic public administration are thus especially essential in societies characterised by weak family ties.

### **Welfare institutions**

Weak family ties and the spatial mobility of young people not only create a fertile soil for general trust; they also promote the development of public support for young people because the behavioural pattern of leaving the parental home during the transition to adulthood generates a strong demand for affordable housing. One example of this is the development of the public housing support for students in Germany. It regularly happens that students move to the city of their university without having a place to stay. In times of housing shortage, as is currently the case in Germany, a number of students stay temporarily, for example, in the common rooms of student halls, where they sleep on mattresses, or in gyms, on camping sites, in public parking spaces and adopt other similar provisional solutions until they can find affordable accommodation.<sup>41</sup> Such conspicuous and strong demand for affordable housing triggers the

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<sup>41</sup> See the numerous media reports regarding this topic, e.g., "Campingplatz statt Studentenwohnheim", *Zeit*, 02 February 2011, <http://www.zeit.de/studium/uni-leben/2011-02/studenten-wohnungsnot-2>; "Sturm auf die Studentenbuden. 25.000 Wohnheimplätze fehlen", *Deutschlandfunk*, 17 June 2011, 14:35, <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/campus/1484165/>; "Leben aus dem Rucksack. Für viele Studierende wird die Wohnungssuche zur Qual", *Deutschlandfunk*, 06 Februar 2012, 14:35,

initiative of student organisations and policy makers to improve the housing supply and public support for students. Hence, it is the demand that creates the supply of public assistance, and not the provision of assistance that evokes the desire for leaving home. Surely, there is also an element of mutual influence in this causality. However, as pointed out in chapter 9, public student support developed out of voluntary associations that emerged in reaction to the demand for help on the part of the students who did not receive sufficient support from their families.

The development of the strong welfare states in northern Europe, compared to the familialistic, residual welfare regime in the Mediterranean countries, can be explained in a similar way. Opponents might argue that high geographical flexibility and longer spatial distances between family members in northern Europe were only possible because of stronger welfare states that allowed the inhabitants of these countries to move away from the protection and help of the family. Historical studies, however, indicate that in these parts of Europe leaving home before marriage and greater spatial mobility was an institutionalised element of the life course that existed long before the establishment of the modern welfare state. In these countries, the mobility of workers and young people during education weakened the welfare function of the family so that other forms of welfare provision became necessary, organised by voluntary associations, by the community or by the state. The differences between the welfare regimes in northern and southern Europe thus need to be seen as partly resulting from the different patterns of leaving the parental home and the spatial mobility of young people in Europe (Laslett 1979, 1988, Reher 1998, for an overview see also Viazzo 2010).

Once established, the mutual influence between welfare institutions and family networks reinforces this path dependency. In the interdependence pattern, actors perceive their close-knit family networks as the most important social unit that provides support to its members and thus should not be put at risk by ‘unnecessary’ detachment and spatial distances. In societies that value early residential independence, family members tend to be more widely scattered about so that family support is not always available. Therefore, parents appreciate that their children prove to be largely independent from family support during the transition to adulthood. How the prevailing cultural patterns regarding the departure from the parental home and the independence or interdependence of family members have been influencing related institutional structures and

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<http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/campus/1670464/> “Studenten. Stubenrein und kehrgeil”, *Spiegel*, 02 October 1989, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13496257.html>, accessed February 2012.

welfare regimes over time is starting to receive scholarly attention (see, e.g., Kohli/Heady 2010), and is certainly a field of research that warrants further interest (Crouch 1999, Esping-Andersen 2000).

### **Housing and labour markets**

Not only has the development of welfare institutions been influenced by the interpretive patterns of family interdependence and independence, but there is also a causal link between the patterns of leaving home and other institutions such as housing and labour markets.

The different ways of leaving home generate different patterns of demand on the housing market. In societies in which family togetherness is a strong value, not many individuals consider it useful to spend their financial resources on early, premarital residential independence. The demand for simple, inexpensive accommodation for young people in shared flats and halls of residence will thus be low. Consequently, this sector of the housing market remains underdeveloped. Due to the importance of the family, young people and their parents will consider it more meaningful to use their financial resources, instead, to acquire a dwelling near the parental home at a relatively young age. As a shared investment, homeownership reinforces family ties and reduces the propensity to divorce (e.g., White/Booth 1991). Parents thus prefer using their resources to help their children become home owners in the vicinity (Tomassini et al. 2003), and as early as possible, instead of 'losing' money for the residential independence of their children during education. In this perspective, policy measures supporting home ownership are more likely to find a political majority than rent allowances. As a consequence, the number of home owners increases in periods of income growth or low mortgage interest rates. Simultaneously, the size of the rental sector in the housing market shrinks which makes renting more costly due to the reduced supply, especially in bigger cities where the demand for temporary rental accommodations remains strong.

If the members of society, instead, strongly value residential independence from parents and accept spatial flexibility at the expense of family proximity, there will be more agreement on citizen's initiatives and policy measures that make rental housing available and affordable. Examples are housing allowances on the part of the state and housing cooperatives – that is, membership based non-profit housing associations – on the part of population. Strong and weak

family ties thus influence housing preferences and, therefore, also the development of the housing market.

On the labour market, small or weak kin networks reduce the influence of family contacts in hiring procedures. This leaves room for more meritocracy. The mutual influence between spatial mobility, weak family ties and meritocracy certainly involves path dependency. As described in chapter 9, it makes more sense for young people and their parents to invest in residential mobility and independence during education and early career if jobs are assigned according to meritocratic criteria or if work contacts are more relevant than family contacts in the job search. Only then does it make sense to leave the sphere of the kinship network, as regards the job search.

#### **10.4 Advantages and disadvantages of weak and strong family ties**

If leaving home before marriage and the residential mobility beyond the boundaries of kinship networks constitutes a risk to the career, welfare and emotional wellbeing of young people, then why would a society develop such values that support the independence from the family and weaken kinship networks? One answer could be the economic success of a society with weak family ties. Weak family networks entail more opportunities for young people to gain experience in different places and meet new people, combined with opportunities to extend their knowledge and strive for self-fulfilment regarding their education and career because of greater meritocracy. Weak kinship ties constitute a limitation to nepotism and promote general trust. They, therefore, facilitate the development of a more impartial and efficient public administration and generate social conditions that are favourable to economic activity. Moreover, they allow for a greater exchange of ideas and thus foster creativity, innovation, technological progress and economic growth. The greater flexibility of the labour force contributes to the efficiency of the labour market. All in all, the societies with weak family ties appear to be more competitive in the globalised economy, at least at first glance, because weak family ties allow the inhabitants to subordinate their social contacts and family networks more constantly to the requirements of market economy. The members of familialistic societies, in contrast, are more resistant to this adjustment and more protective regarding their family life and family networks. They, however,

also compensate for this family related ‘inflexibility’ through international migration in situations of crisis.<sup>42</sup>

The competitive advantages of weak family ties, however, can turn into downsides for the inhabitants of non-familialistic societies, which eventually also cause economic costs: Weak family ties and residential mobility can trigger loneliness and psychological problems. The fast pace of social and technological change leads to alienation and disorientation. Arising stress may be compensated through a focus on material values and excessive consumption. Marriages and long-term relationships become brittle which further undermines already weak kinship networks (see also Mead 1978, Reher 1998). The higher spatial flexibility throughout the life course of employees in non-familialistic societies may result in a deficit of social rootedness and connectedness that eventually undermines civic engagement and social trust (Putnam 2000).

### **10.5 Are non-familialistic societies more individualised?**

The question as to whether societies with weak kinship ties are more individualised depends on the definition of individualisation and is, therefore, not easy to answer. A scholar who significantly contributed to the popularisation of the concept of individualisation was Ulrich Beck. According to Beck, the phenomenon of individualisation regards the loss of group identity and, consequently, the loss of solidarity within social groups because of the expansion of the welfare state. In his view, modernity and the active welfare state led to the weakening of traditional gender roles and class allegiances. As a consequence, individuals gave up their strong identification with family roles and class affiliation and thus lost the protection, orientation and sense of belonging that these groups used to grant (Beck 2007). Beck ignores the historical link between weak family ties and the development of strong public welfare institutions. He interprets the modern welfare state in a Marxist approach as the result of class identities and class conflict. Hence, he overlooks that a major goal of public welfare is to complement the functions of the family and kinship group as providers of care and support. What Beck defines as individualisation is actually only its most radical form, which can be observed in the liberal

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<sup>42</sup> I use the term ‘inflexibility’ here in inverted commas to stress that this behaviour is regarded as ‘inflexible’ from a certain perspective – that is from the employers’ point of view in a market economy, in which family life is expected to bow to the market. Familialistic societies can thus be regarded as more resistant to the pressures of liberal market economy in terms of spatial ‘flexibility’ than non-familialistic societies.

welfare regime, especially in the U.S., where weak family ties are not compensated by a strong welfare state. Beck's catch-all definition of individualisation does not sufficiently differentiate between individuals who either see themselves primarily as part of extended kinship networks or as part of a society that protects its members through welfare institutions, or, in contrast, as individuals who are generally reluctant to engage in these forms of cooperation and, therefore, rely more heavily on market exchange and charity.

The question as to why public welfare in the liberal regime has remained rudimentary or was reduced to a basic provision – despite high residential mobility and weak kinship networks – lies beyond the scope of the present study, but certainly deserves further attention and research. Paying high taxes to a central government to finance public welfare provision requires social consent, which is absent in liberal welfare states. In contrast, the societies that established so-called social-democratic and conservative welfare arrangements achieved a transfer of responsibility and solidarity from the kinship group to the larger community. Residential mobility beyond the family network and the early, premarital departure from the parental home promoted this transfer of solidarity and the generalisation of trust, as explained in chapter 9. This facilitated the establishment of an efficient, impartial public administration as a prerequisite for a strong public welfare system. Familialistic attitudes and strong kinship networks are an obstacle to this development. Individualisation – if understood as social differentiation and the internalisation of control (Wohlrab-Sahr 1997) – is a necessary condition for the transfer of solidarity from kinship networks to society. General social trust can only evolve if individuals internalise the behavioural rules and social control of their family and local networks so that they become universal norms and generalised empathy, which enable cooperation beyond kinship networks. Individualisation in terms of weak family ties, thus, does not automatically imply a lack of group allegiance. The Swedish word 'folkhemmet', which means 'people's *home*', formerly used as a political metaphor for the welfare state, illustrates this transfer of responsibility from family *homes* to the whole society (see Crouch 1999). This expression implies that the state assumes the responsibilities that family homes cannot fulfil because of high mobility and weak family ties.

From this point of view, there are three levels of individualisation: 'low' individualisation in societies with strong family ties and weak welfare states, as in southern Europe; 'compensated' individualisation in societies with weak family ties and strong welfare states, as in continental Europe and the Nordic countries; and, 'radical' individualisation in societies with weak family

ties and weak welfare states, as in the Anglo-Saxon countries (see table 10.2). The traditional patterns of leaving the parental home and the meanings attached to it, thus, help to understand the cultural and historical roots of welfare regimes. Kinship networks as a distinctive cultural feature, however, are combined with other cultural characteristics, for example, the interpretation of gender roles that distinguishes the conservative from the social-democratic regime, and the patterns of meaning that prevented the development of a strong welfare state in the liberal regime. The latter may have been a strong acceptance of class inequalities and the shared subjective belief that social inequality triggers the motivation and creativity of workers. This differentiation, however, goes beyond the scope of the issues investigated here.

**Table 10.2:** Preliminary typology of individualisation as the basis of welfare regimes

	<b>Low individualisation</b>	<b>Compensated individualisation</b>		<b>Radical individualisation</b>
<b>Kinship networks</b>	strong	weak		weak
<b>Gender division</b>	strong	strong	weak	weak
<b>General solidarity</b>	weak	strong		weak
<b>Welfare regime</b>	Familialistic	Conservative	Social-democratic	Liberal

Welfare regimes, however, are a matter of political debate and susceptible to change. Thus, an interesting task for future research would be to explore which forms of individualisation and welfare regime are the most successful in economic terms in the long run, but also the most crisis-proof and sustainable and, above all, which regimes provide most happiness and psychological wellbeing to the members of society. Strong familialism, for example, can be an obstacle to economic development and self-fulfilment, as pointed out in chapters 7 to 9, but a source of emotional security. Radical individualisation, in contrast, with its weak family ties, weak public welfare provision and strong social inequalities seems to be very efficient in economic terms, at least in the short run, but reduces the quality of life, triggers illness, and psychological and social problems (Wilkinson/Pickett 2009). Furthermore, it tends to produce economic ‘bubbles’ and eventually devastating economic crises because a non-familialistic society that only offers rudimentary unemployment protection and no health insurance for the unemployed needs to generate economic growth at any price (Rajan 2010). In times of imminent and recurring retrenchments of public expenditure, we therefore need to ask ourselves how much unprotected individualisation we are able and willing to bear considering the long-term instability

that radical individualisation brings. Moreover, we need to ask ourselves whether the proclamation of stronger family ties really is a feasible and effective solution considering the difficulties of familialistic societies such as inefficient bureaucracies, clientelism and weak innovative abilities.

To conclude, I want to stress again one simple but important result of this exploratory study: The interviewees did not calculate rationally the costs and benefits of the departure from the parental home before they decided to leave or stay with their parents. Instead, their decisions were guided by their feelings, norms, values and conscious or taken-for-granted patterns of meaning. A research focus on the immediate financial costs of the departure from the parental home would exclude these aspects of human existence and lead to an interpretation of human individuals as passive and overly determined by market exchange. Taking culture into account on the basis of the sociology of knowledge, instead, sharpens the view for complexity, new perspectives and alternative forms of behaviour, which eventually can make change possible.

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# Appendix

## Interview Guide Students

### *Starting questions*

1. To get started, could you please tell me a little about who you are, what you do, how old you are, where you come from and where you live?
2. Have you always lived in ...? Could you tell me more about where you have lived until now? If you have lived in other places than ..., can you tell me more about your change of residence?

### *Main narrative part*

3. How come you study here? Please tell me more elaborately how you took the decision to study at this university?

### *Additional questions*

#### Change

4. How was the change from school to university for you? Can you, please, tell more about it?

#### Living

5. Did you think about leaving home during your studies?/Did you think about moving to ... during your studies?
6. Could you tell me more about how you found a place to stay?

## Feelings

7. How did you feel when you left home?
  - a. Can you tell me more about how it was for you at the beginning when you arrived?  
How did you feel?
  - b. How do you feel now with your life here in ...?
- Or:
8. How do you imagine it would be to live away from home, in another city?

## Friends

9. What do you think, what are the reasons why some people choose a university near home or farther away?
10. How is your circle of friends now? Do you still see your old friends from school?
11. Can you tell me a bit about what your schoolmates/old friends are doing?

## Money

12. Can you talk a bit about how you planned the financial issues of your studies?

## Parents

13. How did your parents react when you told them you would study ... in ...? Can you recount your transition from school to university from the perspective of your parents?
14. If it is the case: Could you talk in more detail about the disagreement you had with your parents?
15. How is your relationship with your parents since you left home?

Or:

16. Could you talk a little more about your daily life at your parents' home?

## Future

17. What do you think; where will you live in the near future?
18. What do you think; where will you live after your studies?
19. Where would you like to live in the future?
20. In your opinion, which qualifications are useful to find a job after your studies?

## Vignettes:

21. A family lives in Bonn/Florence. The parents have a small business which is going well, no financial difficulties. They have one daughter who would like to go to study in Berlin/Turin because she likes the city, but also because the study programme is good. Yet her parents would miss their only child very much. That's why they propose her to study in Bonn/Florence or at least nearby in Cologne/Bologna. What would be the best solution for this situation? What should the girl do?
22. Same situation, same family, but their business is not going very well. They don't have a lot of extra money to spend. What would be the best thing to do in this situation? What should the girl do?
23. Another situation: A family in Bonn/Florence has two grown-up children. One of them studies in Heidelberg/Milan, the other one in Berlin/Rome. Unfortunately, the father gets seriously ill for a long time so that the mother is very occupied in this situation. What do you think: Could she expect her children or one of them to come home permanently to help her?

## **Interview Guide Parents 1**

### **(Child living away from home)**

#### *Starting questions*

1. To get started, could you please tell me a little about who you are, what you do, how old you are, where you come from and where you live?
2. How many children do you have? What do they do? Where do they live?

#### *Main narrative part*

3. Could you please tell me from your perspective and at length how your daughter/son made the decision to study at this university? How come that your son/daughter is doing this in this place?

#### *Additional questions*

4. Did he/she live in other place before? Could you tell me more about the different places where she/he lived before, during her/his childhood, during the transition from school to university before studying ... in Bonn/Florence?
5. Did you take part in the process of the decision-making?
6. Did you expect somehow that he/she would move out at this point in time?
7. If applicable: Could you talk in more detail about the disagreement you had with your son/daughter about this issue?
8. Do you know what the childhood friends of your daughter/son are doing and where they live? Do you know what other young people you know are doing? Could you tell me a bit more about this?

9. How was it for you when you found out that your son/daughter was leaving home and how was it when he/she was gone? How did you feel?
10. Were you worried about him/her at the beginning when he/she was gone?
11. How is your relationship now? Do you keep in touch on a regular basis?
12. If applicable: Why do you think it is good to leave home (or not)?
13. What about the financing of your child's studies? How did you organise this issue? Did you plan it together?
14. Imagine your son/daughter was still living with you? What would that be like? Was there a time limit for you as to how long he/she could stay with you?
15. If mentioned: explain key words, such as 'independence', 'to cut the umbilical cord', ...
16. Where do you think your daughter/son will be living in the future? What place of residence would you prefer for your daughter/son?
17. When you are elderly, where would you like to live and where would you like your kids to live?

Questions about the mother's/father's departure from the parental home

18. Have you always lived in ...? Could you tell me more about where you have lived before?  
If you have lived in other places than ..., can you tell me more about the change of residence?
19. Could you tell me more about when you moved out of your parents' home?
20. How did you feel then? What did it mean to you?

21. When you look back at leaving home when you were young, was it different from the way things are now? Could you talk a little more about it?
22. You said about your relationship with your parents that .... Is the relationship between you and your kids different than your relationship with your parents when you were young? Could you say something more about this?

Vignettes:

23. A family lives in Bonn/Florence. The parents have a small business which is going well, no financial difficulties. They have one daughter who would like to study in Berlin/Turin because she likes the city, but also because the study programme there is good. Yet her parents would miss their only child very much. That's why they propose that she study in Bonn/Florence or at least nearby in Cologne/Bologna. What would be the best solution for this situation? What should the girl do?
24. Same situation, same family, but their business is not going very well. They don't have a lot of extra money to spend. What would be the best thing to do in this situation? What should the girl do?
25. Another situation: A family in Bonn/Florence has two grown-up children. One of them studies in Heidelberg/Milan, the other one in Berlin/Rome. Unfortunately, the father becomes seriously ill for a long time so that the mother is very occupied in this situation. What do you think: Could she expect her children or one of them to come home permanently to help her?

## **Interview Guide Parents 2**

### **(Child living at home)**

#### *Starting questions*

1. To get started, could you please tell me a little about who you are, what you do, how old you are, where you come from and where you live?
2. How many children do you have? What do they do? Where do they live?

#### *Main narrative part*

3. Could you please tell me from your perspective and at length how your daughter/son took the decision to study at this university? How come that your son/daughter is doing this at this place?

#### *Additional questions*

4. Did he/she live in other places before? Could you tell me more about the different places that she/he lived in before, during her/his childhood, during the transition from school to university before studying ... in Bonn/Florence?
5. Did you take part in the process of the decision-making?
6. When you think back to the time when your son/daughter graduated from high school, what did you think he/she would do after graduation? Did you expect that he/she would study here and stay at home with you? Can you talk a bit about your expectations at that time?
7. How did you feel about the decision of your son/daughter to study in Florence/Bonn and remain living with you?

8. If applicable: Could you talk in more detail about the disagreement you had with your son/daughter about this issue?
9. How is your relationship now? Did it change since your daughter/son has been at the university?
10. Do you know what the childhood friends of your daughter/son are doing now and where they are living? What about other young people you know? Could you tell me a bit more about them?
11. What about the financing of your son/daughter's studies? How did you organise this issue? Did you plan it together?
12. Imagine that your son/daughter wanted to leave home or even go to another city to live; what do you think would be the reasons for him/her doing so?
13. Could you imagine your daughter/son living with you also after finishing her/his studies? Is there a time limit for you as to how long he/she can stay with you?
14. If applicable: Why do you think it is good to leave home (or not)?
15. If mentioned: explain key words, such as 'independence', 'to cut the umbilical cord', ...
16. Where do you think your daughter/son will be living in the future? What place of residence would you prefer for your daughter/son?
17. When you are elderly, where would you like to live and where would you like your children to live?

### Questions about the mother's/father's departure from the parental home

18. Have you always lived in ...? Could you tell me more about where you have lived before?  
If you have lived in other places than ..., can you tell me more about the change of residence?
19. Could you tell me more about when you moved out of your parents' home?
20. How did you feel then? What did it mean to you?
21. When you look back at leaving home when you were young, was it different from how things are now? Could you talk a little more about this?
22. You said about your relationship with your parents that .... Is the relationship between you and your kids different than your relationship with your parents when you were young? Could you say something more about it?

### Vignettes:

26. A family lives in Bonn/Florence. The parents have a small business which is going well, no financial difficulties. They have one daughter who would like to study in Berlin/Turin because she likes the city, but also because the study programme there is good. Yet her parents would miss their only child very much. That's why they propose that she study in Bonn/Florence or at least nearby in Cologne/Bologna. What would be the best solution for this situation? What should the girl do?
27. Same situation, same family, but their business is not going very well. They don't have a lot of extra money to spend. What would be the best thing to do in this situation? What should the girl do?
28. Another situation: A family in Bonn/Florence has two grown-up children. One of them studies in Heidelberg/Milan, the other one in Berlin/Rome. Unfortunately, the father becomes seriously ill for a long time so that the mother is very occupied in this situation.

What do you think: Could she expect her children or one of them to come home permanently to help her?