

Proximity between adult children and their mothers: a European comparison

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PRELIMINARY VERSION, PLEASE DON'T CITE OR QUOTE

1. Introduction

1.1 Empirical background

In an aging society, the availability of substitutes for formally provided services is of immediate policy significance, and proximity between family members guarantees the possibility (at least theoretically) of finding help within the family. Moreover, the growing number of couples where both partners work out of home emphasizes the importance of proximity between babies and their grandparents for helping parents in childcare.

Consequently, the interest in family ties and family networks has considerably spread. Shelton and Grundy (2000) found that more than the 60% of British people aged 18-54 live within half an hour travel to their parents, which roughly corresponds to the percentage calculated by Glaser and Tomassini (2000) of those living within 10 miles. Mulder and Kalmijn (2005) and van Diepen and Mulder (2005) computed both the minimum and the mean distance of elderly parents with their children for the Netherlands, respectively amounting to about 29 and 16 kms, and Fransson and Teeland (2004) concluded that about the 70% of old Swedish people aged 75 years and older live within 15 kms to at least one child, distance that the authors considered reachable by “a comfortable bus ride”. Barbagli et al. (2004) found that in Italy 65% of couples married during 1990s, at the time of marriage lived within one km to at least one parent. Further research is then available for some non European countries: Choi (2003) focusing on the United States, determined that about the 19% of unmarried elders lived with at least one child and/or grandchild, while Rogerson, Weng and Lin (1993) found that for about one quarter of adult children the parents lived closer than 5 miles distance (approximately eight kms); Bian, Logan and Bian (1998) calculated that in the urban China more than the 60% of elderly people live in the same district as at least one child.

Despite this feeling of a general high level of proximity between parents and children, in one of the rare comparative researches on this topic, Jowell et al. (1989) showed that during the 1980s there were huge differences in the distance between parents and children among industrialized countries (table 1). Similar results are shown by Hank (2005), who especially stressed the existence of a North-South European divide, where the elderly generation in the Northern Europe lives further away from their adult children than the Southern counterpart.

Table 1. Residence of parents and children in some industrialised countries during the 1980s.

	UK	USA	Australia	Germany	Austria	Hungary	Italy
Proportion % of parents living with at least ...							
... an adult son	32	21	30	40	39	37	60
... an adult daughter	29	14	25	26	25	30	58
Proportion % of adult children not living with parents whose mother lives at a distance of ...							
... 15 minutes of less	32	27	24	38	37	43	57
... 15 minutes – 1 hour	40	31	33	30	35	35	26
... 1 – 5 hours	19	19	20	22	23	19	8
... 5 hours or more	9	23	23	9	4	4	4
<i>Proportion % of adult people living near their mother (1 hour or less) who see her every day</i>	11	16	7	20	17	32	32

Source: Jowell et al. (1989)

Given the aim of getting insights on family support related issues, the existing empirical research focusing on residential proximity mainly considered the distance between older parents and their adult children. However, findings in this respect are not easily comparable, due to the fact that different authors considered different distances as the variable of interest (the mean distance with children, the minimum distance, each distance between dyads) and also specified different proximity measures: a distance can be measured as the kilometers between two locations, or according to qualitative categories obtained on the basis of geographical distances, or again as time needed to cover the geographical distance. Moreover, although empirical findings show deep differences among developed countries, the (remote and proximate) motivations of these differences have not been clearly explained.

Many of the analyses quoted above focus also upon the determinants of the spatial separation between children and parents, usually finding an important role of gender, level of education, marital status, region of residence, nest leaving age and mobility history. However, the role of those variables can vary depending on the country. As an example, a comparative study between Britain and Italy showed that while in Britain the needs of older generation were more important than in Italy to determine proximity, in Italy the needs of children played a greater role (Glaser and Tomassini, 2000).

The aim of this paper is to observe proximities between adult children and their parents in five European countries that belong to the western, eastern and southern part of Europe, using a multi-countries survey held in July 2005, considering also the determinants of proximity. Rather than adopting a descriptive approach, we prefer to verify if data fit two possible explanations of differences.

1.2 Two possible theoretical frameworks

On the one hand, proximity may be related to modernization. According to Burch and Matthews (1987), the answer to the questions *With whom shall I live?* and *How far from my relatives do I want to live?* stems from the necessity to procure household goods, which are both material (e.g. domestic services) and immaterial (e.g. companionship and privacy). The value (the cost) of these goods is not fixed, but varies with the evolution of the society, and – for the decision maker – can be considered as exogenous. Looking at *the modern Western society*, Burch and Matthews define some explanatory hypotheses in order to explain the growing proportion of people living alone or in a small household. The main hypothesis concerns the effect of the rising real income. For Burch and Matthews: *We are on safe grounds in assuming that one reason so many people now live alone or in very small households is that they can afford to. They are able to forgo the economies of scale represented by larger households...*(p. 503). Applying this idea to proximity as well as co-residence, we can suppose that (1) more “modern” countries show lower proximity among relatives, and (2) within each country, more “modern” people reside further away from their relatives. We label this first explanatory possibility as *modernization hypothesis*.

On the other hand, proximity differences between countries may mirror patterns deeply rooted in the past. Differences between European nations may reflect both East/West contrast (Hajnal, 1965) and North/South contrast (Reher, 1998). According to Hajnal, Europe is divided by an invisible line joining Trieste (in the eastern boundary of Italy) with St. Petersburg (in the western part of Russia). In the western side, the *European late marriage model* is historically predominant, with late age at first marriage for women and relatively high proportion of never married people. In the eastern side, the opposite holds: women get married at early age (20 or even less), and almost all people marry. The Hajnal marriage line roughly overlaps the Europe division between Socialist and Capitalist countries after the Second World War. Since the Socialist welfare encouraged early marriage up to the end of 1980s

– mainly assigning public flats and houses to married young couples – it is possible to suppose that often couples were encouraged to live not far from the parental families. Moreover, as in many cases the house assignment happened some years after marriage, during the first years the cohabitation between parents and the married children was widely widespread.

According to Reher, another line divides Western Europe, coinciding with the watersheds of Alps and Pyrenees. In the northern side (the weak family-ties area) family bonds between parents and children, and among siblings become less and less important during the teens and after the second decade of life: children leave the parental home early, to work as servants (in the *ancient régime*) or to live alone, with friends or a partner (in recent years); moreover, elderly people are seldom assisted by their adult children during their last years. On the contrary, in the strong family-ties area, children leave the parental family only at marriage, or sons bring their wives into the parental home. When the neo-local rule is followed, children usually live near their parents after marriage, since it is easy for the younger generation to be helped by their parents in the care of their babies, and for the older generation to be assisted by their adult children during the last years of lives. Reher shows how this social geographical cut – deeply rooted in the Late Roman Empire – crosses other important familial and social differences. In the Italian and Iberian regions, the strong-family system has dominated until the present day.

If proximity reflects even nowadays the historical background drawn by Reher, we can suppose that (1) countries with stronger family-ties show higher proximities among relatives, and these differences persist after controlling for other determinants of proximities, and (2) the influence of individual characteristics on proximity should be lower in countries with stronger family-ties; more specifically, the most “modern” people should not necessarily show less proximity with their relatives. We label this second explanatory possibility as *historical hypothesis*.

The Eastern European countries are not included in the Reher’s historical framework. Generally speaking the research on this topic for the former European Socialist countries is lacking (and this paper tries to fill this gap, although only partially). Consequently, it is not straightforward to formulate precise hypotheses. As described above, it is only possible to suppose that the early marriage – rooted in the past as shown by Hajnal, and persisting all around the Eastern part of Europe up to the beginning of 1990s, encouraged also by the state – should favourite proximities between parents and children.

2. Data and methods

We use data collected by LaPolis (University of Urbino) and Fondazione Nord Est (Venice) as part of an international project on *Immigration and Citizenship in Europe*. The surveys, carried out in July 2005, involved six European countries: Italy, France, Germany (CATI survey); Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic (face-to-face survey). For each country, a representative sample of the population older than 15 of about 1,000 people is available. We asked the distance with mother and mother-in-law or, in case no marriage occurred, mother of the cohabiter. For all countries except Poland such distances refer to the time of the interview if mother is still alive or to the time of her death if she is dead. For Poland instead information refers to the time of marriage. Since in this paper we focus on the distance between adult children and their mother at the time of interview, data for Poland are not considered.¹

¹ The just described data-set permits to study also the proximity between parents and children at the time of marriage, including also Poland in the international comparison. This topic – who is extremely interesting, mainly from the historical viewpoint – will be developed in a further research.

Our analysis is divided in two parts, the first focusing on macro level (between countries) and the second on micro level (determinants of proximity within each country).

To get a first idea of the magnitude of the differences in proximity at a macro level, we present some descriptive figures showing proximity by country and age group. As important threshold of proximity we distinguish between co-residence, living within one km, within 50 kms and further away than 50 kms. In addition, we also check whether national differences hide in fact heterogeneity among regions of the same country. With this purpose, for each region (see table A1) we computed the percentage of people living within a certain distance from their parents (we use the same thresholds as before: co-residing, <1 km, <50 kms).

If the *modernization hypothesis* holds, results should show two clusters of countries: the rich Italy (*pro-capite* income and rank in the Human Development Index in 2005: 25,860\$, 21°) Germany (29,587\$, 19°) and France (29,189\$, 16°) should contrast the poorer and less developed Hungary (9,193\$, 38°) and Czech Republic (8,793\$, 32°). On the contrary, if the *historical hypothesis* prevails, Italy should contrast Germany and France, whereas the position of Hungary and Czech Republic is not forecasted.

As a final analysis concerning the macro level, we also check, via logit models, whether differences among countries still persist after controlling for country specific composition by gender, age, if the distance from mother concerns the moment of interview or the period before her death, marital status, education, the dimension of municipality, the region of residence, and church attendance. All these characteristics are (according to the literature, see for instance Hank, 2005) important in shaping distances between generation and at the same time are related with the idea of modernization.

In the analysis at micro level, we focus on differences within nations, performing an analogous logit model for each country. More specifically we measure the influence of each of the already mentioned determinants on the probability that adult children reside within one km distance from their parents. The idea, as specified in the theoretical framework, is to contrast the two hypotheses. If proximity is everywhere determined by modernization, we should observe that categories associated with “more modern” behavior (high education, younger age, residence in a big city, low church attendance) exhibit in each country a lower proximity. By contrast, if the contraposition between strong and weak family-ties prevails, the effect of the determinants in Italy should be weaker or in other direction than in France and Germany.

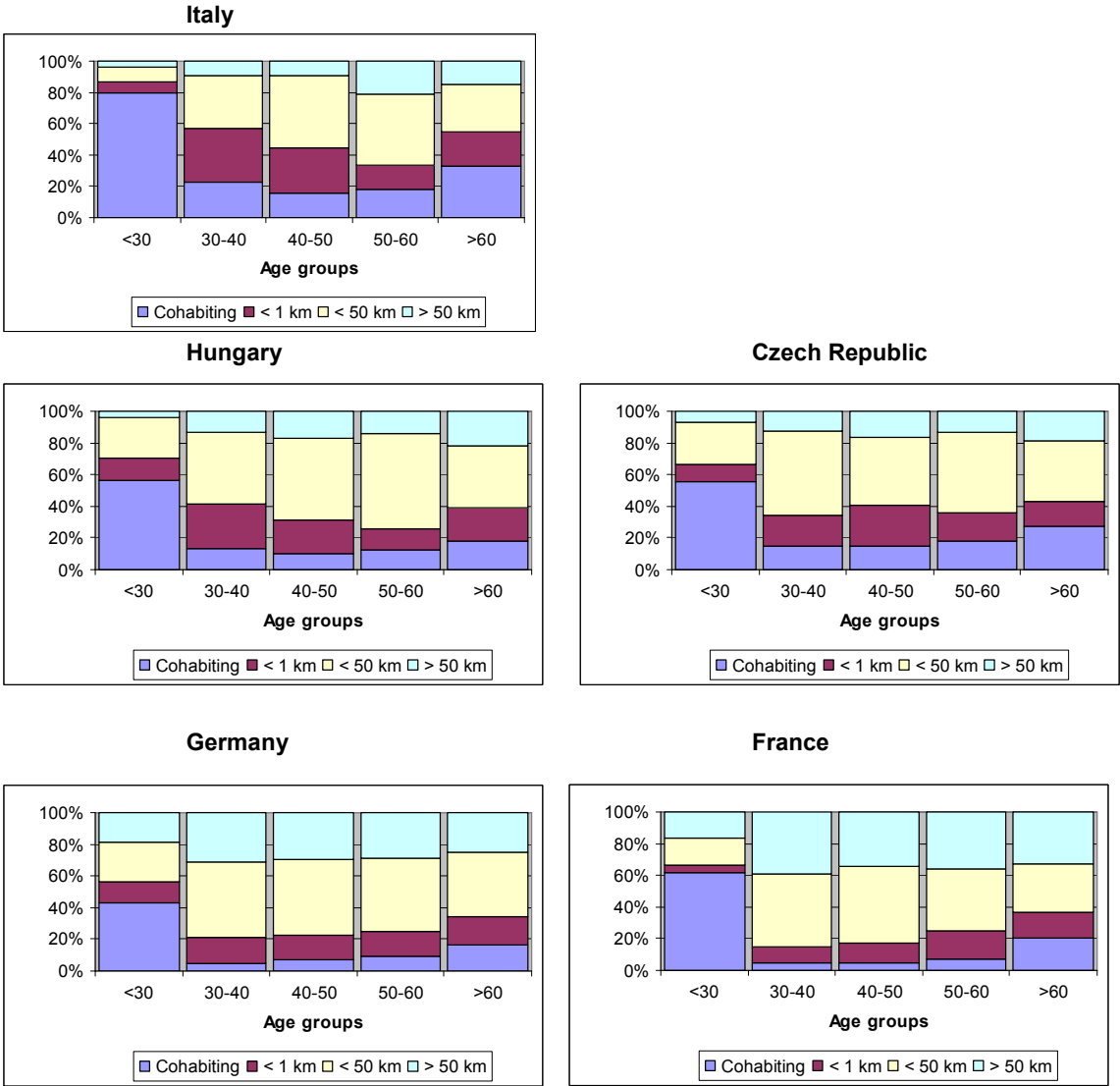
3. Results

3.1 Comparing countries

Countries share some communality in the trends by age (figure 1). The first age group is indeed the one in which co-residence between children and their parents is by far the most common living arrangement, since leaving parental home did not yet take place for many respondents. For following age groups, proximity drops dramatically, and increases again later in life. While for Italy, Hungary and Czech Republic the lowest proximity is found among those who are in their 40s, in Germany and France those in their 30s are the ones who live further away from their parents.

Generally speaking, the differences between West, East and South are very strong. In Italy, children live nearest to the mother compared with all other countries for each age group, whereas Germany and France show the lowest proximities between parents and children. The central-eastern European countries occupy instead an intermediate position. Thus, the *historical hypothesis* seems supported.

Figure 1. Proximity between children and their parents in July 2005: percentage of people co-residing, living within 1 km, 50 km or further away by country and age group.



To see whether country differences depend on the composition of the population in each country (as far as gender, age, marital status, level of education, religious attendance, dimension of the municipality are concerned), multivariate models have been performed (see Table 2). Notice that we restricted the attention – in this analysis as well as in the ones which will follow – to those older than 30, to avoid to analyse leaving parental home instead than proximity between generations.²

Whatever the thresholds we use to define proximity (co-residence, one km, 50 kms, see table 2), even after controlling for the composition of the population, three are the clusters of countries: Italy showing the highest proximity, Germany and France the lowest, and Hungary and Czech Republic in between (differences among clusters are significant – data not shown).

² The comparative studies on living parental home are much more diffused than studies on proximity between relatives: see, e.g., the researches of Iacovou (2001) and Billari et al. (2001).

Table 2. Determinants of living at different distances far from the mother. Odds ratios of logit models. People aged 30+ interviewed around July of 2005

	Co-resident	Less than one km	Less than 50 km
Age at interview and mother alive at interview			
<i>30-39 alive</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>40-49 alive</i>	0.85	0.93	0.91
<i>50-59 alive</i>	1.16	0.81 *	0.83
<i>60+ alive</i>	2.13 ***	1.18	0.71 *
<i>30-39 dead</i>	3.73 ***	2.15 ***	0.96
<i>40-49 dead</i>	4.22 ***	1.75 ***	0.97
<i>50-59 dead</i>	3.13 ***	1.24 *	1.07
<i>60+ dead</i>	4.00 ***	1.71 ***	0.87
Marital status			
<i>Married or cohabiting</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Never married non cohabiting</i>	8.78 ***	2.87 ***	1.29 *
<i>Widow, separated, divorced</i>	1.51 ***	1.15 *	0.91
Religious attendance			
<i>Once a year or never</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>At least once a month or spec. holidays</i>	1.10	1.10	1.17 *
<i>At least once a week</i>	1.43 ***	1.38 ***	1.06
Dimension of municipality (¹)			
<i>Small</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Small – Medium</i>	0.68 ***	0.82 **	0.84
<i>Medium</i>	0.51 ***	0.65 ***	0.79 *
<i>Medium – Large</i>	0.59 ***	0.73 ***	0.79 *
<i>Large</i>	0.63 ***	0.46 ***	0.42 ***
Education and gender			
<i>Low</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Medium</i>	1.02	0.85	0.88
<i>High</i>	1.11	0.78	0.69 ***
<i>Males</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Females</i>	1.00	1.02	1.32 ***
<i>Interaction: medium & females</i>	0.86	1.23	1.00
<i>Interaction: high & females</i>	0.86	1.17	0.73
State of residence			
<i>Italy</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Hungary</i>	0.76 **	0.64 ***	0.84
<i>Czech Republic</i>	0.55 ***	0.60 ***	0.75 **
<i>Germany</i>	0.38 ***	0.42 ***	0.38 ***
<i>France</i>	0.30 ***	0.34 ***	0.28 ***
<i>N° of cases</i>	3,590	3,590	3,590

(¹) In France, the last two categories are 100,000 and more, and Paris.

*** p<0.05 ** 0.05<p<0.10 *0.10<p<0.20

It is now useful to describe briefly the “pure” association between our explanatory variables and proximity, dealing with the European data-set: these results will be re-discussed when focusing on the individual differences within each country (see part 3.2).

(1) *Age* differences are not evident;

(2) Strong differences are instead related to the fact the *mother is still alive or already dead*, since in the latter case proximity, as co-residence or living within one km from the parents, is much more likely. This result suggests that adult children take care of the mother when she becomes severely ill also decreasing the geographical distance with her. A further analysis (here not shown) emphasizes that co-residence is the common practice (versus a simple increase in proximity): in the analysis of proximity within one km, if we exclude those who co-reside, no differences are found between those with alive and dead mother. For proximity within 50 kms, instead, the fact the mother is still alive does not matter.

(3) Proximity also differs by *marital status*: singles (never married and not cohabiting) are those living closest to the parents. This is especially strong for co-residence, but holds in all three models. In addition, those who are divorced or widow are more likely than married or cohabiting people to co-reside with the parents, but the difference between divorced and widow and those in couple vanishes for other definitions of proximity (one or 50 kms).

(4) *Church attendance* seems also to play a role in shaping distances between parents and children. People with a high religious attendance are more likely to co-reside and to live within one kilometre from the parents. When analysing proximity within 50 kms, instead, those with a medium attendance show a slightly higher probability of being close to the parents. However, the significance level is low.

(5) A clear message is related with the *dimension of the municipality*: the bigger the municipality, the higher the chances proximity (whatever definition) occur. However, while for co-residence and short distance (one km) the contraposition is between very small villages and other locations, for large distances are the largest cities distinguished from the rest.

(6) In analysing the role of *education* and *gender*, we find an importance only for proximity within 50 km: those with a higher education are living further away than others, as well as males. No interaction effects have been found.

The role of education, of church attendance and of the dimension of the municipality might be signs of the fact modernization matters in individual life, but country-specific analyses are needed to shed light on this respect (see paragraph 3.2).

As a final descriptive analysis on the differences among countries, we moved to a regional scale and compute the percentage of people co-residing, living within one km, living within 50 kms from their parents. Ranking each region on the basis of such measures allows checking whether differences within countries are as strong as differences between countries: if the ranks of the regions of one country are close to each other, nation boundaries are very important; if the ranks are instead very different within a country, no clear national specificity can be detected. To see whether geographical patterns going beyond the boundaries of the countries hold, the ranks of neighbouring regions of different countries can be compared. Although for some regions the number of cases is low (see table 3), the picture is clear. Generally, Italian region show low ranks, whatever proximity measure we consider: proximity is therefore generally high. The highest ranks (which mean lower proximity) are always found for regions belonging to France and Germany, while Hungary and Czech Republic are in an intermediate position. Differences within countries are however present. For instance, Budapest scores very badly when proximity within 50 kms is considered, and the same holds for the area surrounding Prague when co-residence is considered: in all these cases the percentage of people proximate to their parents is unexpectedly much lower than in the other regions of the same country. In general, within each country the differences among regions do not follow a clear geographical pattern (proximities do not increase/decrease going from North to South

or from East to West), but underline historical heritage (for instance: proximity in West Germany regions is usually different than in East Germany) or a different pattern for the capital city (Prague, Budapest, Berlin, Paris).

In analysing which are the proximity levels of neighbouring regions of different countries, other interesting elements emerge. The watershed of Alps (i.e. the boundary between France and Italy) overlaps the gap between low and high proximity of adult children with their mother. In general, neighbouring regions of different countries do not show similar proximity levels: boundaries of the countries seem therefore to matter more than geographical closeness of the regions.

3.2 Comparing people within countries

Generally speaking, four of our explanatory variables are useful to study the connection between modernization and proximity: age (or year at birth), the dimension of municipality, education, and the attendance to religious ceremonies (table 4 and A1).

In France and Germany, the association between age and proximity follows the pattern predicted by the *modernization hypothesis*: in these two countries, the younger the interviewed people, the longer the distance with mother. In the other countries, the association is less clear: surely, the youngest people (the age class 30-39) are not characterized by the longest distance. In all countries but Germany, the distance shrinks in case the mother is already dead: apparently when the mother becomes severely ill in every country but Germany geographical convergence takes place, particularly in Italy.

The *modernization hypothesis* holds everywhere referring to the dimension of municipality and religious attendance: in the five countries, the longest distance with mother is reported by non religious adult children living in big cities. However, the connection between the dimension of municipality and proximity is very weak in Italy.

Finally, only in Germany the connection between proximity and education follows the pattern of the *modernization hypothesis*, with a wider distance for people with a degree.

Other results of the models in table 3 are interesting, in order to emphasize some country-specific characteristics. In France, the distance with mother is narrower for women than for men (and the same holds for Germany and Czech Republic, although gender differences are here not significant), in accordance with the authors who suggest that in the tradition of Nordic European countries the obligations towards parents are stronger for daughters than for sons. On the other hand, the lack of gender differences in Italy may show that the tradition of some central-north Italian regions (where the old parents were assisted by the daughter-in-law) are now disappearing, as shown by other authors (Barbagli et al., 2004).

Also the connection between marital status and proximity are highly country-specific. The contrast between Italy and Germany is tremendous: in Italy people not in couple stay at home or return near the parental home, whereas in Germany the distance between the adult child and his mother does not change, irrespective of marital status. The position of France is more similar to the one of Germany, whereas Hungary and the Czech Republic are more similar to Italy, even if the statistical association is lower.

In conclusion, the *modernization hypothesis* fully works in Germany, since the four modernization variables (age, dimension of municipality, education and attendance to religious ceremonies) are associated with proximity between adult children and their mother in the predicted direction. In France, this happens for three variables (education is excluded), whereas in Italy, Hungary and the Czech Republic only dimension of municipality and religion show the “right” connection with proximity. Moreover, the analysis of the connection between proximity and other characters (as gender and marital status) shows that – generally speaking – each country tells a different story.

Table 3. Distances between adult children and their mother in the regions of five European countries. People aged 30+ interviewed in July 2005.

	Coresid.	Rank	<1 km	Rank	<50 kms	Rank	N. of cases
<i>Italy</i>							
North West (Piedmont Valle D'Aosta, Liguria, Lombardy)	18%	10	46%	6	84%	14	189
North East (Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia)	17%	11	36%	12	90%	5	81
The "red" zone (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria)	24%	3	53%	1	84%	13	140
Center-South (Lazio, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise)	26%	2	51%	2	91%	3	76
South (Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Puglia, Sicilia, Sardegna)	22%	4	47%	4	89%	7	194
<i>Hungary</i>							
Northern Transdanubiana (Észak-Dunántúl)	20%	8	39%	10	87%	9	108
Southern Transdanubiana (Dél-Dunántúl)	28%	1	47%	5	88%	8	106
Central Hungary (Közép-Magyarország)	16%	13	32%	17	84%	12	242
Northern Hungary (Észak-Magyarország)	22%	5	50%	3	93%	2	183
Eastern Hungary (Kelet-Magyarország)	17%	12	38%	11	91%	4	162
Budapest	21%	7	25%	26	63%	32	158
<i>Czech Republic</i>							
Praha	12%	20	21%	33	76%	19	76
Center-East (Střední Čechy)	5%	33	23%	30	77%	17	57
South-East (Jihozápad)	12%	21	30%	19	83%	15	94
North-East (Severozápad)	15%	14	34%	15	74%	22	65
North Center-West (Severovýchod)	20%	9	45%	7	86%	11	86
South Center-West (Jihovýchod)	14%	17	40%	9	79%	16	117
West (Střední Morava)	21%	6	42%	8	95%	1	81
Extreme West (Moravskoslezsko)	5%	31	34%	14	90%	6	91
<i>Germany</i>							
North East (Schleswig Holstein, Hamburg, Bremen, Niedersachsen)	10%	23	24%	28	70%	25	102
North-Center East (Nordrhein-Westfalen)	9%	25	30%	18	74%	23	141
South-Center East (Rheinland-Pfalz, Hessen, Saarland)	13%	18	34%	16	76%	20	83
South-East (Badern-Württemberg)	13%	19	28%	21	76%	21	87
South West (Bayern)	5%	32	14%	36	62%	33	93
Berlin	15%	14	23%	29	69%	26	26
North-West (Mecklenburg-Vorpomm., Brandenburg, Sachsen-Anhalt)	8%	30	35%	13	77%	18	74
Center-West (Sachsen, Thuringen)	4%	36	21%	32	62%	34	52
<i>France</i>							
Ile de France	8%	29	20%	34	52%	36	108
North-East (Bassin parisien est)	5%	34	23%	31	86%	10	44
North	9%	26	26%	23	63%	31	57
East	4%	35	27%	22	69%	27	48
West	11%	22	25%	27	72%	24	72
South-West	10%	24	17%	35	65%	29	83
Center-East	9%	27	29%	20	64%	30	58
South-East (Mediterranee)	9%	28	26%	24	69%	28	70
North-West (Bassin parisien ouest)	15%	16	26%	25	57%	35	86

Table 4. Determinants of living one kilometer or less far from the mother (at interview or when she dead). Odds ratios of logit models. People aged 30+ interviewed around June of 2005

	TOT	ITA	HUN	CZE	GER	FRA
Age at interview						
30-39	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
40-49	0.93	0.66 **	1.34	0.58 ***	1.10	1.14
50-59	0.75 ***	0.35 ***	1.09	0.39 ***	1.22	1.78 **
60+	1.01	0.65 *	0.96	0.55 ***	1.68 *	2.62 ***
Mother alive at interview						
Yes	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
No	1.68 ***	2.38 ***	1.47 ***	1.64 ***	1.05	1.93 ***
Marital status						
Married or cohabiting	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Never married, no cohabiting	2.81 ***	6.20 ***	2.65 ***	4.26 ***	1.36	2.20 ***
Widow, separated, divorced	1.13 *	1.52 *	1.10	1.38 *	0.99	0.89
Religious attendance						
Once a year or never	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
At least once a month or special holidays	1.10	1.60 **	0.85	1.42 **	1.09	1.17
At least once a week	1.37 ***	1.86 ***	1.51 **	1.20	1.41 *	1.12
Dimension of municipality (¹)						
Small	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Small – Medium	0.82 **	0.70	0.83	1.11	0.67	0.58 **
Medium	0.65 ***	0.73	0.52 ***	0.60 ***	0.55 *	0.93
Medium – Large	0.73 ***	1.09	0.60 **	0.51 ***	0.60 *	0.81
Large	0.46 ***	0.46 *	0.36 ***	0.36 ***	0.50 **	0.55 **
Education						
Low	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Medium	0.96	1.25	0.72 ***	1.12	0.80	1.11
High	0.86	0.82	0.88	1.25	0.40 ***	0.92
Gender						
Males	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Females	1.16 **	1.04	1.05	1.24	1.24	1.35 *
State of residence						
Italy	1.00					
Hungary	0.64 ***					
Czech Republic	0.60 ***					
Germany	0.41 ***					
France	0.34 ***					
<i>N° of cases</i>	3,590	680	959	667	658	626

(¹) In France, the last two categories are 100,000 and more, and Paris.

*** p<0.05 ** 0.05<p<0.10 *0.10<p<0.20

4. Conclusions

Considering together macro and micro analyses, it is possible to give some concise answers to the possibility of fitting the two here proposed theoretical frameworks on proximity between relatives in Europe.

The *modernization hypothesis* does not explain the differences of proximities among our five nations: Italy shows the narrowest proximities, although the Italian *pro-capite* income and Human Development Index are at a similar level of France and Germany, i.e., the nations with the lowest proximities. Moreover, proximities in Hungary and the Czech Republic are at an intermediate level, even if they are much poorer than the other three countries.

The *modernization hypothesis* works better in explaining individual differences within each country, since the most secularized people and those residing in big cities live at a higher distance from their mother. However, in Italy, the Czech Republic and Hungary – after having controlled for the other explanatory variables – proximity is not inversely related with year of birth and education, as the *modernization hypothesis* predict. Moreover, the association between proximity and variables measuring modernization is stronger in Germany and France, i.e., in the countries where family-ties and proximities are more relaxed. This result supports the *historical hypothesis*, which suggests that in countries traditionally characterised by strong family-ties, people may use the opportunity guaranteed by the modernization, but without seriously discussing (and sometime reinforcing) bonds between generations.³

In conclusion, our findings clearly support the *historical hypothesis*. Both North-South and East-West historical differences in the European family-ties have not been erased by modernisation. There are not any clear clues of convergence among countries in the family proximity system: consequently, it is not possible to speak of “globalization” of family-ties. Rather, the impact of the same social changes (income increase, education improving and so on) on family-ties follows territorial-specific paths, strongly conditioned by the kind of organization of proximities among relatives prevailing in the past.

³ Trying to fit Burch and Matthews’ framework to the living arrangements of Italian people, Dalla Zuanna (2001) suggests that they do not refer to *the modern Western society*, but *the modern weak-family-ties Western society*. In order to understand why Italian adult children stay in the parental home until their thirties, and the most of aged Italian parents live near their adult children, it should be underlined that the increasing income of parents increases the amount of money available to their co-resident adult children. During the last 25 years, the proportion of young people in employment living in the parental home, with their salary at their complete disposal, has substantially increased, and for those contributing to the household expenditures, the proportion of salary given to their parents has substantially dropped (Buzzi *et al.*, 1997). This situation increases the opportunity-cost of leaving the parental home. Hence, in a strong-family-ties society, the rising of real income hampers – rather than favours – the early departure of children. Moreover, a huge proportion of Italian parents help “significantly” the new couples to buy (or to build) a house when they get married (more than 60% of couples married during the 1990s), and many Italian grandmothers care their grandchildren when their daughters or daughters-in-law go back to work after the maternal leave. These “presents” are not free of charge: when parents become old and ill, their children or children-in-law assist them directly, or providing money. This family network is stronger when the house of the new couple is near the one(s) of parents (see Barbagli *et al.*, 2004, chapter 4).

Appendix

Table A1. People aged 30+ interviewed in July 2005: percentage distribution by some variables (column %)

	Total	ITA	HUN	CZE	GER	FRA
Age at interview (cohort of birth)						
<i>30-39 (1965-1974)</i>	23	24	17	23	26	29
<i>40-49 (1955-64)</i>	24	28	21	27	24	23
<i>50-59 (1945-54)</i>	21	23	22	21	20	19
<i>60+ (<1945)</i>	32	25	39	30	30	30
Mother alive at interview						
<i>No</i>	43	33	55	48	42	35
<i>Yes</i>	57	67	45	52	58	65
Marital status						
<i>Married or cohabiting</i>	69	77	57	71	72	73
<i>Never married non cohabiting</i>	8	13	5	4	7	13
<i>Widow, separated, divorced</i>	23	11	37	25	21	14
Religious attendance						
<i>Once a year or never</i>	40	13	33	71	34	53
<i>At least once a month or special holidays</i>	42	47	54	21	45	35
<i>At least once a week</i>	18	40	13	7	21	12
Dimension of municipality ⁽¹⁾						
<i>Small</i>	15	3	14	26	7	26
<i>Small – Medium</i>	33	42	40	26	37	18
<i>Medium</i>	22	30	18	26	21	14
<i>Medium – Large</i>	15	11	11	10	18	27
<i>Large</i>	15	13	16	11	17	15
Education and gender						
<i>Low, females</i>	40	40	42	42	43	29
<i>Medium, females</i>	49	48	48	46	48	58
<i>High, females</i>	11	12	10	12	9	13
<i>Low, males</i>	34	33	31	50	32	24
<i>Medium, males</i>	50	50	56	35	53	56
<i>High, males</i>	16	17	13	15	15	20
<i>Males</i>	46	44	42	47	48	48
<i>Females</i>	54	56	58	53	52	52
<i>Low</i>	37	37	38	46	38	26
<i>Medium</i>	48	49	51	41	50	57
<i>High</i>	13	14	11	13	12	16
<i>N° of cases (absolute values)</i>	3,590	680	959	667	658	626
<i>N° of cases (row % by country)</i>	100	19	27	19	18	21

⁽¹⁾ Thresholds changes by country. In France and Hungary, the last category is the capital city.

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