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Different patterns of home ownership in Europe

(a few notes: this is a work in progress, please do not cite without author's permission;
parts of the paper have not been corrected by a native speaker of English;
my apologies for possible errors)

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Debate on the expansion of home ownership within the European Union tends to underestimate the differences both in the historical trajectories leading to such development and in the resulting social and economic outcomes. Discussion on the pros and cons of home ownership is therefore founded on a rather undifferentiated – and so potentially misleading – concept of this tenure.
On the contrary, convergence toward the expansion of home ownership within the EU has come with divergence in the way housing-related markets, the state and family networks interplay in supporting the development of this tenure – its shape and timing – in the different countries.
Accounting for such "different patterns" of home ownership may contribute to the debate about the future of this tenure in Europe, the role it plays in national housing systems and its economic and social implications.
The multiplicity of the experience of home ownership and divergence in the national trajectories that have led to the expansion of this tenure are discussed in the paper. A tentative typology of home ownership models is presented. A preliminary comparative analysis of different patterns of home ownership in the EU is discussed, mostly focusing on Southern Europe and on Italy, in particular.

1. Introduction

Debate on home ownership and its expansion is often based on a rather undifferentiated concept of this housing tenure and on the assumption that the development of home ownership is an almost linear indicator of improvement in housing and living conditions of European households.
These assumptions are not unfounded: home-owners clearly have a set of common attributes distinguishing them from renters and empirical research has shown that home ownership is correlated with better housing and living conditions. However, this seems to be only part of the story. Variation does exist in the experience of home ownership and in its social and economic implications.
Significant differences exist in the experiences of home ownership – especially in the countries where this tenure is widespread – regarding ways of becoming home-owner and its timing, in housing quality and in the spatial and social characteristics of the areas where households settle, for instance. From this point of view, the relevance of the "housing tenure" indicator in the investigation of housing and living conditions seems to be somewhat overstated.
Other differences emerge when comparing – on a macro level – the expansion of home ownership in different housing systems. Differences exist regarding the incidence itself of this tenure, ranging from less than 50% – in Germany and Switzerland – to about 70% or more, in Italy, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, for example (table I).
Even when considering only national housing systems with a high incidence of home ownership, it is possible to distinguish different patterns in the expansion of this tenure. Convergence toward the expansion of home ownership within the European Union has come with divergence in the way housing-related markets, the state and family networks interplay in supporting its development in the different countries.
This paper mostly is an effort to distinguish different "home ownership models" within Western Europe. Preliminary results of a comparative research project – still in progress – are presented. There is no ambition to offer a systematic and exhaustive picture of home ownership in Europe, but rather to discuss a research programme and some early findings.
The next section of the paper is dedicated to a discussion on the variability of experiences of home ownership and on the issue of convergence/divergence in the national trajectories towards its expansion. Four "home ownership models" are presented. Their main characteristics are discussed in the third part of the paper. Main social and economic outcomes of home ownership within what is identified as a "familialistic model" are examined in the fourth section, focusing on Italy as an exemplar case. Finally, some preliminary conclusions are presented in the last part of the paper.

2. Home ownership in Europe: multiplicity and divergence

2.1. Multiplicity

The experience of home ownership is differentiated within Europe and inside each national country. This tenure clearly has certain relatively invariant advantages over renting: home ownership represents a form of wealth that can be released and an investment producing a relevant in-kind income in the guise of imputed rent; it also allows a greater security and control over housing. Nevertheless, these and other features normally considered to relate to this tenure have great variability.
It is remarkable that even some of the above mentioned core attributes of home ownership do not have an absolute value. The greater security of tenure granted by home ownership over renting is largely a function of rent regulations: in the national countries where the latter protect tenants from evictions, the advantages of owning a dwelling, over renting it, are clearly reduced. In addiction, the increased risks associated with mortgage borrowing, by low – or insecure – income households, contribute to undermine the security of home ownership (Ford & Wilcox 1998, for instance).
Other relevant differences do exist within the owner-occupied sector: in the housing careers leading to home ownership and in its timing (Guiso & Jappelli 1996; contributes in Kurz & Blossfeld 2004; Mulder & Smits 1999; Mulder & Wagner 2001, for example); in the kind of accommodation and in its quality; in

the value of the dwelling and in its adequacy to the occupants' needs; in the physical environment and in the social milieu where home ownership is produced (Cremaschi & Tosi 2001).
Furthermore, commitment to home ownership represents one of the main investments in family life and may have different implications for households' budgets, insofar as it takes away resources that could be used to satisfy other needs (Castles & Ferrera 1996; Kemeny 1981).
Finally, housing preferences for home ownership have changed with time and vary in space (Cnel 1976, for instance). All things being equal, it may be reasonably assumed that people prefer to own their own home. However, what seems questionable is the consistency of the "all things being equal" hypothesis in the real world.
In short, when there is not just an interest in formal property rights – and usually this is the case in social research – it is worth considering the multiplicity of conditions and experiences behind – for instance – the 71% of home ownership rate for Italy. Behind this figure, there is the paradigmatic middle-age couple that chose to invest their savings and move from a rented to an owned dwelling, all things being equal; but there is also the household that, when evicted, had to buy a home – leaving their neighbourhood and giving up a room – because of a lack of alternatives. There is the well-off young couple that has received a comfortable dwelling in a pleasant city area as a gift, but there is also the elderly person in the outskirts who became home-owner because she/he could never afford to leave their parents and just outlived them and inherited their dwelling.
From this point of view, the multidimensionality of housing tenures is an area of research that is, to a large extent, unexplored.

2.2. Divergence

Many differences also exist when comparing home ownership between different European countries.
First, the various social and economic contexts (*welfare regimes*) obviously influence the characteristics of the housing systems and both the relevance of home ownership and households' capability of acceding to this tenure.
Second, diversity in home ownership rates shows both different levels of expansion of this tenure and the relative importance of access to this kind of property within different housing systems. Where home ownership has a relatively low incidence, it is likely to be more correlated with social and economic inequalities and to be a more homogeneous phenomenon. Contrarily, where this tenure is widespread, greater heterogeneity does exist in the experience of home ownership and a lower correlation is expected with social and economic inequality. In Southern Europe, for instance, home ownership is rather common even among poor households, while this is not the case in other countries (Allen, Barlow, Leal, Thomas & Padovani 2004).
Moreover, where owning a dwelling is so common that it has become the ordinary way to satisfy housing needs, home ownership increases the threshold of what is needed – in terms of owned wealth and savings or in terms of borrowed money – to enter into the housing market. This disadvantage for the "new entrants" has relevant implications when they want to leave the parental home, or wish to start a family, or would like to move into a new area (Kemeny 1981; Spilerman, Lewin-Epstein & Semyonov 1993).
Third, the overall composition of the systems of housing provision and the relative incidence of other tenures are important. On one hand, the availability of alternatives in the rental sector – especially affordable ones – sets the conditions for a possible tenure choice and may allow potential home owners to delay access to this type of tenure within their life course. It also contributes to lowering the above mentioned threshold for entering the housing market, as renting a dwelling usually does not imply the need for drawing on accumulated wealth and/or on the credit market.
On the other hand, the composition of the home ownership sector itself is also an issue: diversity in the relative importance of co-operatives – in their various forms – versus individual ownership shows that the expansion of this tenure may come from different trajectories.
This leads to the last issue in the divergence perspective here adopted: the different cultural, social, economic and political processes on which the expansion of home ownership and its social production are founded. This is a complex matter referring to each country history.
However, from an analytical point of view, it is particularly relevant to distinguish three ideal-typical forms of social production of home ownership, that are related to the role played by the market, by the state and by family networks:

- the intergenerational production and transmission of this kind of property on an informal basis;
- buying a home through market channels;
- the state allocation of dwellings for home ownership.

The first form – *intergenerational production/transmission* of home ownership – comes from traditional and pre-industrial societies. Access to home ownership is in this case embedded within intergenerational relations, community networks and processes of family reproduction (Gulbrandsen & Langsether 2003; Segalen 1995). In its simplest form, the son – the first-born, typically – may simply accede to home ownership by succeeding his parents in the home where he grew up. This is also the home where he works with his parents, where he brought his wife to live and where the young couple raises their own children. Home is both the shelter, the place of economic activities and a closed care-system where different generations support each other in a context of forced solidarity (Segalen ibid.).
Proximity between generations tends to be maintained even when descendants settle elsewhere. On one hand, this allows affective, economic and care relationships to be maintained. On the other hand, proximity consents parents to better help their children in acceding to home ownership, as the former have a greater control over relevant resources: a family dwelling or a piece of land, a network of relatives or community members who would be involved in self-building activities. Home is, in fact, typically built and maintained through self-building.
In contemporary societies, family networks, self-provisioning and the reciprocity economy have become less important than in traditional societies. Nevertheless, related informal processes – when compared to market and state institutions – are still relevant in allocating resources and in welfare provision (Esping Andersen 1999).
This kind of intergenerational production of home ownership still works, albeit in different forms. Complex households, with several generations living together in the same dwelling, are less common than in the past. Instead, different generations often live on different floors of the same building, or in the same neighbourhood, according to what has been defined an *intimacy at distance* criterion. Self-building is no more a standard, but developing one's own home (self-development) and do-it-yourself are quite common phenomena. Furthermore, the transmission of home ownership through inheritance and gifts, and the financial support from the family, are to some extent playing a more relevant role than in the past (Bernardi & Poggio 2004).
Entry into *home ownership through market channels* is – not surprisingly, in a capitalist economy – probably the most common way to do it within Western Europe, even though national experiences differ in this respect. According to this form of social production of home ownership, dwellings are goods that may be purchased on the market, as people do with other things.
Housing production is left to developers and to their subcontractors, while households may buy their own home from the former or from real estate intermediaries. Even when prospective home-owners are self-developing their home, they still have to buy services and materials within the building industry. It has been noticed, however, that self-development can be considered somehow between the two forms of social production of home ownership, the informal – family and community-based – and the market-driven ones (Kurz 2004; Martens 1985).
Furthermore, entry into home ownership may be financed within the credit market, as an alternative to relying on personal savings or intergenerational transfers.
Income availability and the opportunity to accumulate savings or to borrow money that derives from it, allows people to buy their home. This contrasts with what happens within the two other ideal-typical forms of social production of home ownership, where *status* is more an issue: both in the case of the ascriptive status deriving from being a member of a family and in the case of entitlements deriving from social citizenship (see below).
Finally, a wide range of housing-related policies support the development of home ownership in almost all European countries. Some of these policies may be specifically oriented to the – direct or indirect – *state allocation of dwellings for home ownership*. Various forms of privatization of social housing have been implemented in different countries. In these cases, the state usually provides dwellings for home ownership, at a discounted price, to beneficiaries selected according to some status criteria. The more common entitlement is probably being a tenant in the same dwelling, but other conditions – being a civil servant, or a serviceman – have also been considered.
In almost all European countries, the welfare state involvement in housing provision and in the housing market regulation has been oriented to allocate homes in the rental sector. At least in principle, allocation within the home ownership sector is also possible.

There is no direct matching between these three theoretical forms of social production of home ownership and the experience of this tenure within the European countries. In fact, the three forms are likely to be observed in every country. However, differences do exist in their relative importance.

2.3. A tentative typology

Based on the characteristics of the housing systems mentioned in the previous subsection and considering the ideal-typical forms of social production of home ownership there presented, it is possible to sketch a tentative typology of "patterns of home ownership". This is the typology under investigation in my research project. A preliminary discussion of its consistency is presented in the next two sections, but I still need to develop more systematic and exhaustive empirical research at both a macro (characteristics of the different housing systems) and micro (relevant social and economic outcomes) levels.

First, it is possible to distinguish some "*lands of tenure choice*". These are countries – mostly in Continental and Northern Europe – where the rental sector traditionally plays a relevant role in housing provision. Governance of this sector has been successful in granting reasonably affordable and secure dwellings to tenants. These results may have been obtained through different policy options: developing a large social housing stock; by means of effective regulation of the private rental market; through generous housing allowance schemes; or by implementing different combinations of such instruments. The main point is, however, that even ordinary households – i.e. not only low income ones – are used to renting their homes, at least in certain phases of their life course. The choice to invest in their own home is made against reasonable renting alternatives and against other investment opportunities (Werczberger 1997) (for instance).

Housing and tax policies supporting the expansion of home ownership may also have been implemented, but the main trait of these housing systems is the importance of the rental sector in housing provision. Relevant differences may exist in the typical forms of social production of home ownership but they are not considered here for analytical simplicity.

Countries where home ownership is widespread form a second – albeit internally differentiated – group.

Three home ownership models have in common a residual role of the rental sector in the housing system. They differentiate by the relative importance of the three typical forms of social production of home ownership presented in the previous subsection.

It is possible to discern a *market-driven home-ownership* model, where access to this tenure is mostly achieved via commercial channels. In the real world, the United Kingdom may be considered a champion of this model.

It is then possible to distinguish a *social model*, where the state is heavily involved in housing provision for home ownership, with egalitarian goals. Norway may be considered a prototype of this model.

Finally, a *familialistic model* may be used to indicate those national cases where access to home ownership heavily relies on the intergenerational production and transmission of this kind of property. Southern European countries may represent this model.

This four-model typology is intended as a heuristic tool and has obvious limits. It necessarily relies on selection of information and reduces the complexity of national experiences; it also probably underestimates existing differences within each country. Family transfers – for instance – do matter also in Norway (Gulbrandsen & Langsether 2003), while state allocation for home ownership, via privatization of social housing, has played a relevant role both in the United Kingdom (*right to buy* scheme) and in Italy ("leasing" schemes). What is more, in every country differences in the typical forms of social production of home ownership are likely to exist between urban and rural areas.

Even with such limits, this typology may be of some use.

3. Market, state and family in the social production of home ownership

3.1 Housing provision in European countries

The distribution of housing tenures within selected European countries is presented in table I. Estimates are for the first few years after the year 2000.
The first group of countries – Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Denmark and Sweden – is characterized by a relatively low incidence of home ownership. These countries have been tentatively indicated as *lands of tenure choice*.
In fact, a large share of households live in a rented dwelling: within this group, the range of people who rent is from 39% (Sweden) to 60% (Switzerland). Moreover, it is possible to observe – even if this piece of information has not yet been retrieved for all the countries – that social housing plays a major role in the rental sector: it accounts for about one half of the dwellings within the sector in France and in the two Scandinavian countries; even more in the Netherlands. The rental sector in this group of countries is therefore characterized by a relatively high offer of affordable housing.
Renting has a minor relevance in housing provision within the other countries in the table: with the exception of the United Kingdom, it accounts for less than one in four occupied dwellings.
The distribution of housing tenures in the UK (*market-driven home ownership model*) is peculiar. It is characterized by a high home ownership rate (69%) and by a large relevance of social housing within the rental sector. This data reflects the outcomes of two different phases in British housing policy history. In the period from the end of WWII until the Eighties, the construction of a large social housing stock was carried out, similar to what was happening in the Scandinavian countries. Thatcherism marked a radical change in the development of home ownership: both through a liberalization of the credit market and favourable tax policies, and via the privatization of a large stock of social housing. Notwithstanding such a large scale privatization scheme, the UK is still among the European countries with the largest social housing stock.
What has been highlighted about the British housing system is its dualism and its high degree of polarization in tenure distribution, with low-income households being heavily concentrated within social housing (Forrest & Murie 1995, for instance).
The Norwegian (*social home ownership model*) pattern of tenure distribution contrasts with the patterns shown by the other two Scandinavian countries: the latter have a large rental stock, where about one half of the dwellings are in the social housing sector, and a relatively low incidence of home ownership; on the contrary, the home ownership rate is really high in Norway (79%), while the social housing stock is limited (4%). This could appear rather counter-intuitive, considering the emphasis on "Scandinavian" or "social democratic" grouping in mainstream comparative welfare research.
In fact, social housing (in the more comprehensive meaning of the term) has mostly been provided via home ownership in Norway, particularly through co-operatives: the latter accounts for about 14% of the overall occupied dwelling stock. While the limited social rented stock is intended just for households with people with special needs.
This country is differentiated from Denmark and Sweden because housing policy traditionally focuses on access to home ownership, instead of on the rental sector. Housing policy in Norway is nevertheless considered as comprehensive and egalitarian as housing policy in the other Scandinavian countries (Esping Andersen 1985; Gulbrandsen 1988).
Finally, a large home ownership segment and a very limited social housing sector is what also characterizes the Southern European countries (*familialistic home ownership model*).
Here home ownership has been developed almost entirely on an individual basis. The development of this tenure has been, to a great extent, family-driven; partially in continuity with the traditional intergenerational production/transmission or this kind of property; partly as a self-help strategy in order to satisfy the housing needs, when facing an ineffective governance of the rental sector (Allen et al.2004; Bernardi & Poggio 2004; Tosi 1987).
The "other tenures" count in these countries more than social housing. Rent-free and life-tenancy dwellings are mostly allocated within the family to the younger and the elderly members, respectively. These tenures typically represent a stage in the intergenerational transmission of home ownership (Cremaschi & Tosi 2001): on one hand, younger members can have a home for free but they are not allowed to fully control that resource; property may be definitively transferred to them later, by inheritance or when they meet the requirements of certain social norms, such as marrying. On the other hand, elderly

members may wish to transmit – especially for fiscal reasons – their property to their descendants anticipating inheritance. They secure their home against any possible eviction, by reserving for themselves a life-tenancy entitlement.

3.2 Housing-related policies and markets

National housing-related policies in Europe do differ in relation to both their framework and the specific instruments adopted to support the expansion of home ownership.
A common and simple distinction is traditionally made between *comprehensive* versus *residual* models of housing policy. The first model is characterized by both universalistic goals in housing provision and by an integrated approach in the implementation of housing-related policies: apart from housing policy itself, town-planning, social policy, tax and credit policy, for instance. Contrarily, within the residual model housing policy is targeted only to low-income households and people with special needs, under the assumption that all the other households can satisfy their needs within the housing market (for instance (Adams 1990).
According to this distinction, it is possible to classify the Scandinavian countries and, to a certain extent, Continental Europe within the comprehensive model; while thatcherist and post-thatcherist Britain may be classified within the residual one (ibid.).
Southern European countries do not fit very well in this scheme. It is certainly not possible to include them within the comprehensive model, as neither their policies have been inspired by universalistic goals, nor housing policy has been characterized by a systemic approach dealing with other policy areas (Allen et al. 2004; Tosi 1990)s. On the other hand, beneficiaries were not always targeted according to some means-test criterion. In the Italian case, they were individuated on the basis of different – and some time coincidental – status (Tosi ibid.).
Other criteria in the classification of housing policy include the "preference" for one of the two main tenures (Balchin 1996; Kemeny 1980). The relevance of home ownership versus renting in the different countries has been discussed in the previous section.
Home ownership is supported in almost all European countries by a favourable tax treatment and often by dedicated saving plans. Other policy instruments better characterize different national trajectories and home ownership models.
Speculative large-scale developers and real estate professionals traditionally play a major role in housing provision within the United Kingdom (Martens 1985), in a free-market context. It has been estimated that in 1991 real estate agencies were involved in about 80% of all transactions; the corresponding figures for Italy and Germany were, respectively 35% and 60% (European Commission 1995).
The development of home ownership in Norway has been carried out, with egalitarian aims, through comprehensive policies. Three are the main pillars of this social home ownership system: town-planning instruments allowing councils to control land price; the National State Housing Bank that grants credit to prospective home-owners and is responsible for housing allowances; subsidized co-operatives developing dwellings for home ownership in urban areas (Gulbrandsen 1988).
Italian housing policy is also traditionally oriented towards home ownership, but in a different style. The development of social (rented) housing itself has come with an early privatization of this stock via the concurrent allocation of dwellings for home ownership. During almost all the 20th century, both liberal, fascist and – after WWII – christian democrat governments implemented a double-strategy in the allocation of the social housing stock, being new dwellings partly allocated for renting and partly for home ownership through various forms of leasing contracts. The main beneficiaries of such an allocation for home ownership were civil servants and middle class households (Poggio 2006). In the period 1951-1970 about 800,000 public dwellings were completed while in the meanwhile 850,000 were privatized (Padovani 1996). Further privatization schemes were also implemented in recent decades, for the existing stock.
To a certain extent, the expansion of home ownership has been realised against the development of a large (rental) social housing stock. On an ideological level, such a policy has been largely inspired by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, that considers the diffusion of small properties and thrift to be the best solution to the "social question":

> *If a workman's wages be sufficient to enable him comfortably to support himself, his wife, and his children, he will find it easy, if he be a sensible man, to practice thrift, and he will not fail, by cutting down expenses, to put by some little savings and thus secure a modest source of income. Nature itself would urge him to this. We have seen that this*

> *great labor question cannot be solved save by assuming as a principle that private ownership must be held sacred and inviolable. The law, therefore, should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.*
> *Many excellent results will follow from this; and, first of all, property will certainly become more equitably divided. For, the result of civil change and revolution has been to divide cities into two classes separated by a wide chasm. On the one side there is the party which holds power because it holds wealth; which has in its grasp the whole of labor and trade; which manipulates for its own benefit and its own purposes all the sources of supply, and which is not without influence even in the administration of the commonwealth. On the other side there is the needy and powerless multitude, sick and sore in spirit and ever ready for disturbance. If working people can be encouraged to look forward to obtaining a share in the land, the consequence will be that the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought nearer to one another…* (Leo XIII, "De Rerum Novarum").

With the exception of the above mentioned "continuous privatization" approach, the development of home ownership has been sustained mostly through non-policies. Two issues are particularly significant in this respect: an ineffective governance of the rental market that since the Seventies left Italian households with no reasonable alternative but home ownership (Bernardi & Poggio 2004) and the late implementation of town-and-country planning instruments, that allowed – until the Eighties – family-based informal strategies for a cheap access to home ownership (see below).
Comparative research on housing provision (Barlow & Duncan 1994; Martens 1985, for example) has shown that differences exist in the relative importance of real estate professionals, speculative developers and large scale building firms. For-profit development and housing production play a very significant role in the British system of housing provision. While the relative importance of self-development and – to some extent – of self-building seems to be higher in Continental and Southern Europe (ibid.; Allen et al. 2004; Kurz 2004).
The expansion of home ownership in Norway is linked to two main modes of housing production: traditional self-development in the rural regions and large scale development by co-operatives in the urban areas (Gulbrandsen 1988). Both are supported by favourable credit conditions from the National State Housing Bank.
The importance of the credit market in funding home ownership also varies within Europe. In a few countries, most notably the UK and the Netherlands, the majority of households rely on it in order to finance their access to home ownership. Favourable mortgage conditions apply in these countries. Contrarily, Southern European households traditionally draw mostly on personal savings and family wealth. National mortgage markets were rather underdeveloped, especially in Italy, until a few years ago. It has been estimated that in the mid-Nineties home mortgage conditions in Italy were among the worst in Europe (Bernardi & Poggio 2004). However, recent developments in the international financial markets and in the construction of a common credit market are steadely reducing variation in this respect, within the European Union (Ball 1990; National Board of Housing … 2005: table 4.13).

3.3 Informal and family practices

Entry into home ownership through non-market channels – usually family-driven – also matters. On one hand, self-building and self-development allows low income households to use their own time, labour and social capital, in order to offset their own limited economic resources (Bourdieu & de Saint Martin 1990; Kurz 2004; Tosi 1987). This is especially true in rural areas and, generally speaking, in housing systems where no strict planning regulations have been implemented. This was the case in most of the Southern European countries until a few decades ago (Allen et al. 2004; Bernardi & Poggio 2004).
On the other hand, home ownership may be transferred between generations through bequest, gifts and various forms of financial support. It is worth considering that relevant cultural differences do exist, both within and between countries, in people's attitude toward helping their children (Gulbrandsen & Langsether 2003; Kohli 2004; Spilerman 2004). Such differences are also reflected in the various legal and tax treatment systems dealing with the intergenerational transmission (Beckert 2005; Kohli ibid.).
Supporting entry into home ownership by descendants is, in any case, the main motivation for intergenerational economic transfers in Western Europe (Attias-Donfut, Ogg & Wolff 2005).

Table II, shows some results from the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE). Data provided refers to the elderly population (50 years old or above) of ten countries. Unfortunately, the survey does not include the United Kingdom and Norway.
The distribution of home ownership and of selected modalities of access to this tenure are presented. Estimates for home ownership rates are consistent with data shown in table I, although rates presented in table II are higher than the ones shown in the first table, and differences between the various countries are lower. This is due to the different population selection made in the SHARE survey.
Data on the modalities of acceding into home ownership are more interesting. Selected modalities reflect different possible channels of the intergenerational transmission: inheritance, gift and other forms of financial support from the family.
Differences clearly emerge. When considering the three forms of family help all together, it is possible to distinguish countries where the family plays a relevant role and countries where this is not the case: about one third of the considered Greek and Italian households – and a quarter of the Spanish ones – have acceded into home ownership thanks to some type of family transmission; contrarily, the corresponding figure for Danish, Dutch and Swedish households is less than 7%.
Estimates for Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland suggest that the relevance of the family in these countries is somehow at an intermediate level between the two groups of countries previously discussed.
It has been noticed that even though the hereditary transmission is a relevant modality to enter home ownership, housing careers of the beneficiaries can not obviously rely on it, given that the death of a relative is never a planned event. On the contrary, inter-vivos transfers – gifts and financial support – do allow a more strategic interaction between donors and recipients. The latter may better plan their housing careers relying on these kind of transfers. For these reasons, inter-vivos transfers are somewhat more interesting than bequests (Guiso & Jappelli 1996; Kohli 1999).
The general picture previously discussed considering the overall intergenerational transfers, does not change substantively when looking at only the estimates of the gifts and the financial help: the relevance of inter- vivos transfers in access to home ownership is greater in Southern than in Northern Europe. Furthermore, when considering gifts and financial support only, Germany exits the group of countries where intergenerational transfers matter at an intermediate level and may be considered among the Northern European group.
More detailed data on the role played by the family in supporting their descendant in the satisfaction of their housing needs is available for Italy. In 1998, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) interviewed more than 11,000 married women within the Survey "*Famiglie, soggetti sociali e condizioni dell'infanzia*", in order to collect a set of retrospective data on marriage and family formation. Data collected includes the first living arrangement of couples and the possible type of help received by the families of the partners.
Main results from a preliminary analysis of this data are presented in table III. It has been noticed that this data suffers from some selection problems (Barbagli, Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 2003, pp. 277-278). Because of a technical error, only women still married in 1998 – and not the ones that at that time were already divorced or widowed – were interviewed. Notwithstanding these problems, which require due care and attention, the analysis of this data may provide the opportunity for a preliminary discussion on the role of the family network in a significant moment of family life, that in Italy tends to coincide with the departure from the parental home.
Data in table III refers to married couples in 1998, where the wife was born in the period between 1934 and 1968 (i.e. 30-64 years old when interviewed). It shows the combined distribution, for different periods of marriage, of the first accommodation of the married couples and of the possible help received by the families of the two partners.
After WWII (1950-1968), a rented home was the more frequent living arrangement for new couples (about 44%), followed by other solutions implying co-residence with the ascendants (30%). These two figures reflect the dualism of Italian society at that time: on one hand, massive migrations towards greater industrial and urban areas sustained the development of a good quality rental stock; on the other hand, co-residence – mainly within low-quality owned or sharecropping homes – represented a forced choice for poor households.
The relevance of the rental solutions steadily increases until the mid-Seventies and then constantly decreases as a result of both the conclusion of the expansion of the large industrial and urban areas and the rental market starting to collapse (Padovani 1996; Tosi 1990). Co-residence arrangements also progressively decrease in their importance.

Home ownership solutions steadily increase in relevance: just one fifth of the new couples in the period considered first could enter into home ownership after marrying; the corresponding figure for the last period (1989-1998) is more than double.
Family help is a relevant resource. On average over all the periods considered, family contributes to the first accommodation of couples in at least one third of the marriages, when considering both co-residence with the ascendants, rent-free housing allocated within the family and various intergenerational transfers supporting entry into home ownership (gifts, bequest and financial help). It is likely that the modality "home already owned by one of the partners" is also correlated with some kind of family help, but it is not possible to test this hypothesis.
With the exclusion of co-residential arrangements, family help increases its relevance over time.
Rent-free accommodation allocated within the family almost doubled its relevance from the Eighties onward. The importance of home ownership solutions supported by intergenerational transfers (gifts, bequest and financial help) also steadily increases: in its complex, the corresponding figure was 6.3% in the first period considered and became more than 20% in the period 1989-1998.

4. Implications of home ownership within the familialistic model: preliminary evidence from Italy

Main characteristics of the familialistic home ownership model have been sketched in the previous sections, focusing on the Italian case. In this section, main social and economic outcomes of the development of this tenure within this model, and Italy in particular, are briefly presented.
Expansion of home ownership in Italy is to a large extent based on its intergenerational production and transmission. These intergenerational processes are usually correlated with a limited geographical and labour mobility. Both transfers of in-kind resources (house, land, labour) and self-development of home ownership within the family network are in fact typically localized close to family members involved in these processes (see subsection 2.2).
This trait of the Italian housing system represents an element of rigidity within the labour market. Some empirical evidence for this correlation between home ownership and rigidity of the labour market have been found both on a macro (Oswald 1999) and on a micro level (Cannari, Nucci & Sestito 2000).
It is worth considering that financial help – i.e. not localized, in principle – is steadily increasing its relevance within the overall family support package for entry into home ownership (table III), reflecting an adaptation of informal practices to recent changes in the housing system towards a more market-driven model (Bernardi & Poggio 2004; Poggio 2006). However, this de-localization of family help seems to be mostly a prerogative of well-off families (not shown).
The spreading of home ownership in a housing system with no reliable alternatives in its rental sector has relevant distributive implications.
First, the expansion of home ownership has led, in the long run, to a certain degree of "democratization" of wealth. Informal practices – especially self-building and self-development – allowed also low income households to become home owners (although relevant differences are likely to remain when considering multidimensionality issues discussed in subsection 2.1). On the other hand, there is some evidence that home ownership is becoming a relatively autonomous factor (as regards to earned income) in the structuring of economic inequality (Guiso, Paiella & Visco 2005, for instance).
Secondly, the threshold of what is needed to enter into the housing market – and therefore to leave the parental home and/or start e new family – has been increased in the last two decades by the combination of limited affordable alternatives in the rental market, rising housing price and the full implementation of town-and-country planning that have limited the opportunities for a cheap access to home ownership. Such a high threshold for entering the housing market is considered among the relevant factors in delaying the transition to adulthood and in postponing family formation (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006, for example).
Finally, as access to home ownership heavily relies on intergenerational transfers, this tenure represents a relevant channel in the transmission of material capital between generations and therefore in the reproduction of social inequality (Bernardi & Poggio 2004; Tosi 1987).

5. Tentative conclusions

In this paper, I have tried to address home ownership in Europe from a "divergence perspective".
A preliminary issue to deal with has been the multiplicity of home ownership. A discussion on the multidimensionality of this tenure and some arguments for more empirical research in this perspective has been presented.
Secondarily, notwithstanding convergence being a matter within the expansion of home ownership, I have tried to make a good case for a divergence thesis.
The expansion of home ownership is decidedly connected with converging social and economic processes that have been and are taking place in Europe. In the long run, improvement in households' economic and living conditions has clearly supported this expansion; while – for instance – in the short period the construction of a common credit market within the EU is leading to both new opportunities in funding home ownership and increased risks in this tenure.
Nevertheless, European national experiences of home ownership still maintain relevant differences, according to the way housing-related markets, the state and family networks interplay in the social production of this tenure in each country. There is some evidence that such diversity does not just reflect different phases within common processes, but it rather indicates dissimilar historical trajectories of the European housing systems.
A tentative typology of the different patterns of home ownership has then been discussed. A preliminary empirical analysis of home ownership in Europe has been presented using this typology. Some implications for what has been identified as a *familialistic model* have been discussed, focusing on Italy.
On a theoretical level, I do need to better coordinate the suggested typology with the ones other scholars are currently working on, as – for instance – about one quarter of the papers in the program of the research workshops within this conference deal with home ownership typologies. On an empirical level, I need to proceed with a more systematic multivariate analysis of both the characteristics of the different home ownership models and their main social and economic outcomes.
With such a to do list for my research project it would be imprudent to draw any conclusion, except that – when discussing home ownership and its implications – it is probably worth wondering what kind of home ownership we are talking about.

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Table I - Housing provision in Western Europe: occupied dwelling stock by tenure (%). Estimates for the first few years after the year 2000.

	Rented		Owner-occupied		Other [c]	
	private	social	individual	co-operative		Tot
lands of tenure choice						
Switzerland	[b]60	n.a.	35	4	2	100
Germany [a]	[b]55	n.a.	45	n.a.	0	100
Netherlands	10	35	55	n.a.	0	100
France	21	18	56	n.a.	6	100
Austria	25	14	58	n.a.	3	100
Denmark	20	20	53	7	0	100
Sweden	18	21	46	15	0	100
market-driven model						
United Kingdom	10	21	69	n.a.	0	100
social model						
Norway	20	4	63	14	0	100
familialistic model						
Italy	16	4	71	< 1	9	100
Greece	20	0	74	n.a.	6	100
Portugal	18	3	75	n.a.	4	100
Spain	10	1	82	n.a.	7	100

Sources: own elaboration from: the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Sweden) & Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic (2005); Statistics Norway; Swiss Federal Statistical Office; National Institute of Statistics (Italy). Notes: [a] excluding territories of the former GDR; [b] all the rental sectors (private+social); [c] include rent-free and life-tenancy dwellings. Total may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table II - Distribution of home ownership and of selected modalities of property acquisition among the elderly (50 y.o. and above) in Europe, 2004 (%)

	Home ownership rate (%)	Selected modalities of acquisition of the home property (% for home owners only)		
		Bequest	Gift	With family support
lands of tenure choice				
Switzerland	57.5	7.9	1.0	8.2
Germany	52.6	18.0	2.2	1.6
Netherlands	56.0	1.9	0.0	1.4
France	76.0	9.6	0.5	3.8
Austria	60.5	17.5	2.4	7.9
Denmark	72.1	1.1	0.5	2.9
Sweden	72.0	3.4	0.7	2.3
familialistic model				
Italy	76.5	20.9	2.3	11.4
Greece	84.7	15.7	2.1	13.8
Spain	87.4	14.8	1.5	7.4

Sources: own elaboration from Börsch-Supan et al. (2005: tab. 2A.5 & 2A.6)

Table III - First accommodation of married couples in Italy by period of marriage: living arrangement and possible help from the family (%)– married couples (1998) where wife was born in the period 1934-1968

	Autonomous living arrangement:							Co-residence with ascendants:	Total
	(a) rented	(b) owner-occupied			(c) free				
Period of marriage		already owned by one of the partners	acquired by their own means	acquired with financial help from the family	inherited	gift	home allocated within the family		
1950-1968	43.8	4.4	8.6	2.0	2.3	2.0	5.5	30.3	100.0
1969-1978	47.1	5.7	10.1	3.8	2.7	2.7	7.1	20.2	100.0
1979-1988	37.4	8.6	11.7	6.6	3.4	4.2	13.0	14.4	100.0
1989-1998	28.7	12.5	12.7	13.2	3.5	4.3	13.7	10.6	100.0
Total (N=11,424)	40.7	7.2	10.6	5.5	2.9	3.2	9.4	19.7	100.0

Sources: own elaboration of data from the Istat Survey *Famiglie, soggetti sociali e condizioni dell'infanzia.*
Notes: modalities "inherited or gift from outside the family" and "free-rent from employer" omitted (< 0.5%). Total may not add up to 100% because of rounding.