

The evolution of models for leaving the family of origin in five Italian urban areas

David Benassi, Daniele Novello

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The article presents some research results on models for leaving the family of origin in the more general framework of the process of transition to adult life. As the specialised literature has shown, the Italian situation is striking in the European context for the persistence of traditional models of transition to the adult condition and for the lateness with which the young leave the parental home. Using original data on five Italian urban areas (Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Bari), the article tries to establish if there are differences at local level in the consistency and extension of these specific features. In particular,

the analysis seeks to document any possible changes in the ways in which the family home is left, comparing individuals born between 1934 and 1974. The evidence shows that in central and northern urban areas the gradual erosion of marriage as the main form of departure from the family of origin is evident, with a gradual strengthening of «innovative» solutions (living alone and cohabitation); in the two areas from the south, by contrast, there have been no significant discontinuities. Here too, then, the familiar North/South divide proves to be a useful analytical category.

1. Introduction

In the last three decades great attention has been given to studying changes and persistent features in the models of how life courses develop¹.

For all the striking differences in approach in studies of this topic, there is general agreement in identifying some trends shared by most, if not all, European countries regarding the changes in these models. This is markedly true as regards the gradual delay in the various steps to adulthood: the end of one's educational career, entry into the labour market, leaving one's parents' home, creating a new family, and the birth of children².

There is less agreement, above all in Italy (Schizzerotto, 2002), about the decreased rigidity of some sequences (for example that of school-work), the in-

¹ For example Modell, Furstenberg and Hershberg, 1976; Elder, 1985; Hogan, 1981; Hogan and Astone, 1986; Marini, 1984a; Mayer, 2001; Blossfeld, 1995.

² For example Kuijsten, 1996; Cavalli and Galland, 1996; Corijn and Klijzing, 2001; Iacovou, 2002; Billari and Wilson, 2001.

creasing number of atypical conditions (for example singleness, cohabiting, divorce), and the impact that they have on building «new» transitions to adult life.

This paper presents some results regarding models of transition to adulthood in five Italian urban areas (Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Bari), starting from data collected as part of a large-scale Prin project³ (Project of relevant national interest, funded by the Italian Minister of Education and University). The paper is organised along two analytical axes. The first is temporal, designed to verify if and to what extent the ways in which adulthood is reached have changed in the passage from one generation to another, by comparing individuals born from 1935 to 1974, sub-divided in five-year cohorts. The second is territorial, and seeks to verify if there is a fracture between the Centre-North and the South in this field of studies too.

The paper concentrates particularly on one central transition for analysing life courses – leaving the parental home – seen as an event strongly regulated by social rules and customs (Marini, 1984b) and so significant of the basic social and cultural structures of a given society at a given historical moment. Leaving the parental home is in fact a decisive point in the transition to adult life, the prelude to an independent life, and is practically irreversible. Finding a discontinuity in this transition in the succeeding generations would mean identifying a process of change in social structures and rules of central importance for the process of social reproduction. We shall try, in particular, to evaluate the degree of «innovation» in the models for leaving home in relation to the greater or lesser availability of alternative choices to marriage. We shall regard as innovative a context in which there are more unmarried couples and singles, while contexts where marriage prevails will be regarded as traditional. Can we claim that in some parts of Italy there are greater economic, cultural and contextual resources for innovative choices?

Our basic hypothesis is that in southern Italian urban contexts there are fewer chances of innovative solutions for leaving one's original family than in central and northern Italy, both because traditional models of behaviour are more deep-rooted and because there are fewer material resources typically connected with greater openness towards non-conventional choices.

³ In March and April 2005 a survey was carried out in seven Italian metropolitan areas (Milan, Florence, Rome, Ancona, Naples, Bari and Cosenza). Overall information was collected on 23,715 individuals from 8,180 families.

2. Transition to adulthood and leaving home in Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Bari

Leaving parents' home is one of the markers of the so-called *transition to adulthood*, while the other are, conventionally, the end of education, entry into the labour market, starting a new family and the birth of children (Modell, Furstenberg and Hershberg, 1976).

Changes regarding leaving one's original family may involve:

- ♦ *the age at which one leaves*: late leaving may depend on models for allocating opportunities between generations to the disadvantage of the young, or slow and fragmented work careers;
- ♦ *the destination*: the traditional destination is marriage, and it is the solution that better expresses the expectations of a social, juridical and regulatory system in which rights and social status depend on marriage. Adopting alternative solutions is innovative compared to the classic model based on marriage;
- ♦ *the position that leaving home occupies within the process of transition to adulthood*: the traditional or standard model involves a progression in individual trajectories in which leaving the original family follows the end of education and stable entrance into the labour market, and precedes the birth of children. On this level the process of de-institutionalisation of life courses (Mayer, 2001) should mark the diffusion of «innovative» forms of transition, for example leaving home before the end of education because educational career and working career develop jointly or one alternating with the other.

This work concentrates mainly on the second question and, to a lesser extent, on the third. Let us simply recall with Barbagli, Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna (2003) that throughout Italy in the twentieth century there was a linear growth in the first two transitions – end of education and first job – and a U turn for the other two – leaving the family and marriage (see also Ongaro, 2001; Pisati, 2002). The change in age (gradual delay) in leaving the original family deriving from our research (tab. 1) follows the same pattern as the work of Barbagli et al. (2003). It is interesting to note that our data brings out substantial territorial homogeneity: in all the urban areas there is a slight anticipation in leaving for the cohorts born between 1945 and 1954 and for the later cohorts a linear growth to beyond the age of 30 for males in the final cohorts. The lengthening of times of leaving the original family is thus a generalised phenomenon and displays no territorial differences, confirming that it is a trend characteristic of present-day Italy, unequalled in Europe (e.g. Iacovou, 2002; Corijn and Klijzing, 2001).

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Given this general picture of a trend to delay leaving home in Italy, there are various timings in relation to the purpose: leaving alone happens, particularly for males, much earlier than marriage or cohabiting. Clearly, creating a family, whether through formal marriage or cohabiting, is a more demanding and thought-out choice that requires longer time to be adopted. Leaving for other reasons, by contrast, requires mobilising fewer resources: in the first case it is normal to buy one's home, while in the second renting is more common. Another aspect to be underlined is the effect of gender on the age of leaving, which changes if we move from creating a family to leaving to live on one's own. In the first case females leave about three years earlier than males, while in the second they show a certain delay, which grows if we move from north to south.

Table 1 - Average ages for leaving home by cohorts and urban areas (Kaplan-Meier estimates)

Cohorts	Milan		Florence		Rome		Naples		Bari	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<1945	25.5	23.7	26.5	24.6	25.6	24.0	26.8	24.1	26.1	23.9
1945-1949	25.0	23.1	26.0	22.8	25.1	23.6	25.4	23.6	25.8	23.8
1950-1954	25.5	23.0	26.4	23.1	25.6	23.7	25.6	24.0	24.9	23.0
1955-1959	26.0	24.1	26.6	25.1	25.6	24.9	26.8	24.2	26.8	23.6
1960-1964	27.1	25.1	27.8	25.3	28.2	25.8	28.5	25.1	28.0	25.8
1965-1969	28.8	26.0	30.1	28.2	29.7	27.4	30.1	27.3	29.7	26.6
1970-1974	30.1	28.1	30.2	27.6	30.0	28.0	31.4	28.9	31.7	28.3

Table 2 - Average ages for leaving home by destination and urban areas (Kaplan-Meier estimates)

		Marriage	Cohabiting	Alone/with friends
		Milan	M	26.9
	F	24.2	24.5	23.8
Florence	M	27.6	28.2	23.7
	F	24.6	25.7	23.4
Rome	M	27.3	26.7	22.8
	F	24.6	26.7	23.8
Naples	M	26.9	27.7	24.0
	F	24.0	24.4	26.8
Bari	M	27.0	25.4	23.0
	F	23.9	22.9	25.4

In analysing changes in the transition to adulthood, a possible change in the order of steps marking this transition is also important. The literature (e.g. Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Schizzerotto, 2002) starts from the assumption that there are some standard sequences that, particularly in a certain historical period, were highly standardised and institutionalised (Mayer, 2001), meaning they were strictly regulated by institutional mechanisms and widespread. So in interpreting the transition to adult life as the expression of processes of social change it is interesting to see if the traditional sequences have gradually lost ground against innovative trajectories.

The process of transition to adulthood is traditionally regulated by mechanisms that envisage the start of a working career after the conclusion of one's education, and the creation of a new family after a stable job has been found. For women a sequence that does not include entry into the labour market is also considered traditional.

All the other possible sequences are considered non-traditional or non-standard: starting work before the end of school, work after marriage, leaving home for reasons other than the creation of a family, etc.

Pisati's analysis (2002) on the order of the transition sequences to adult life for the generations born before 1962 shows convincingly that there were no far-reaching changes, and so there did not seem to have been a drastic restructuring of life-spans, but only a growth of atypical trajectories, particularly among women.

On the basis of the perspective that we are trying to develop in this paper, the opposition typical/atypical and the interpretation of the change in model of transition to adulthood as an expression of a deeper social change do not go hand in hand. In other words, some transitions that are considered «atypical» are not necessarily to be automatically interpreted as «innovative». An example is the transition to work before the end of education. For much of the post-war period the limited resources available for families forced children to start work at an early age, while the educational career could continue with evening classes or catch-up courses.

This «atypical» trajectory could be interpreted as innovative until 25-30 years ago, as it allowed an improvement in educational levels compared with the older generations, while today, given the general improvement in living conditions, it has lost this connotation.

Table 3 describes the different models of transition to adult life in five areas. The evidence is fairly clear: the standard sequences are more frequent a) for women rather than men, b) in Naples and Bari rather than in Milan, Florence and Rome. In the two cities from the South, evidently, social rules and habits that direct individual choices towards typical life courses are more stringent,

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Table 3 - Sequences of events in the transition to adulthood by territorial area and sex⁴

	Milan		Florence		Rome		Naples		Bari	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
School-work-marriage-children	40.8	33.9	44.9	36.3	41.1	23.5	55.1	14.5	53.2	20.1
School-marriage-children	0.4	18.5	0.2	14.7	0.8	25.1	2.3	53.8	1.2	48.4
School-work-marriage	7.3	6.4	9.4	7.0	6.9	5.1	4.2	2.4	7.8	3.2
<i>Total standard sequences</i>	<i>48.6</i>	<i>58.8</i>	<i>54.5</i>	<i>57.9</i>	<i>48.7</i>	<i>53.6</i>	<i>61.6</i>	<i>70.7</i>	<i>62.2</i>	<i>71.6</i>
Cohabiting	7.5	7.8	12.8	10.1	7.6	6.6	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.1
Alone/with friends	25.7	12.3	19.5	12.5	27.2	12.9	10.8	3.8	16.2	3.7
Work after marriage	3.9	10.7	3.6	11.2	6.3	17.6	10.1	12.8	7.5	13.5
Work before school	12.0	6.8	5.7	3.5	7.9	3.5	10.2	2.2	7.3	1.7
Other non-standard	2.3	3.6	3.9	4.8	2.3	5.7	3.8	6.7	3.0	6.4
<i>Total non-standard sequences</i>	<i>51.4</i>	<i>41.2</i>	<i>45.5</i>	<i>42.1</i>	<i>51.3</i>	<i>46.4</i>	<i>38.4</i>	<i>29.3</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>28.4</i>

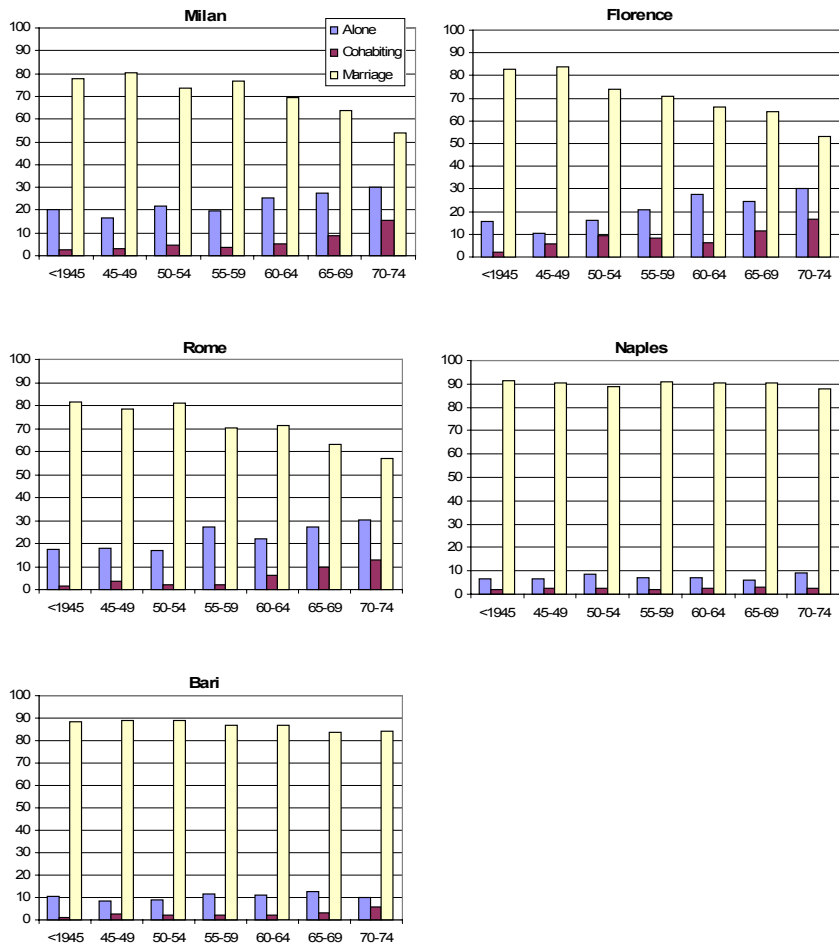
and women in general in all areas have fewer chances than men of following atypical trajectories.

The possibility that standard trajectories might lose their hegemony can be verified by checking if the transition of the cohorts has been accompanied by a gradual trend of leaving the original family for reasons other than marriage (figure 1). The situation is fairly clear: in the three central and northern cities there is a decided trend to replace leaving home for marriage with that of living on one's own or with friends or cohabiting, while in Naples and Bari there has been little change over the years. In the case of Milan, Florence and Rome, more people are leaving home to live alone or with friends, even though the growth is not linear, as this was relatively frequent in the generations older than our sample among those who emigrated.

There is, however, nothing ambiguous about the decided popularity of cohabitation as an alternative choice to marriage, a solution that in the three cities is beginning to be adopted by a significant share of young people. In Naples and Bari there has been no change in the patterns for leaving the original family.

⁴ Not all the sequences are mutually exclusive: for example, a period of cohabitation may be part of a standard sequence. As this paper is concentrating on non-standard choices we have used a criterion of priority by which cohabitation, living with friends or alone or other atypical solutions automatically situate the trajectory among non-standard sequences.

Figure 1 - Destination on leaving home by urban area and cohorts



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Particularly interesting is the linear change in patterns of behaviour in those born in the three central-northern cities from the 1950s on, with a drop in marriage and an increase in other solutions. In Naples and Bari, by contrast, there are no visible modifications in behaviour, with marriage remaining the prevailing choice (nearly 90%).

What explains a greater or lesser propensity towards «innovative» or «traditional» solutions? Two characteristics, gender and social origin, play a signifi-

cant role in determining the risks behind these choices. For the first factor, males have a greater propensity than females to go and live on their own or with friends, which probably depends both on the greater freedom allowed to males (opportunity) and on work experiences that are sometimes accompanied by migratory episodes (constraint). The first aspect explains the similarity in the five cities of the proportion of males that go and live on their own compared to females, while the second explains the differences, Milan and Rome being destinations for migratory movements, while Bari and, above all, Naples, are places of departure.

Table 4 - Destination on leaving home by urban area and sex

		Milan	Florence	Rome	Naples	Bari
Males	Alone/friends	28.9	24.6	30.3	11.7	16.1
	Cohabitation	6.0	8.1	4.8	2.5	2.3
	Marriage	65.1	67.3	64.9	85.8	81.6
		100	100	100	100	100
Females	Alone/friends	16.9	16.4	15.4	4.0	5.3
	Cohabitation	5.3	7.1	4.5	3.0	2.4
	Marriage	77.8	76.5	80.1	93.0	92.3
		100	100	100	100	100

To analyse social origins we classified our individuals by father's profession: upper class (businessmen, self-employed, managers), traditional middle class (tradesmen and craftsmen), clerical middle class (office workers and teachers) and working class. In general terms those coming from the upper class and the clerical class were more likely to go and live alone or with friends, while those coming from the traditional middle class and the working class more often choose marriage. In the case of cohabitations, there do not seem to be significant influences. It is interesting to note that in Milan social origins seems less important than in other cities to explain the destinations on leaving the original family, probably because of the high number of subjects who immigrated from outside the area.

Our analysis shifts now to factors more closely concerned with individual life course: educational attainment and possible migration. The educational qualification is an indicator of individual cultural resources and should have significant impact if our hypothesis that reasons for leaving home other than marriage are a break with traditional models is correct: breaking consolidated

rules requires above-average cultural resources that allow to adopt alternative strategies. The evidence confirms this view: the number of individuals adopting innovative solutions grows with the growth of their qualifications. Those with low qualifications will leave home for marriage in almost every case, as against half of the more highly educated in Milan, Florence and Rome and three quarters in Naples and Bari, confirming educational level as one of the most important factors influencing life courses.

Table 5 - Destination on leaving home by urban area and social class of origin

		Milan	Florence	Rome	Naples	Bari
Upper class	Alone/friends	25.6	28.3	27.9	13.2	15.2
	Cohabitation	5.9	10.2	5.2	3.8	2.5
	Marriage	68.5	61.5	66.9	83.0	82.3
		100	100	100	100	100
Traditional middle class	Alone/friends	17.7	13.6	14.4	5.5	2.1
	Cohabitation	4.9	11.2	1.6	3.8	3.5
	Marriage	77.4	75.1	84.0	90.7	94.4
		100	100	100	100	100
Clerical middle class	Alone/friends	22.5	20.1	21.9	8.6	13.6
	Cohabitation	6.0	5.8	4.7	2.5	2.1
	Marriage	71.5	74.1	73.4	88.9	84.3
		100	100	100	100	100
Working class	Alone/friends	19.6	11.3	13.9	2.7	4.5
	Cohabitation	4.4	7.8	5.3	2.5	2.0
	Marriage	76.0	80.9	80.8	94.8	93.4
		100	100	100	100	100

In the case of migrations, until the first half of the 1970s (i.e. for those born up to the second half of the 1950s) internal migrant flows (from south to north) involved significant numbers of individuals, mainly young males (Reyneri, 1979; Ascoli, 1979). Leaving the parental home to share a house with friends or acquaintances or, more rarely, living alone was connected to emigration and not a choice expressing a life-style. By contrast, let us suppose that today leaving home for reasons other than marriage is not only not performed under constraint due to a condition of need but is an innovatory solution that has to overcome material and cultural obstacles. It then becomes an interesting indi-

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cator which must be explained by different factors in the transition from one generation to another: for the older a question of adaptation (migration) linked to leaving the parental home prior to the creation of a family, for the younger a choice of independence in a phase preceding more radical changes (the creation of a family and children). To grasp the effect of this different exposure to the risk of experiencing migration, table 8 distinguishes the generation of those born before 1960 («pre») and those born after («post»).

Table 7 - Destination on leaving home by urban area and educational level

		Milan	Florence	Rome	Naples	Bari
Tertiary	Alone/friends	36.6	41.1	39.0	19.0	23.0
	Cohabitation	9.2	10.0	6.1	3.4	3.1
	Marriage	54.2	48.9	54.9	77.6	73.9
Upper secondary	Alone/friends	21.1	19.6	19.8	8.5	11.4
	Cohabitation	5.5	8.6	5.6	3.2	2.6
	Marriage	73.5	71.8	74.6	88.3	86.0
Lower secondary	Alone/friends	17.3	10.4	15.7	3.9	7.6
	Cohabitation	5.3	7.3	3.4	2.4	2.0
	Marriage	77.4	82.3	80.8	93.7	90.4
Primary	Alone/friends	19.7	8.7	15.9	3.1	2.2
	Cohabitation	1.9	2.0	1.1	1.9	1.9
	Marriage	78.4	89.3	83.0	95.0	95.8

The five cities have experienced these phenomena differently: in Naples and Bari immigrants from outside the region are less than 10%, in Florence 25%, in Rome 33%, and in Milan almost 40%. As expected, long-range migration generally exposes one to greater risk of leaving one's original family and going to live alone or with friends in southern cities too. By contrast, medium or short-range mobility does not correlate clearly with choices different from those who do not move. In the case of cohabitation migration does not seem to have a particularly significant role. In the younger generation we find fairly clearly a decided diffusion of innovative solutions among those who do not move in Milan, Florence and Rome. In these cities more than 20% choose to leave the parental home to go and live on their own or with friends and more than 10% to cohabit, marking a significant difference with those of the previous generation. Naples and Bari, by contrast, show no significant discontinuity among those

who do not move, for whom the choice of marriage remains more or less predominant for the younger too. Thus we may conclude that the choice of leaving the original family for reasons of deliberate life style (i.e. without forming a family and without being obliged to for reasons of migration) is gaining ground in Milan, Florence and Rome, confirming our theory of a discontinuity in the transition of cohorts with the penetration of innovative models for building the course of one's life. The same cannot be claimed in the case of Naples and Bari.

Table 8 - Destination on leaving home by urban area and possible migration

		Milan		Florence		Rome		Naples		Bari	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Non-migrant	Alone/friends	13.2	22.0	8.7	21.7	10.5	19.4	6.0	7.4	7.7	11.5
	Cohabitation	3.3	11.7	6.3	13.0	2.5	9.6	2.3	2.4	1.9	3.5
	Marriage	83.5	66.3	85.1	65.2	86.9	71.0	91.7	90.2	90.4	85.0
Migrant from region	Alone/friends	10.0	17.0	12.3	19.7	20.5	38.5	7.8	4.2	12.2	7.0
	Cohabitation	4.0	8.0	3.1	11.2	0.9	11.5	2.2	3.3	1.0	4.7
	Marriage	86.0	75.0	84.6	69.1	78.6	50.0	89.9	92.5	86.8	88.3
Migrant from outside region	Alone/friends	29.6	46.2	31.8	47.3	31.3	43.8	20.2	23.7	20	22.4
	Cohabitation	3.0	6.7	5.8	6.2	1.7	7.6	3.6	7.9	2.7	-
	Marriage	67.4	47.2	62.4	46.5	66.9	48.6	76.2	68.4	77.3	77.6

Note: Pre = born from 1934 to 1959; post = born from 1960 to 1974.

3. Conclusions

The most interesting result of our analysis concerns the gradual differentiation, in the transition of generations, of transitions to adulthood between cities of the Centre-North and cities of the South. In the cohorts born around the 1950s we do not observe particular differences in the choice of leaving the family home, while for the later cohorts there is a growing differentiation: marriage as transition to independence from parents is less significant in Milan, Florence and Rome but remains dominant in Naples and Bari. Our analysis has confirmed that the traditional models of transition to adulthood are still strongly rooted: at national level the most obvious phenomenon, which in its dimensions characterises the Italian case in Europe as a whole, is the gradual raising of the age at which one leaves one's parents' home, a phenomenon that also involves a significant raising of the age of first marriage and the age at which

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one becomes a parent. Given this general picture, it has also emerged that the younger cohorts in the Centre-North areas tend to modify their choices of transition to adult life in an innovative way, choosing more and more often to leave the parental home to live alone or to cohabit. By contrast, in the two southern areas marriage remains the dominant solution, without any sign of change of preference.

This result confirms the existence of a marked territorial dualism over economic and social fundamentals. Phenomena such as economic development, poverty and entering the labour market have a solid territorial basis; for more than a century the deep-seated inequalities in economic and social fundamentals have given rise to the «southern question» and are the object of studies, debates and policies. Our analysis confirms that this dualism shows no signs of being overcome, but tends to take new and, in a certain sense, more «modern» forms.

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