"INTER-GENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY": A SOCIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL POLICY ISSUE

PIERPAOLO DONATI

1. INTER-GENERATIONAL RELATIONS AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

1.1. *The inter-generational challenge*

At the beginning of the XXIst century, in many countries all over the world, families and children have come to face new dilemmas related to the lack of inter-generational solidarity and equity. While many old issues (such as family poverty, multi-problem families, etc.) persist, a new scenario of difficulties has appeared: the ceaseless *worsening of generational relations*. In what does this scenario consist?

"Generational issues" is a broad label under which it is common to subsume many interconnected social problems in the relations among generations. In what ways are they different today from in the past? Let me summarize them briefly:

– *families are less and less committed to having children* to an extent that overshadows the demographic transition from a traditional to a modern society; today, in some countries (e.g. Europe) even the model of the typical nuclear family with two children is at stake;

– owing to the socio-demographic shifts, more and more resources (in terms of social protection expenses) are devoted to older generations, while *shares available to children are in danger*; the present patterns of social expenditures among different age groups are confronted with a *vicious circle syndrome*: the more they give to the older, the less they leave to the younger;

– *the fraction of the national income distributed to households with children*, and thus the fraction of that income available for the raising of children, *has declined quickly* as the percentage of households with no children increases;

– *the cultural transmission from one generation to the other is losing ground*; children and youth are increasingly isolated from the adults who constitute their principal socializing agents; primary social ties become more and more problematic in everyday life; families split up and are dispersed; children are confronted with a more dangerous social environment since risks of isolation, neglect, poverty, and even abuse are multiplied;

– national welfare states have set up many educational, social and health schemes for children, but at the same time it has become even more apparent that collective welfare arrangements, besides not being able to substitute the family, quite often do not work properly in favour of better exchanges between generations; in other words, *social welfare systems have shown themselves as lacking a real orientation to the links between generations*.

Put bluntly, in many countries it becomes apparent that children and younger generations appear as *victims* of adults and older generations under many social, economic, and cultural respects.

1.2. *A new stage*

It is not my task to analyse the above mentioned phenomena in detail here. I take them for granted. My aim is to suggest that we should have a careful look at what is happening between and within generations in the different countries taking into account the relations between families and governments.

In order to understand the historical discontinuities I am referring to, we can recollect that, generally speaking, the relations between families and governments have followed two typical *patterns* or *stages*.

a. In the first half of the twentieth century, national welfare states *used to address families and children mainly in terms of social control*: families were granted economic, legal and material provisions in exchange for men's control over women and children. *Family rights embodied individual rights* so that people (in particular children) suffered from bonds which were too compelling. Children's rights were greatly restricted: they were almost completely subsumed under the family coverage. In case of family failure, total institutions were delegated to pick up the children.

b. Since the second world war, national welfare states have, in a sense, reversed the previous pattern: they have acknowledged an increasing number of social rights and provisions for individuals and social categories (in particular women, handicapped people, old people, and children), but have left the family apart. The rights of the family as a social group and institu-

tion have been undermined in many respects. In a certain sense, *the family has lost its citizenship*. The overall outcome has been the decline of fertility and the creation of a social environment unfavourable to the reception of the newly born (be it a direct or an indirect effect).

The evaluation of the positive and negative outcomes of these policies cannot be elaborated here, both because I have not enough room here and because this subject is already well documented (e.g. Dumon ed., 1989).

c. Nowadays many countries (particularly western countries) are entering a stage (or pattern) which is very different from the previous ones under many aspects.

On the one hand, the new trends contradict the old pattern (which used to be dominant until the end of the XX century) in so far as the family cannot be considered and handled as a social control agency which acts on behalf of the state: the family has acquired an increasing autonomy (*autopoiesis*) and is oriented towards managing its generational problems even more privately.

On the other hand, the new trends must differ from the old patterns in so far as it becomes clear that the multiplication of individual rights is only a partial solution. If we want to have a social environment which is more sensitive to children's needs, then we must give proper *consideration to the repercussions that the lack of social support for families has on children.*

1.3. In the perspective of the development of citizenship rights, the new issues revolve around the need for a better *compatibility between individual and family rights*: both kinds of entitlements must be secured, and the pursuit of this target should be done in such a way as to foster relations of social solidarity and equity between generations. If societies really want to pursue this goal, then families should become valid interlocutors of societal institutions and governments, at every level (regional, national, and supernational). This is, I believe, our topic. From the point of view of the development of families and children rights, the last decade has been one of lost opportunities. But, at the same time, it has been fruitful, since a new "generational" awareness has arisen and grown up.

1.4. This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I intend to sketch a profile of the main social needs of families and children emerging all over the world today in terms of intergenerational issues (pr. 2, 3).

The argument is that sociological research must recognize that families are a sub-system of society. In the second part, I argue that family needs can and should be solved with reference to the issue of "intergenerational solidarity (or equity)", which has to be defined accurately (pr. 4, 5). In the conclusions (pr. 6), I contend that the present agenda and strategies of nation-States are not well suited to confront the issue of intergenerational equity, and I make some suggestions about the ways to overcome these deficiencies.

2. WHERE IS THE FAMILY GOING? EMERGING SOCIAL NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AND THE UNDERTAKING OF POLITICAL REPLIES

2.1. *What do families need?*

It is of course impossible to synthesize here the very many empirical surveys and statistical research projects done on this broad subject matter (some of the most recent reports are listed in the final bibliography: Chouraqui, 1986; EEC Documents; Cornia ed., 1992; Donati & Matteini eds., 1991; Dumon, 1990; Moss, 1988; Oepfn, 1990; Qvortrup *et al.*, 1991). What I can say, without going into detail here, is that societal changes occurring throughout the world are deeply affecting family structures and children conditions along with the following main trends:
– families go on *splitting up* (increasing the number of singles and one-parent families);
– families show a *decreasing average size* (mainly due to the decline in the birth rate);
– families are *ageing* (rise in the average age of households);
– families display worrying *signs of psycho-social pathologies*, both within the couple (separation and divorces) and towards children (violence, abuse, maltreatment, abandonment);
– families stick to a cultural process of *privatisation in their choices, feelings, and expectations*, so that narcissistic and selfish orientations prevail on behaviours of internal solidarity and civic participation;
– the continuing existence of *poor families* is also striking; we can distinguish them into *poor working families* (low income strata) and *underclass families* (stemming from unemployment, lack of professional training -e.g. unskilled women-, irregular immigration and other factors excluding people from the regular labour market); but what is more

important is to observe that *poverty is generally associated with particular family structures* (such as one parent families and large families with many children).

By putting the emphasis on these trends I do not mean to claim that there have been no social advancements and no positive achievements. As a matter of fact a general and remarkable improvement of material living conditions has taken place in most countries in the last few decades. What I want to stress and thematise here is something which can be expressed in the form of the following questions: is the above depicted picture satisfactory in order to understand the deeper meaning of present changes? is this picture a plausible basis for a reliable sociological understanding of the situation and for a sound social policy?

On balance, I am afraid, the answers to these questions are negative.

If one sticks with the above sketched portrait of the social conditions of families, then the list of needs becomes only an endless *cahier de doléances* which refer to:

– socially *weak* families (e.g. one parent families; families below the poverty line; underclass families with handicapped children, with unemployed or unskilled members, especially women; immigrant, socially isolated or non integrated families);

– and *pathological* families (e.g. severely ill, educationally inadequate or abusing families),

where children are stigmatised or are exposed to a wide range of risks.

If policies follow the logic of addressing single issues, they end up by formulating a long list of needs and priorities in which the family almost disappears, or at least is reduced only to a problematic object. This has been the dominant pattern followed until today.

The main shortcoming of this approach lies in the fact that the needs of families and children are formulated in a disconnected and patchy way. So are the replies, in terms of policies. One cannot clearly see the links between different wants and different persons as a malfunction in the exchanges between generations.

The descriptive approach I am referring to tells us only that, on the whole, societal changes have created deep imbalances among generations. It ends up by saying that many families find themselves in such a situation that they cannot deal with issues of generational solidarity and equity through the private sphere alone. This is of course true, but it is only one side of the coin. The other side says that families and societies have to mobilise in order to solve their problems.

The question: "what do families need?" should be given a reply which is very simple and extremely complex at the same time: *families need to be fully recognised as families*.

This perspective leads us to new observations. In particular it suggests that:

– (i) the living conditions of families depend on the complex of exchanges among generations: as we know that there are social bonds between genders that penalise women, so it is also now apparent that *there are bonds between generations that penalise those who have children in respect to childless people*;

– (ii) *our society cannot discharge the filial debt* (the aid of younger people to the older) *on generations that are not generated*; if the replacement of the population should go on at the depressed levels which have occurred in the last two decades, around the middle of the next century only a few social security systems will be able to assure a fairly good income level for the older generations;

– (iii) the social needs of families and children should be given new attention not only from the material point of view (lack of income, lodging, health) but especially from the *relational point of view*. The social needs of children cannot be managed either within the family *alone* nor by addressing them as a social category *per se*: they must be met by looking at the adequacy of the relationships between children and their everyday social environment. Welfare systems must operate on the network of social ties in which children live rather than on individuals.

If we want to have a more integrated and global picture of the issues at stake, we must consider the fact that *most of the social problems arise when families do not perform their tasks as mediating structures* linking together needs and persons in a proper way. This is the *core issue* at stake. *One is led to the idea that it could be more productive to look at present social problems through a re-interpretation of family functions, and that such a perspective could also be more equitable and effective from the point of view of practical solutions*, provided that families are helped by society to help themselves.

But is there something like "the family"? Is it not true that the family is seriously in crisis and that in many areas it is almost disappearing?

As a matter of fact the trends described above are, as a rule, decoded in that way. The most diffuse interpretations of the family condition all over the world quite often reveal two basic biases.

I. First, they contain an *evolutionist* reading of the family, as if it were bound to disappear, which is at least dubious (Lévi-Strauss, 1983).

II. Second, they *reduce* the *family life cycle* to the *life course approach*, treating families only as a provisional set of contingent individual careers, which is also an improper operation (Aldous, 1990). Of course the life span approach is a useful tool for looking at the dynamics of households, but it cannot substitute the *family life cycle* perspective.

2.2. *After the crisis of the family*

At this point, it becomes clear that we cannot give a significant answer to the issue of families' and children's needs unless we have a more precise idea of where the family is going.

Most literature on the so-called "crisis of the family" has made serious mistakes or has incurred plain misunderstandings: on the one hand it has overestimated the crisis, on the other hand it has underestimated it. The last decades have demonstrated that neither the theories asserting the "death of the family" nor the theories supporting the view of a supposed dominance of the "nuclear family model" have proved right. Neither theory fits empirical reality, nor are they useful for social policies.

Today it should be more evident than yesterday that the family has indeed faced a deep crisis, but this crisis must be interpreted adequately. Family changes have certainly been radical, but not in the sense that the family is going to disappear or lose its most relevant social functions. On the contrary, the family has proved to be an *active subject*: under many respects it is still a "latent" actor of society in so far as it precedes and exceeds it, i.e. "goes beyond it".

Extrapolating the current phenomena within and around the family as if they were to move forward in a linear way over time could be not only wrong but also damaging. As Roussel rightly points out, if the "uncertain" family of the present age should become the dominant type, and if the family should therefore give up its institutional dimensions, then for the new generations there shall remain nothing more than a mere incitement to egotistical desires or to overt violence (Roussel, 1989).

From this angle, it becomes more and more urgent to re-read the meaning of family changes not only in a socio-cultural perspective (as a question of fashion, opinions, psychological feelings), but also as *a social and political issue*. The family must again and again be interpreted as a difference which makes a difference: in what ways is a family different from other social relationships and in what ways this difference is relevant today in comparison with the past?

If we place ourselves in such a perspective, the distinction between familiar/non-familiar becomes more and more, not less and less, relevant and meaningful: to have a family or not, to have a family which is competent or malfunctioning, to have a family with a certain living style or another, all these factors become more and more determinant in the life of children. *The family as a social relation* discloses itself as increasingly discriminating in respect to non-family relations.

Why, then, have many come to believe that just the opposite is true? The fact is that the family is exposed to a (seeming) paradox: it becomes less relevant and more relevant at the same time. This happens, of course, in different domains: the family becomes less important from the point of view of social order and control (it loses ground particularly in its relationships with the political-administrative system), while it increases its importance in the sphere of daily informal relations, particularly those which concern the health of children and their primary socialization.

If we adopt this perspective, it becomes clearer how and why governments have treated the family in an ambiguous way. For instance: many national reforms appeal to the family as a socializing agency of minors who are deviant or drop out, just when the family displays its deep difficulties in the education of children. The fact is that in order to understand these paradoxes we must avoid thinking of the family either in traditional terms or in terms of sheer subjective feelings.

These considerations do not lead us to an easy evaluation of the crisis of the family. Where is the family going? For a plausible answer, I believe, we are led to a perspective according to which we are witnessing a *qualitative change* (*morphogenesis*) *in the forms of the family* as a social group *and* as a social institution at the same time. In what does this morphogenesis consist?

Briefly, I would like to describe it as follows.

2.3. *How families change*

The new needs of families and children must be spelled out and coped with in the context of two fundamental tendencies, which are ambivalent in themselves: (a) on the one hand they ask for more freedom, (b) on the other hand they need new regulations for the common good. Let us look at the two sides of the coin.

a) On the one hand the family is inclined to constitute itself on the grounds of more and more autonomous and individualised behaviours. As a social *group* the family is made up of people who are holders of individ-

ual rights (it can be called the "*auto-poietic family*"). This means that families tend to become normative for themselves; they tend to create their own structures by themselves. Seemingly this occurs on the basis of very individualistic behaviours. One says: the family becomes an interlacing of highly contingent individual life courses. In reality it is a new social order which emerges. Within it the family is at the same time looked for (as a sphere of humanization) and repressed (as a sphere of solidarity). The family, now conceived as a mere household, demands more autonomy from society, but if such autonomy does not encounter reasonable forms of co-ordination and social regulation it runs the risk of converting into isolation, breakdowns, and/or emargination of people.

b) On the other hand, the family activates new social demands which become a basic referral for welfare policies. From this point of view families manifest the exigency of assuming a new *institutional* role. They ask for many interventions which concretely regard:

– the need, for the couple, to live freely their fertility behaviours: they discover that our society limits the freedom of procreation only downward, i.e. only in a restrictive sense;

– the need to harmonise family life and work, and to solve this difficult issue through a legal, economic, and social equality between the sexes;

– the need for more social protection of socially weak people living in the family, as a consequence both of conjugal breakdowns and of critical events (illness, handicap, etc.);

– the need to reconcile family life and social services, leisure time, and civic participation (the schedule of shops, social facilities, schools for children, TV programs, and so on);

– the need for a fiscal treatment which can be equitable on the part of the state, and be arranged so as not to penalise those who willingly assume more responsibilities in favour of rearing children, and taking care of old and handicapped people;

– the need to strive against poverty without stigmatising the family itself, or its individual members;

– the need for welfare interventions which can take into full consideration the quanti-qualitative structure of family wants;

– the need for more support for those families who engage in enterprises of mutual help, self-help, volunteering, and cooperation, especially in the field of personal social services: this relates to the topic of the role of the family in community care;

– the need to have political representation in order to promote the rights of families as consumers and clients.

At the heart of all these new needs we find the fact that social policies have not addressed properly families' and children's conditions in so far as welfare policies:

– have stockpiled individual rights without upholding the family system as a solidarity network for the support of the person, as it is in reality (Dumon in Shamgar & Palomba eds., 1987);

– social security systems have not been designed according to the family life cycle (Gilliand, 1988);

– welfare expenditures do not take into account the need for a "logic of compatibility" between generations: generally speaking, they have devoted too much to the elderly and too little to children (Pampel & Stryker, 1990; Preston, 1984; Sgritta, 1991).

In synthesis: all over the world, on the one hand civil society has created a deep lack of continuity and even breaks among generations, and on the other hand both global markets (globalization processes) and public welfare policies have complied with these trends rather than trying to balance their inherent contradictions.

The main issue concerns the pursuit of a new, dynamic equilibrium between families and the other spheres of society (work; school; leisure; civic activities) taking into account the "generational variable". We need a new dialogue between families and other social institutions inspired by full reciprocity and equity vis-à-vis the new generations.

This is particularly important in the so called "divided families". It has been increasingly noticed that divorce is detrimental to children, particularly because of the fathers' absence. At the same time, it is more and more recognised that large-scale changes in fathers' behaviour is not likely to occur by simple modification of custody orders or improvements in child-support enforcement – or, really, by any measures addressed solely to *absent* fathers. Rather, what is required is a deeper and quite radical change in the way all fathers relate to their children. What is needed is a greater sense of shared responsibility and partnership in childrearing. Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991, p. 119) ask us: "can it happen?" They continue: "If women's wages in the labour market approach men's, women may have more leverage in negotiating shared parenthood in exchange for pooling incomes. But equality in earnings will also make it easier to be a single parent... Perhaps the best that we can expect is a family system with unions that are more egalitarian but less stable. Such a system might provide an improvement in family life for adults, but it would not be a clear improvement for children".

I take this as an example of the fact that the new needs of families lead us to a new interpretation of its social role: families need first of all to be recognised as social subjects in themselves, as systems which provide their children with fully shared protection even in the case of family breakdown.

On a larger scale, this means that society should consider more carefully alternative ways of operating on the family: can society increase individual rights as mere individual entitlements or has it to treat individual rights in a relational manner, which implies structuring rights and entitlements so as to push people into being willingly co-operative with each other?

It is more and more evident that national welfare states (including the European countries) have not taken into account the generational unbalances and their long-term effects. Today there are many empirical evidencies that public policies must now engage in this re-orientation.

3. IS THERE SOMETHING LIKE A "SOCIETY OF FAMILIES"? ARE FAMILIES A SUB-SYSTEM OF SOCIETY?

3.1. *Let me introduce quite a simple idea*

In order to pass on from social needs to policy replies we must conceptualise the global issue at stake in a suitable manner. Whatever the definition of "the family" and of "family policy" (Dumon, 1987; Aldous & Dumon, 1990; Wisensale, 1990), one cannot speak of policies for families and children without having in mind an adequate representation of the role and functions that families as a whole perform for the entire society. In order to be effective, this representation should be based on a wide consensus.

Now, it is a legacy of the modern era to have differentiated our society into four fundamental sub-systems: the *economy* (with its markets), the *political government* (with its public administration), the *associations* (with their autonomous organisations) and *families* (with what? as far as I can see, I would like to reply: a specific welfare network linking formal and informal provisions and services).

Each one of these spheres has developed on the basis of its own symbolic code, with its own means, and has built up its own institutions, through a proper codification of rights and duties. When we speak of "national states" we refer to complex societal systems which are articulated on the premises of specific forms of social differentiation and integration among these four sub-systems.

From analogy, the construction of an integrated society must also make reference to the theory and practice included in such a representation. It has a long-standing and consolidated sociological tradition (fig. 1).
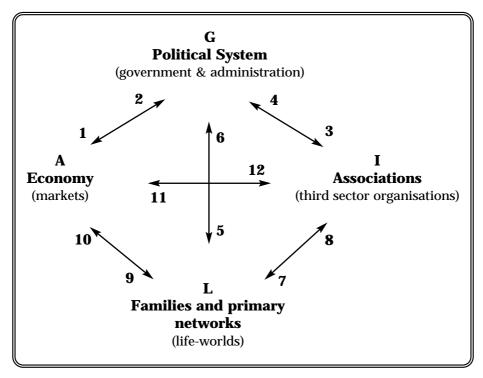

Fig. 1. The social structure of modernised societies.

As many sociological studies have elucidated, the two sub-systems of the economic market (A) and the political government (G) have been the hinge of global modernization in the last two centuries. They are built upon their specific generalised means of exchange, namely money and law. The other two sub-systems, associations (I) and families (L), on the contrary, have been penalised. So has their own role in society, which is to foster social solidarity, reciprocity, and trust in what sociologists call the "daily life-worlds".

A lot has been written about economy and governments; entire libraries. As a matter of fact, political and integration across countries, dif-

ficult as it may be, seems to be anyway easier than social and cultural integration between them. Given for granted that we can pursue to a certain degree the economic and integration of societies, what about the integration of the other two sub-systems (associations and families)?

The European Union is a good example. Within the above depicted framework, in Europe families run the risk of being treated as a mere reference for consumption and social assistance. European Social Charter, in fact, does not mention widely and explicitly the social rights of families, in particular with reference to the generational dilemmas. As we all know, the national governments have different attitudes in relation to family policies, and the principle of subsidiarity has been recognised and institutionalised – in a quite reductive way – as a principle which afford each nation-State to do its own family ad generational policies. At the beginning of the '90s, the setting up of a European Observatory on national family policies clearly indicated that the EU acknowledged the importance of the family as a social institution, while various measures and initiatives (particularly concerning child care facilities, adolescents commencing work life, poor children and migrant families) were forming the beginnings of a common framework for young generations' rights. It seemed, at that time, that social regulations in these field were becoming more and more inevitable. But the situation has deeply changed during the '90s. The European Observatory on national family policies has been reduced both in its ends and in its activities, while social regulations common to the national countries have been dismissed.

Now a question arises as to the latter two sub-systems (associations and families): what are their rights and duties? what is the citizenship accorded to them? To pursue a sound project of intergenerational solidarity means to accord a new strategic role to associations and families (Donati, 1987). As a matter of fact, we must admit that the "fourth sub-system" (families) is, in many regards, the least clear. It is not by chance that the sociological theory identifies it as the "latent sub-system" of the whole society (Donati, 1991, ch. 4). If governments can easily observe and guide the NGOs (Kaufmann *et al.* eds., 1986), this is much more difficult for families. But this is precisely why the challenge is interesting.

There is much rhetoric about families. They are mentioned in many documents, recommendations, laws, conventions, but we can hardly say that they are really recognised as a sub-system of society. On the contrary they are more often addressed as passive consumers, clients of social assistance, social "cells" which perform or do not perform the tasks that society

"delegates" to them. The appeals from the international associations speaking on behalf of families (see for instance the COFACE documents at the European level), clearly indicate all of this.

It is therefore an interesting theme to begin thinking in what sense and with what consequences families could and should be treated as a sub-system of the whole society.

3.2. *What does it mean?*

Families are a sub-system for the following main reasons.

a. Families perform a huge quantity of social functions which no state, no public administration, no market can "socialise". Neither can these functions be "privatised", in the sense of being considered a mere responsibility of private subjects, as sometimes governments do in order to reduce social expenses devoted to collective services.

b. Families certainly use the means of the other sub-systems (money, law, etc.), but they have their own means of communication and social exchange. We can think of *social reciprocity* within and between generations. Without such reciprocity there cannot exist trust and equity in society. It is the cultural basis of all our institutions. And it grows up inside the family before anywhere else.

c. In the end, families are the social location of those dimensions of generational equity which cannot be assumed by any other actor in society. It does not admit any functional equivalent.

3.3. *What does it imply?*

Recognising that families are a sub-system of society implies the need for more social regulations, but at the same time a *peculiar form of regulation* which can allow families to become a social movement and act as a "social subjectivity". Present advanced industrial societies cannot avoid creating a more attentive policy towards the sub-system of families for the simple reason that what happens within it has many deep repercussions in all the other sub-systems (the labour market, the social security system, the organisation of social services at large) (Donati, 1990/b).

It is a traditional attitude of national governments not to enter into the private sphere of the family. One must certainly respect this stance, which guarantees a legitimate sphere of autonomy for people. But, on the other hand, society cannot abstain from regulating those social structures

and behaviours from which many social problems stem, such as child neglect and abuse, the abandonment of the elderly, and so on (Hantrais & Letablier, 1996).

The problem is: how do governments intervene within the family domain? After policies are decided, who will implement them? What is the role of public bureaucracies vis-à-vis family networks and associations? Do public agencies behave as *intruders* or *enablers*?

It is certainly true that families, as I have already said, are accentuating their private features. But if our analysis stops here it will be incomplete and biased. In reality, families are also subject to an increasing process of "publicisation", which is inevitable and necessary to ensure social justice in the public realm. The seeming paradox of a double process of "privatisation" and "publicisation" of the family is yet to be understood (Donati, 1990/a). But we cannot have any doubt about the fact that it is happening. The crisscrossing of what is considered to be private and what is public in the family grows inevitably.

The main problem is not to recognise that families are more and more important at the public level, but to understand why this importance expands in a *latent*, unrecognised way. Thinking that families are only a "cultural survival" or mere "private business" is a big mistake, both from a sociological and from a social policy point of view.

Briefly, to contend that, in society at large, families constitute a sub-system means making it clear that they have something in common, and that this commonwealth has precise societal functions which do not admit any functional equivalent. If this is true, then this sub-system should get - *as such* - an adequate symbolic representation and an explicit full citizenship for itself and for its members. It is of the utmost importance that such recognition be in line with the solution of what is mostly at stake: generational equity.

4. A NEW FRONTIER: THE STRUGGLE FOR INTER-GENERATIONAL EQUITY

If the arguments presented so far are reasonable, then it is right to claim that policies for family and children are becoming more and more a question of *equity between and within generations*. It is therefore particularly important to clarify what "generational equity" means. To my mind, generational equity has different meanings, and also different spheres in which it may or may not be achieved.

a) There are at least *three different dimensions* to be distinguished.

(i) *Equity between generations in the use of resources available to copresent different age groups at a given time.*

Strictly speaking, *generational equity means allocating the available resources according to criteria of justice in the way that the shares are distributed to the various age groups.* For instance: how much is given to children in comparison with what is given to adults and the elderly?

For the best solution of these issues it is necessary to adopt two basic criteria: first, the adoption of *rules of compatibility* (what is given to one generation, e.g. old people, must be in balance with what is given to another, e.g. children); second, the adoption of *measures that can result in non-zero sum games*: in other words, measures which can create other resources by stimulating help, solidarity, and co-operation given by one generation to another.

Inherent to this concept is the fact that it concerns not only the present time, but also the future. What we do now to the younger generations has repercussions on what they will be able to do in the near future.

(ii) *Equity between generations in the transfer of resources from one generation to the next.*

We have to analyse the *generational impact*: what a generation leaves to the following one and how it affects its life chances. The impact has, of course, *cultural* aspects (in terms of values, norms, and styles of life which are transmitted to the younger generation), *psychological* aspects (adults can give more or less trust and sense of security to their children), *economic* aspects (older generations can leave a greater or lesser share of work, greater or lesser resources of social security, larger or smaller shares of assets), *ecological* aspects (one generation can leave a more or less polluted environment, and more or less natural resources).

In a broader sense, then, generational equity means investing in the new generations so as to equip them adequately in order to meet the challenges they will have to cope with, taking into account how much the preceding generation has consumed and therefore the problems of scarcity which are transferred to the future.

For the solution of these problems it is necessary that *the ratio between what is presently produced and consumed be positive.*

(iii) *Equity within a newborn generation.*

It concerns the treatment of newborn people in relation to the generational "charge" assumed by their own family of orientation. Since each family contributes in a different way to the reproduction of society, *coeteris paribus*, there is a difference between growing up in a family as an only child and growing up as the brother or sister of another child or other children. This factor means different opportunities for any social achievement.

In this sense, generational equity concerns the exigency of eliminating or compensating for the disadvantages which derive from the fact of being reared in a family which has a different generational load in respect to other age peers.

If we do not take this dimension into consideration, then the public and private transfers end up by heavily discriminating on children: some of them will be privileged while others will be condemned to the so-called cycle of deprivation as a result of their parents' generational choices.

Public policies must be inspired here by two main guiding criteria. Firstly, minors should all have the same opportunities of access to social entitlements independently of their family composition and standard of living. Secondly, childless families (childless people, and even firms) should pay something more for families who have children. At least taxation systems should benefit families with children in respect to childless families more than occurs today.

b) Beside the three dimensions sketched above, one must consider the different *social spheres* where the issues of generational equity are (or should be) managed: the private sphere (families and "social private" networks) and the public sphere (state and markets).

In the past, most of the transfers were handled within the kinship, a fact which has contributed to a high degree of social inequality. Today, society mediates these transfers to a greater extent. But are these operations really in line with the pursuit of generational equity?

Many research results say that this is not the case. The redistribution operated by the state can be, sometimes, even worse. Or, in any case, it might well be that it does not reach the goals of a real generational equity in the three above specified dimensions.

Usually this happens because public redistribution (to poorer families) and transfers (schemes of social security) are not tuned to the family composition and its position in its life cycle.

In order to see the whole picture of the generational equity issue, I will sketch a figure (fig. 2) which we should consider carefully.

	Spheres for the management of intergenerational solidarity (equity):	
	public (3. state and 4. regulated markets)	private (1. family and 2. primary networks)
Dimensions of generational equity as:		
i. redistribution of resources between copresent generations	**a**	**b**
ii. ratio between present consumption and investment in future generations	**c**	**d**
iii. equality of opportunity for the newborn in relation to the generational charge assumed by the families in which children are born	**e**	**f**

Fig. 2. Dimensions and relational spheres which define the issues of intergenerational solidarity (equity).

If we pay attention to the six cells of fig. 2, many interesting questions arise. At the present state of social research we can answer only a few of them.

a. How efficient are families in the redistribution of resources between co-present generations? It seems that this is the most important function

that families perform, and there is evidence that they still do it quite well when they stay intact. This becomes an issue where families split up.

b. How efficient are states and markets in the redistribution of resources among copresent generations? We do not have good research findings on these topics. They must be left to future investigations.

c. What is the present ratio between consumptions and investments in future generations within the family? Recent research shows that, in most countries, families save less and less money. But, due to the restrictions in fertility, in the short run they can invest more on fewer children. In this way, anyhow, they transfer to the collectivity the costs of a private gain, since they have contributed less than others to the reproduction of society.

d. What is the present ratio between consumptions and investments in the future generations on the part of state and markets? This is a very complex question which cannot have a well-documented answer. We need more investigation.

e. Do families succeed in assuring equality of chances to their children vis-à-vis their different composition (number of children)? Empirical surveys show that this is not the case.

f. Does the state succeed in assuring equality of chances to children vis-à-vis the different composition (number of children) of their families? Some success has been achieved, but a lot has still to be accomplished. The last question: "do markets succeed in assuring equality of opportunities for children vis-à-vis the different composition (number of children) of their families?" has a clearly negative reply.

The conceptual framework I have put forward here can at least be useful in assessing the issues at stake and in promoting new investigations which can help in pushing the envisaged change towards more equity.

5. SOCIAL POLICIES: UP-DATING THE AGENDA AND LOOKING FOR SOUNDER AND MORE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

5.1. *Up-dating the agenda*

Only very recently national governments have put families and children on its agenda. The spirit of this agenda is clearly to help families in performing their functions. Most governments today explicitly recognise the need for new interventions in order to improve family life. These interventions are devised in many different and well articulated fields, in particular:

women's condition and motherhood; income and social security, particular-
ly in cases of broken and at risk families; child-care services and provisions.

In the light of what I have claimed so far, all of these goals are certainly
very important and relevant. However, one can wonder whether there is a
global design and adequate strategies behind them. The envisaged measures
are undoubtedly needed, but they could be insufficient in the long run for
managing the issue of generational equity. We are always exposed to the risk
of being behind the times. Up-dating the agenda means, in fact, to grasp the
novelty of a situation, its discontinuities and the wider scenario it reveals.

5.2. In the long run, the *global design* to be pursued must aim at creating
those social conditions which can allow families and children to master an
increasingly risky environment. This design can be sketched in terms of
general goals to be pursued and of the *strategies* they require.

5.3. As to the general goals, *they can be devised as follows*

– *The reform of social security systems according to the family life cycle*.
As it has been shown by many national experiences (see Vella ed., 1990),
social security systems are never indifferent to family and child needs: they
always reward or penalise them. Social security schemes must be designed
with more flexibility so as to adapt to the differential load families have in
the different stages of their life cycle, with respect to the number and social
conditions of their members.

– *A bigger investment in new generations*. Families seem to invest less
and less in new generations. Some nation-states have picked up this task
increasingly, but without an explicit policy. It is nowadays more and more
evident that, if they want to survive, governments must assume more
responsibility for what one generation leaves to the next in terms of public
resources, taking into account not only the economic, but also the cultural,
social, and ecological dimensions of generational transfers. So far a few
researches have been done on this topic (Modell, 1989).

– *Real freedom of choice in having babies*. To rebalance the ratio
among generations means putting families in the condition to have a
number of children close to the replacement level. The point is not to
adopt pro-natalist policies in the spirit of incrementing the population,
but to take up policies oriented towards more social justice. Apart from
the fact that incentives in favour of pro-natalist policies would have min-

imal effects, the problem is basically to fill the gap between the number of children that couples really have and the number of children they would like. With high probability, this means bringing the fertility ratio up to about 2.1 children per woman; but this is not easy. For instance, in Italy, to elevate the fertility rate from the present level (1.2 children per women) up to 1.8 would mean that about 30% of all women should have a third child, which is a very difficult and costly target.

5.4. *In order to pursue these goals it is necessary to develop consistent public strategies. The latter can be outlined as follows.*

– *The structuration of welfare interventions along family lines.* If we recognise that the welfare state cannot substitute parents' responsibilities, then its main task is to sustain them through collective arrangements which are adequate for the peculiarities of family life. In a sense, the whole social organisation should not only pay attention to family needs, but be structured according to them. Consequently, we need strategies which are able to enhance *time-to-care measures* (e.g. parental leave, etc.), *family designed services* in educational settings, personal social services and health settlements, and more generally the *familisation of welfare packages* (home care, etc.) even when the request for help comes from an individual alone.

– *The interplay between formal and informal services through a community care policy.* Statutory and informal aid are not to be seen as opposites or substitutes, but, on the contrary, as complementary and operating together: the key idea is to foster networks linking together primary groups and public services according to co-operative styles of intervention.

– *The development of social organisations (NGOs) mediating* the linkages between families and political authorities (local/regional, national, supranational). This means the fostering of family-based voluntary organisations, cooperatives, mutual and self-help groups, associations, and so on, provided that they are able to perform intergenerational solidarity.

– *Intersectorality in social policies.* Policy measures should link together different sectors of intervention in meeting different needs (economic, social, educational, health, etc.).

– *The adoption of policy styles inspired by what as been called "relational guidance"*, which means involving families, both as individual entities and as collective (i.e. associated) bodies, in designing plans of intervention.

The emerging idea is that social policy is not integrated simply because it has its "centre" in the state, but because it is able to grasp the needs of

people's life-worlds and to cope with them by focusing on the family as a unit of primary services in the community.

6. Conclusions

6.1. In the last few decades, most countries have adopted policies for families and children which have been largely implicit, indirect and fragmented (sectorialised). The result has been a deep worsening of intergenerational relations.

Today national welfare states cannot get any improvement if they do not recognize that families must be helped to understand and cope with the problems of intergenerational solidarity and equity on a large scale and in the long run. We are in need of a new global rationality for the whole society.

Social policies aimed at solving the social problems of particular family forms (socially weak, at risk, and pathological families) are missing this perspective. It becomes therefore more and more relevant to design and implement a framework for social policies addressing all families, i.e. the family conceived as a social relationship of full reciprocity between genders and between generations. This approach does not deny the necessity of supporting, through specific additional regulations, people who choose different living arrangements.

6.2. *This idea implies what I would like to call the search for a new post-industrial citizenship.*

a. *A new citizenship for children* (rights and duties). Children must be recognised as active subjects who become more and more aware of their social condition and must be given earlier and earlier the opportunity to speak with their own voices, and assume their own responsibilities, in the family as well as in schools and welfare institutions (personal social services, courts, and so on).

b. *A new citizenship for families* (rights and duties). We must recognise that the family has its own rights to be and act as a solidarity group linking generations over time (P. Donati 1998). Such a recognition should be inspired by values of equity between generations. This implies, among other things, that governments shall aid all couples willing to have babies to have them effectively, to enjoy the social rights connected with this goal (lodging, minimum income, education, health, social security) and to see

these rights as human and political rights, and not as charity or political "grants".

The shifting from industrial to post-industrial citizenship means that our societies must recognise that, for children and families, social entitlements are a question of human dignity and social solidarity, not a consequence of their position with reference to the labour market or a result of political lobbying or the actions of pressure groups.

The building up of modern societies has so far been based upon an interplay between the state and the economic market. Such an interplay has favoured a process of modernisation which has contributed to the betterment of material and living conditions, but it has at the same time strongly penalised local communities, primary social networks, and also family life. Today it is important to acknowledge that such a project needs a *cultural basis*. The argument I have tried to present is that this basis may consist in a *caring culture* oriented towards the fulfilment of people's rights as they concretise in their daily life-worlds.

The premise for this fundamental shift of focus lies in the acknowledgement that human well-being is not an individual or collective condition abstracted from the concrete community we live in, but a relational process of mutual reciprocity between *Ego* and *Alter* in any field and at any level of social interventions. It starts in the family. "Intergenerational solidarity" signifies all of this.

REFERENCES

Aldous J., *Family Development and the Life Course: Two Perspectives on Family Change*, in "Journal of Marriage and the Family", vol. 52, n. 3, August 1990, pp. 571-583.

Aldous J. & Dumon W., *Family Policy in the 1980s: Controversy and Consensus*, in "Journal of Marriage and the Family", vol. 52, n. 6, November 1990, pp. 1136-1151.

Chouraqui N., *Rapport sur une politique familiale communautaire*, Rapport au Parlement européen, 16 juin 1986.

Cornia A. (ed.), *Child Poverty in Industrialized Countries: Trends and Policy Options*, Oxford, 1992.

Donati P., *Traditional Political Theories and New Social Options: Replies to the Crisis of the Welfare State*, in A. EVERS et al. (eds.), *The Changing Faces of Welfare*, Gower Press, Aldershot, 1987, pp. 24-45.

Donati P., *Die Familie als soziale Beziehung zwischen Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit: Jenseitz der Paradoxien*, in "Soziologisches Jahrbuch", Trient, vol. 6, I, 1990/a.

Donati P., *Towards an Integrated and Synergized Social Policy: Concepts and Strategies*, in Ch. Vella (ed.), *Integrating Social and Family Policy for the 90's*, Proceedings of the Council of Europe Congress, Ministry for Social Policy, Malta, 1990/b, pp. 86-106.

Donati P., *Teoria relazionale della società*, Angeli, Milano, 1991.

Donati P., *The New Citizenship of the Family*, in K. Matthijs (ed.), *The Family. Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1998, pp. 243-261.

Donati P. & Matteini M. (eds.), *Quale politica per quale famiglia in Europa. Ripartire dalle comunità locali*, Angeli, Milano, 1991.

Dumon W., *La politique familiale en Europe Occidentale. Une réflexion sociologique*, in "L'Année Sociologique", 37, pp. 291-308, 1987.

Dumon W. (ed.), *Family Policy in EEC Countries*, Commission of the European Communities, Leuven, 1989.

Dumon W., *Les évolutions des politiques familiales en Europe en référence aux transformations de la famille*, in *Familles d'Europe sans Frontières. Les Actes*, Paris, 1990, pp. 51-65.

EEC Commission, *Qui prend soin des enfants de l'Europe? Compte rendu du Réseau des modes de garde d'enfants*, par Angela Phillips et Peter Moss, EC Commission-Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Education, Juin 1988.

EEC Commission, *Communication from the Commission on Family Policies*, Brussels, 8 August 1989.

Furstenberg F.F. Jr. & Cherlin A.J., *Divided Families. What Happens to Children When Parents Part*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991.

Gilliand P., *Les perspectives d'avenir des divers systèmes de sécurité sociale à la lumière de l'evolution des structures familiales*, Rapport pour le Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg, 29 mars 1988.

Hantrais L. & Letablier M.T., *Families and Family Policies in Europe*, Longman, London and New York, 1996.

Kaufmann F.X. *et al.* (eds.), *Guidance, Control, and Evaluation in the Public Sector*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1986.

Levi-Strauss C., *Le regard éloigné*, Plon, Paris, 1983.

Modell J., *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the U.S. 1920-1975*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1989.

Moss P., *Child Care and Equality of Opportunity: A Consolidated Report of the Child Care Network to the European Commission*, Brussels, April 1988.

Oepfn (Observatoire Européen sur les Politiques Familiales Nationales), *Famille et Politiques. Tendances et évolutions en 1988-1989*, Rapport intermédiaire, Bruxelles, Juin 1990.

Pampel F. & Stryker R., *Age Structure, the State, and Social Welfare Spending: A Reanalysis*, in "The British Journal of Sociology", vol. 41, n. 1, March 1990, pp. 16-24.

Preston S., *Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents*, in "Demography", vol. 21, n. 4, 1984, pp. 435-457.

Qvortrup J. *et al.* (eds.), *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon. Implications for future Social Policy*, European Centre, Vienna, 1991.

Roussel L., *La famille incertaine*, ed. Odile Jacob, Paris, 1989.

Sgritta G.B., *Iniquità generazionali e logica di compatibilità*, Paper presented at the International Seminar on "Social Policies for Children and Adolescents", Florence, February 20-23, 1991.

Shamgar L. & Palomba R. (eds.), *Alternative Patterns of Family Life in Modern Societies*, Irp, Rome, 1987.

Vella Ch. (ed.), *Integrating Social and Family Policy for the 90's*, Ministry for Social Policy, Malta, 1990.

Wisensale S.K., *Approaches to Family Policy in State Government: A Report on Five States*, in "Family Relations", vol. 39, n. 2, April 1990, pp. 136-140.