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UNIVERSITÉ DU  
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# Doing Family in a Transnational Context: A Single Case Study Exploring Relationships across **Three** Generations in an Italian Emigrant Family in Luxembourg.

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University of Luxembourg

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Symposium 9

Family Dynamics and Well-being in Culturally Diverse and Transnational Contexts

ESFR – University of Madeira, Funchal, PT 26.06.2025

- Doing family in a transnational context - **migration** influences the development and maintenance of social relationships across **space** and **time** (Karl & Ramos, 2017).
- “Doing Family” introduced by Morgan (2011)

Family is not viewed as a static structure or institution, but **a set of practices**. Family is something that people **do** – not just something they **are**.

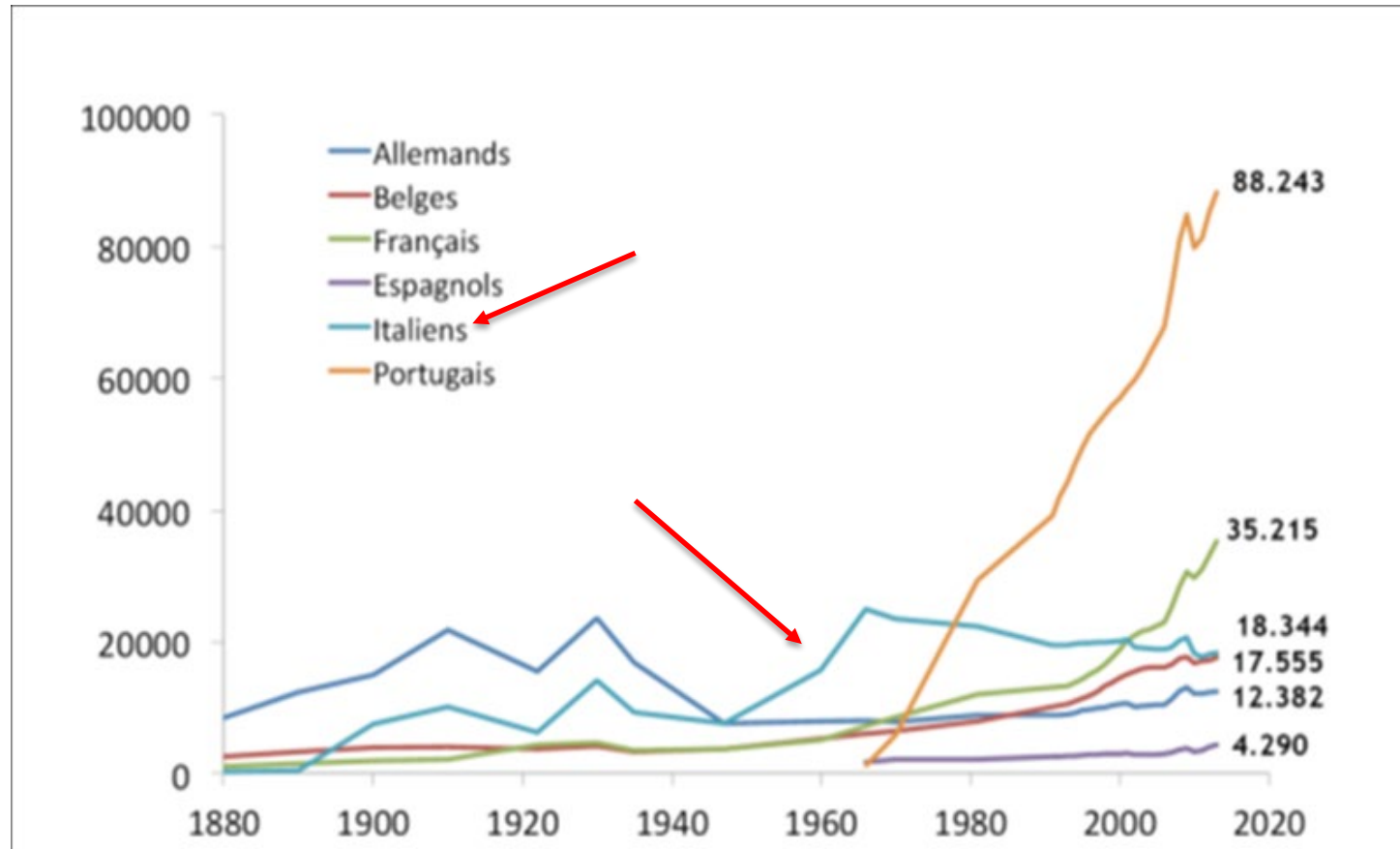
Special focus on **everyday practices**: These are contextual – shaped by time, space, emotions and social norms. They are relational and often embodied (requiring physical presence).

## Luxembourg is...

- ... fairly small
  - Total population: **672,050** (1/2024)
  - Dimension: 82 km x 57 km
- ... shares borders with 3 countries
  - Belgium: 148 km
  - Germany: 135 km
  - France: 73km
- ... is trilingual (FR, DE, LU)
- ... Population has grown by 84.3% since 1981 (Statec, 2024)
- ... has a foreign population percentage **47,3%** (1/2024)

# Population evolution – 1875 – 2013

## Italian immigration



Source: Cefis (2013)

# Italian immigration to Luxembourg

## Experience of first generation coming to Luxembourg

**ESPACE CULTURES**  
Uni.lu - Espace Cultures, in partnership with Tarantula Luxembourg, Office of Student Life, Migration and Inclusive Societies research group, Cinema Club, and Association of Latin-American Students



**CINEMA DAYS: IO STO BENE**

**When:**  
Wednesday, 04/06/2025  
from 16:30 to 19:00

**Where:**  
Luxembourg Learning Centre (LLC)  
Salle Ellipse

  
Join our facebook group

**04.06**  
LLC  
Salle Ellipse



**Cinema Days is a series of film screenings and meaningful discussions on Campus**  
Next session: Join us for "Io Sto Bene", by producer Donato Rotunno  
Synopsis: Antonio has spent his whole life away from Italy, his home country. He crosses paths with Leo, a young Italian artist who is trying to make it abroad. The old man and the young woman's destinies mirror each other. Memories from the past are awoken and end up offering a more peaceful future to the both of them.  
Film session followed by a discussion on migration with student clubs and the film's director and producer.

  
Mandatory registration

[espace.cultures@uni.lu](mailto:espace.cultures@uni.lu)

  
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Acculturation experience – adaptation to the host country

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NJ-S583Xx8>

Film by Donato Rotunno (2020)

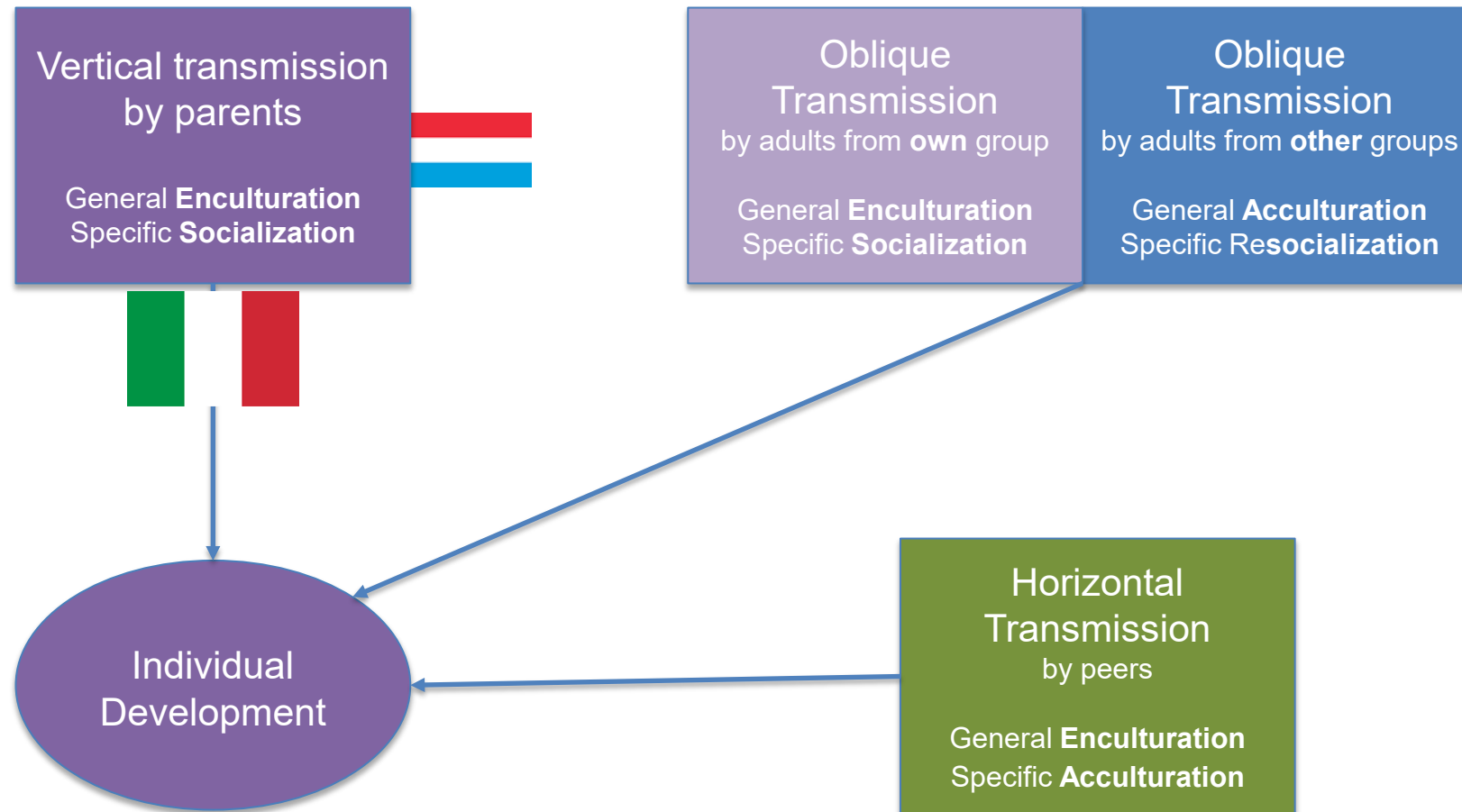
## Grandfather (GF)

- Leaves Italy to help his family as his father was ill and unable to work.
- Aged 22 – first migrates to France. Comes to Luxembourg in 1960 – where he decides to stay
- Upon settling in, he brings his sisters to LU, after his father's death also his mother and brother.
- His five siblings and mother live in Luxembourg – he takes on responsibility for all.

*“Then, after I had settled in a bit, I brought my sister to Luxembourg, who later got married [...] Then my other sister came and got married too. My father died in 1962. I brought my mother and my brother to join me. I was responsible for the whole family.” GF*

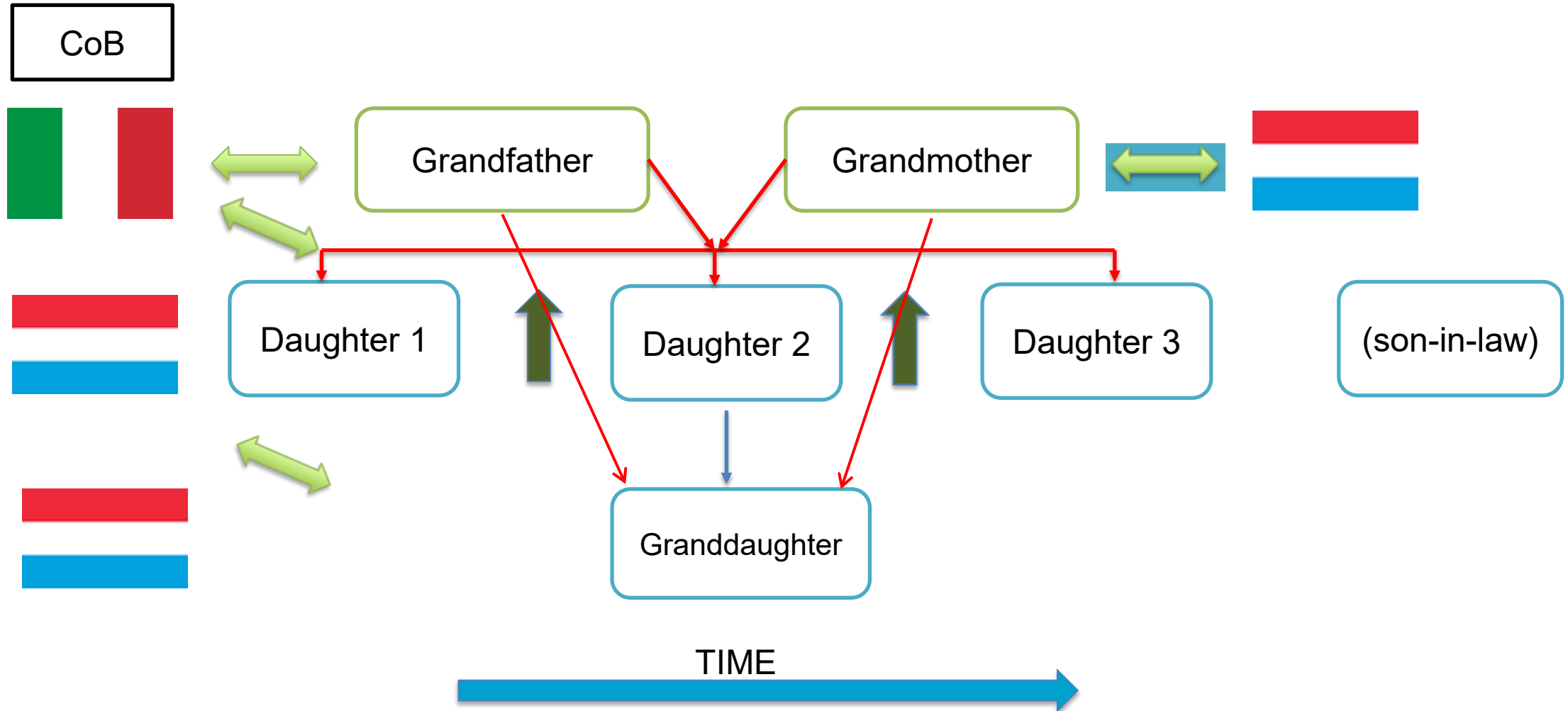
- When visiting his home village in Italy – he gets to meet his future wife.
  - They led a long-distance relationship for a year (wrote to each other) – married 1966 in Italy.
  - At 19 she follows him to LU.
  - Her family stays in Italy
- 
- Both used to travel to Italy every year until 2020, when it became too difficult (age-wise).





- Explore the relationship
  - With the country of Origin (Italy) over time
  - With the country of Residence/ Birth (Luxembourg) over time
- Investigate
  - Transmission processes (what & why)
  - Perception & reception of these efforts (what & why)
- Across 3 generations

100



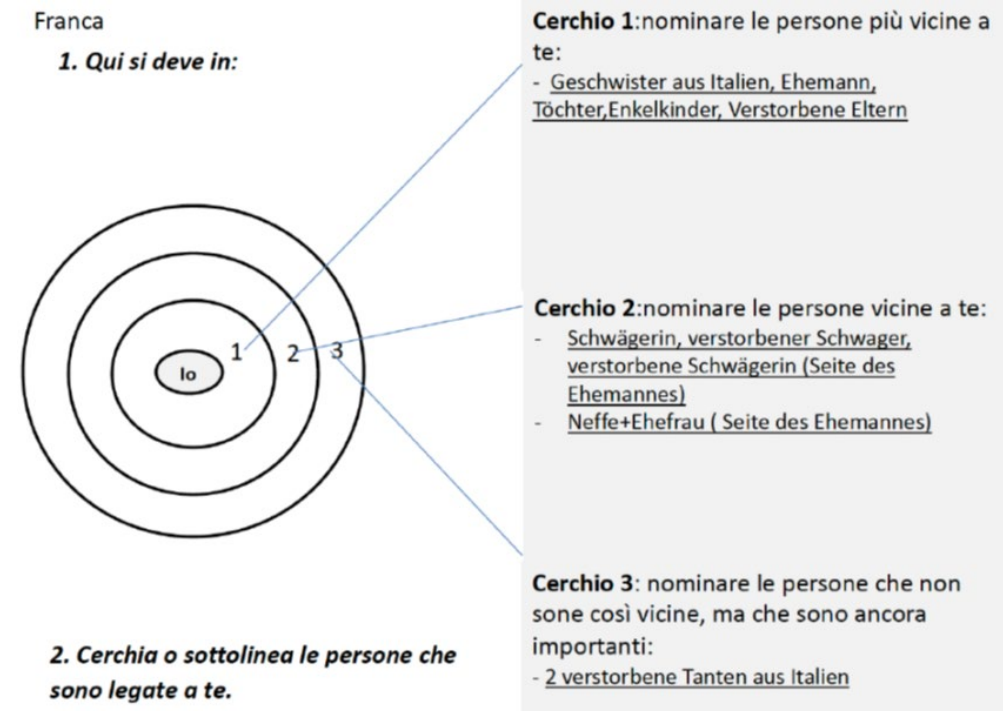
- Single case study – several family members
- Biographical interviews & **Convoy** method - egocentric network charts (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980)

You are in the centre -

Circle 1 – People very close to you

Circle 2 – People close to you

Circle 3 – People important but not so close





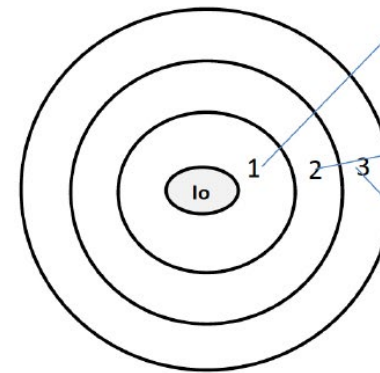
- To preserve anonymity - Location “Southern Italy”
  - Age bands wide – Grandparents between 75-85 years
  - Daughters – between 39 -55 years
  - Granddaughter < 30 years
    - Note: son-in-law (< 60 years) born in Lux, with Southern French and Swiss roots – outsider perspective on the family

# Selected Results

- For all 3 generations – **core family** dominates inner circle (Spouse, children, grandchildren) – with subtle differences
- Grandparents
  - Grandmother
    - Also includes her siblings deceased parents in Circle 1
    - Includes also deceased family members in Circles 2 & 3

Franca

1. *Qui si deve in:*



2. *Cerchia o sottolinea le persone che sono legate a te.*

**Cerchio 1:** nominare le persone più vicine a te:

- Geschwister aus Italien, Ehemann, Töchter, Enkelkinder, Verstorbene Eltern

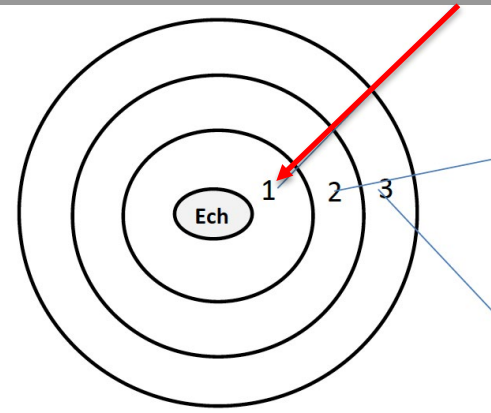
**Cerchio 2:** nominare le persone vicine a te:

- Schwägerin, verstorbener Schwager, verstorbene Schwägerin (Seite des Ehemannes)
- Neffe+Ehefrau ( Seite des Ehemannes)

**Cerchio 3:** nominare le persone che non sone così vicine, ma che sono ancora importanti:

- 2 verstorbene Tanten aus Italien

## Network Chart – Daughters – Inner Circle

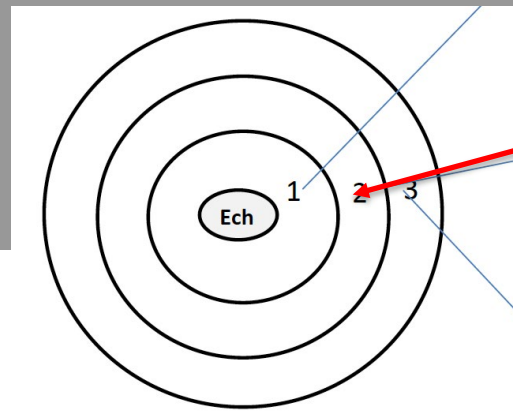


Daughter 1	Daughter 2	Daughter 3
Daughters Husband Parents Deceased maternal grandparents (Italy)	Daughters	Children Husband Parents Sisters Nieces Brother-in-Law 6 closest friends
Traditional	narrow	wide



# Network Chart – Daughters

## Second Circle



Daughter 1	Daughter 2	Daughter 3
Sisters Cousin Uncle from <b>Italy</b> 2 closest friends	Sisters Parents Nieces & Nephews Deceased husband 2 closest friends	Husband's family: Parents-in-law Brothers-in-law

- Close friends have left or passed away
- Parents passed away.

*“Almost all of my childhood friends have passed away. I don't know those who were born after me. I have one friend who is still alive. When I'm in Italy, we say hello and talk to each other [...] We have a good relationship within the family. They used to come to visit us in Luxembourg. **We've always had a good relationship, a family relationship.**” GF*

*“My parents have passed away. We used to go to their house all the time. It was a different time, a different life [...] Besides, we'd have to stay in a hotel [...] **It's not the same anymore.** We didn't eat as well as we did at my mother's.” GM*

## Daughter 1 (D1)

- Grandmother in the inner circle – very close relationship with her

*“I had deep conversations with my grandmother. She always had good advice and she was a very warm person. She was always positive, no matter if she was ill or anything else. This positive attitude always cheered me up.” D1*

- Reluctant to return to Italy – wants to preserve the memory how it was *with* her grandmother.

## Granddaughter (GD)

- Italy – country of holidays as a child
- Positive memories:

*“That's also one reason why I'm afraid that now, as an adult, if I went back, I'd realize that it's not the same as it used to be. I would find it a shame not to be able to go back to the same apartment or see the same people anymore. I don't want to lose those childhood memories or realize that it's not like that anymore.” GD*



## Daughter 2 (D2)

- Noted no Italian relatives in Circles
- Mentions her lack of fluency in Italian as one of the reasons for lack of contact
- Last visit to Italy in 2017 – mixed memories:  
*"It's been the same for years. All the time, all the time the same, and also because of the mentality there. Southern Italians (...), how can I put it? Not very modern. The way the animals were treated there really annoyed me and I found it cruel. If there were too many cats, they were drowned, and dogs had their tails cut off for fun. When I started to understand certain things, I quickly turned my back on Italy. (...) That's how it was, mainly out of boredom and annoyance."* D2

## Daughter 3 (D3)

- Noted Italian relatives in Circle 3
- It was important to her to present her children to the Italian family.
- Continues to holiday in Italy

## Grandfather

*"At first, I had difficulty adapting to the culture here in Luxembourg because it is colder and more rigid.*

*When I came here, I had to accept this culture. I came to Luxembourg, so **I had to adapt** and I'm happy about that [...] I've never had any problems with the people here.*

*I've always **worked** and have always been appreciated (because of that). I've never had any problems because of where I come from."* GF

- Has initially learnt French
- Then attended evening classes and learnt Luxembourgish
- Has taken out Luxembourg citizenship several years ago.

- Stresses that he has worked hard and adapted to the local system

*“I have adapted to their customs, but in my **parenting style** and my **honesty**, I always remain true to **my Italian upbringing**. My upbringing has stayed with me, but I have learned to live here, in the Luxembourg system.” GF*



- Has learnt French. Italian and French were sufficient in her daily contacts and work. She never felt the need to learn Luxembourgish.
- Only applied for Luxembourg citizenship very recently.
- While she states that her life is here in Luxembourg and that she is happy ->

*“I feel 100% Italian. I need to see if they give me Luxembourg nationality [...] I've been here for 56 years now, what else is there to look for? My husband also has Luxembourg nationality. They can do it without any problems.” GM – p.51*

- Growing up in Luxembourg
  - Dinner experience
  - Report difficulties in primary school, as they were the only “foreigners” – and not fluent in Luxembourgish
  - Situation improved in secondary school.

# Self-identification now – Daughters

- Daughter 1

*“With my heart partly and with my mind completely, Luxembourgish. You must never forget your roots, where your parents come from, and you must maintain this mentality and culture, and, of course, where you have immigrated, you must accept and tolerate the people, because they, the Luxembourgers, also tolerate us.”*

- Daughter 2

*“... I have Italian roots, but I don't really feel Italian because I have very little desire to go to Italy. As for Luxembourg, I have integrated, but it's not like my heart beats faster when I hear “Ons Heemecht”. I wouldn't say that I'm a citizen of the world, as I don't travel much, but I am a resident of the Earth (Bewohnerin der Erde) (laughs)*

- Daughter 3

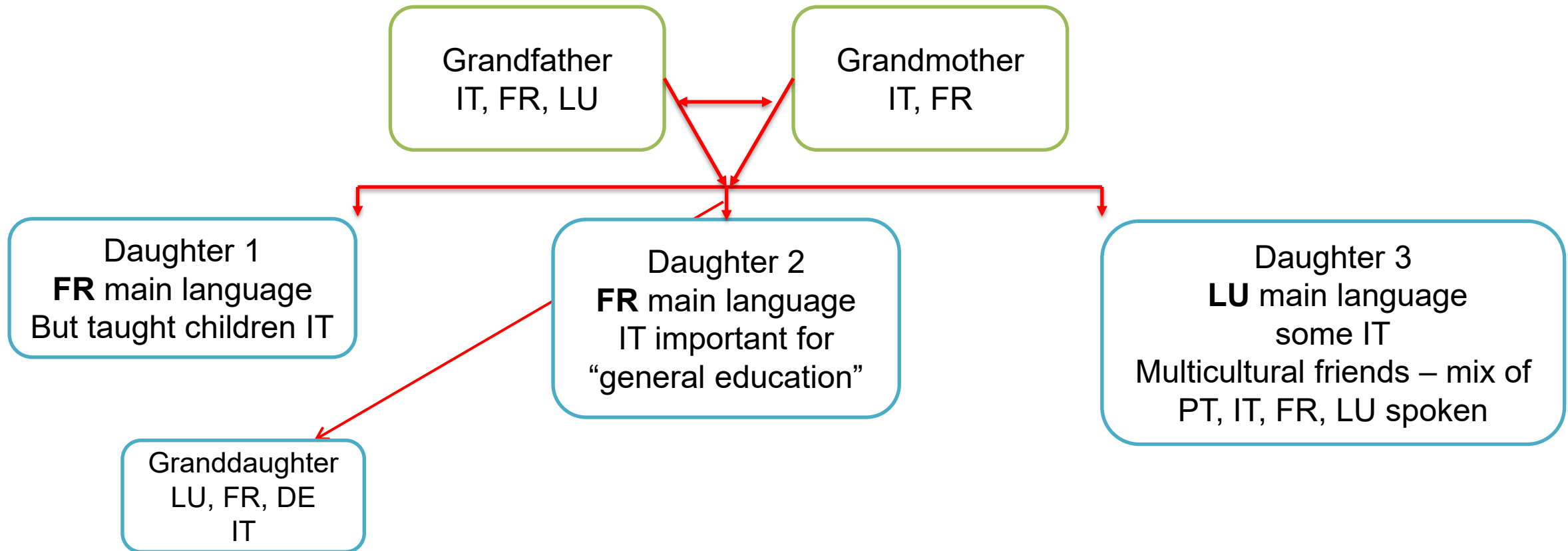
*“I am Luxembourgish with Italian roots, but I actually consider myself only Luxembourgish now.”*

- Granddaughter

*“Yes, well, I'm Luxembourgish, but I know that I have Italian roots. And that's important to me.”*

## Transmission: Language(s)

- **Italian** – important to all
- Languages at home differ



*“Mutual respect and love for family, and of course the food.” GM*

FOOD culture – and all related traditions are endorsed by ALL

- Importance of family life – and respect for parents and grandparents is stressed.
- Observation of “cooler” North as compared to South, where people and weather are kinder and warmer...

*“Family life is more important to Italians than to Luxembourgers. In Italy, several generations live together, and I don't see that so often here in Luxembourg.” D1*

*“I would say that there is a completely different quality of life in Italy. I feel that family cohesion plays a more important role there than it does here. Here in Luxembourg, everyone just lives for themselves.” GD*

### ■ Daughter 2

*"I'm not very family-oriented in the Italian way, but I still need to have a family. ... I have to force myself to celebrate Christmas together, even though I might have other plans, but I automatically have to reject those other plans because otherwise I would upset my father or mother. It's so complicated when you say yes and then meet up, even though I could have gone on vacation somewhere with the girls.*

*Those are the constraints that annoy me - Being present regularly. If you don't call, it means you have a problem, even though that's not true. There's no problem, except that I don't just call to make small talk. I can't stand that. I really have to call regularly, even if it's just to say that I've fulfilled my role as a sister, my role as a daughter. That annoys me."*

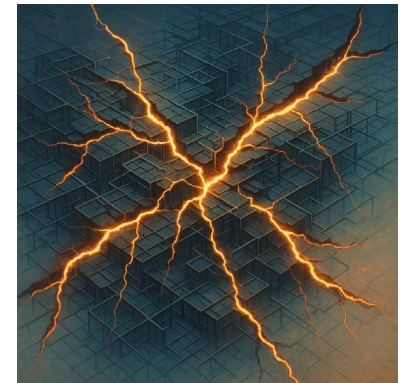


- *“Italians have this preconception that men always play the dominant role. I don't raise my daughters that way at all. They are equal to everyone else. They are not inferior to men. Not inferior to older people, not inferior to anything. If I take my parents as an example, they are not very open to change [...]. So I try to be much more tolerant and open, without any kind of hierarchy. With my parents, you have to obey because that's the way it is...” D2*
- *“Because in Italy, men are more dominant than women, and I don't like that. It's rare for him (her grandfather) to change his mind. His opinions and ideas are set in stone. That's how it is with southerners.” GD*

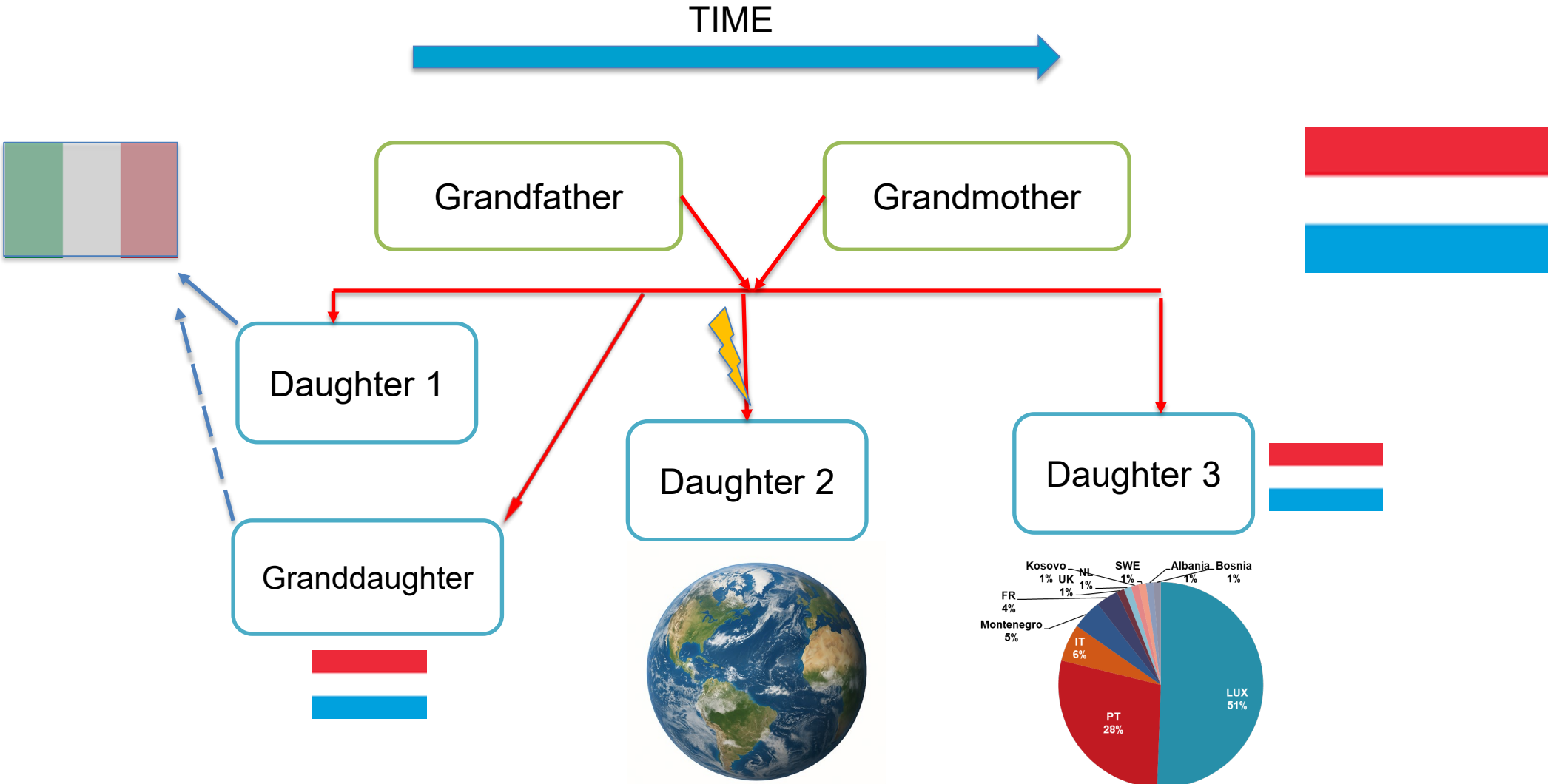
- Grandparents
  - Grandfather – successful acculturation experience
    - Proud of his Italian roots – but proud of his achievements in Luxembourg – patriarch
    - All his direct family is in Luxembourg
  - Grandmother – 100% Italian, but content in Luxembourg
    - Children and Grandchildren are in Luxembourg
    - The network chart contains Italian relatives.
- Transmission – Respect, Love of family, Language & Food
- Connection with Italy has changed over space and time.

- Daughter 1 – Granddaughter
  - Visits to Italy – fond childhood memories
  - Italian roots are important to both
  - D1 – very close relationship with maternal grandmother
    - ⇒ Desire to preserve the memory
    - ⇒ Italy as “**inner retreat**”
    - ⇒ Strong emotional bond, but **grounded** in Luxembourg

- Daughter 2 – the Rebel
    - Critical view of interdependent family structure / Obligation
    - Critical view of hierarchy
    - Desire for more tolerance and openness.
- 
- ⇒ BUT - Not against family gathering, but obligation
  - ⇒ Rejects national identifications
  - ⇒ For multilingualism (Allgemeinbildung)
  - ⇒ Supports Italian culinary traditions wholeheartedly



- Daughter 3
  - Identifies as Luxembourgish
  - LU main language + multiculturalism
  - Italy – holiday destination.



# Thank you!

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