

## Tekst 4



If we really want to be more European,  
we should move in with mum, dad,  
auntie and grandma

**M**y brother, 35, still lives with his mum. Two years ago, when our mother moved to London, it seemed only natural that my high-earning, single brother should invite her to share his large flat. Or at least, it seemed natural to Italians, brought up with live-in loved ones and the notion of the extended family.

Not here; in this, as in so many other cultural trends, Britain remains obstinately 4. A survey published this week by Social and Community Planning Research on British and European social attitudes points out how very different Britons are from other Europeans: there are more single mothers in this country than anywhere else in Europe; only a quarter of Britons regard work as important to their identity, as opposed to nearly half of Germans, Swedes and Italians (surprisingly); in comparison to the rest of the EU, very few Britons care about the environment; and they have a higher divorce rate and a higher acceptance of divorce.

If the way British families break up is different from on the Continent, so is the way they stay together. In many European countries, and in particular in the Latin (and Catholic) ones, the extended family – 5 dismissed as a template worthy only of the poor immigrant community – remains a popular unit. It may be far-fetched to claim that adopting this Continental familial mould would prevent divorce or disregard for the environment, but this ancient family unit could serve as a buffer against these ills – and others.

The “family compound”, where grown-up children, grandparents, distant relatives or siblings and their new families share a living space, 6 an all-for-one, one-for-all mentality that grants security in our increasingly alien and lonely landscape. Bridget Jones mumbling into her chardonnay glass; desperate single mum stuck at home because of her three-year-old child; melancholic divorcé feeling alienated from his

earlier connections: these familiar figures of the nineties would be clasped to the bosom of the large intergenerational clan, and benefit from its company and support – as indeed would granny and the maiden aunt.

If the extended family setting can turn chaotic – babies cry and grandpa barks – there is always someone to talk to, someone who will listen. The E M Forster axiom, “only connect”, is a natural consequence of membership of the sprawling family; in this arena intimate contact is unavoidable, brooding isolationism impossible, tolerance essential. Thrown together in 7 setting, men, women and children are forced to learn and apply those social skills that the rest of us in our increasingly individualist existence lack – or have lost. 8, what better preparation for entry into the wider community could there be than communal living of this kind? For here we inherit, and build upon, an interdependent web of relations that is a first template for the “inclusive society” this government seeks.

Taking part in the extended family banishes the angst of exclusion. It also 9 our sense of identity: the duties, allegiance and responsibilities fostered by membership of a clan pin us in a particular domestic environment and ease us into a particular role as someone’s daughter, wife or grandmother. This labelling counters the sense of displacement by a nation that is redrawing the map of its 10; from regionalism to city mayors, from the peerage to nascent republicanism, Britain’s new landscape threatens to loosen the ties we used to rely upon or react against.

11, too, the Continental model of extended family makes sense. At a time when job insecurity is great, youth unemployment greater and real estate prices both in terms of rent and sales still at a pre-recession high, your relatives make for great flat-mates and expense-sharers. Where the grotty flat is all you can afford individually, a pooling of family resources may allow for a decent house, or at least more space.

Acceptance of the extended family model does not mean that related adults who loathe one another should be shoe-horned into one home, despite their hatreds and feuds. It does call on us, though, to change our expectations about when the family 12. Youths of 18 leaving home as a matter of course; older relatives being banished to the emotional tundra of the elderly people’s home without a second thought; and single mums being ashamed of returning to the parental fold: we should be encouraged to rethink these patterns and restore the family to a lifelong haven rather than an 18-year stopover.

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## ■ Tekst 4 If we really ...

*Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.*

1p **4 ■**

- A family-minded
- B intolerant
- C isolationist
- D old-fashioned

1p **7 ■**

- A a domestic
- B a harmonious
- C this ill-fated
- D this unfamiliar

1p **5 ■**

- A formerly
- B here
- C rarely
- D there

1p **8 ■**

- A By contrast
- B Even so
- C For instance
- D Indeed

1p **6 ■**

- A compensates
- B generates
- C prevents

1p **9 ■**

- A diminishes
- B ignores
- C strengthens

1p **10 ■**

- A allegiances
- B class system
- C former empire
- D role patterns

1p **11 ■**

- A Economically
- B In terms of employment
- C In view of the housing shortage
- D Sociologically

1p **12 ■**

- A ceases to matter
- B deserves to be called extended
- C should be given outside help
- D should take in relatives in need