

Recommendations on the issue “Reconciliation of Work and Family Life”

1.1 VALORISING CARE TASKS/ BUILDING AWARENESS AMONG LOCAL PLAYERS AND THE CITIZENS

Reconciliation of personal time will never truly be achieved as long as inequalities between men and women persist in parental and household tasks¹. Despite progress in the usual member states – Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands – male/female roles still need to be broadened. This process involves changing behaviour and attitudes, which are the most profound and difficult changes.

The idea that parental duties have an intrinsic non-monetary value needs to be promoted. It must be highlighted that men and women must both have their role, for the well-being of both the children and the parents.

At the same time, it is essential that our society bring to the fore the place it reserves for children and care work in general. The issue of reconciling family, personal time, work and care-giving stems *not only* from problems within the family, *but also* from challenges involving the entire local, national and European community. All members of society must assume their responsibilities. In that connection, efforts to raise the awareness of men and the mobilisation of local players in Modena are exemplary.

Activities involving individuals, parents, couples, friends and others should not be treated as a commodity on the pretext of job creation. Such an outcome would jeopardise encouragement to share what may be a restriction but that can also be a source of pleasure.

1.2 IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AMONG DIFFERENT LOCAL PLAYERS AND THE PUBLIC

¹ Couple relationships have evolved a great deal, with the exception of men’s share of housework, although the sharing is more balanced if the woman has high-level qualifications.

Communication as a means of dialogue and exchange of information is the basis of any concerted and long-term action.

In the CARE project's partner territories, we have noted a lack of communication and coordination among the local players at various levels (cities, provinces and regions) and between the local players and the population.

This shortfall leads to various problems, such as an overlapping of services and wasted local resources. It is all too often observed that different services working with the same beneficiaries rarely share information on measures taken, the follow-up and needs. Service providers are unaware of the activities of others. The absence of information and a sharing of the real needs of the population could compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives and measures.

The creation of exchange mechanisms, such as e-netting in Piraeus or the work-private life reconciliation tables in Piacenza contribute to improving communication. But all of this takes time. Creating a network of regular exchanges and coordination requires trust and solid relationships, changes in administrative procedures as well as efforts from all involved to expand their spheres of action and reference.

Nonetheless, we need an inclusive and well-designed communication system that makes allowances for the horizontal nature of the reconciliation of family, public life and work to guarantee the success of a strategy and partnership actions.

In addition, the population and the beneficiaries must become more involved. Services and work hours need to be better adapted to the real needs and life rhythms of the various groups. Information about service offers and opportunities must be made available. Very often, citizens are not even aware of the measures and services on offer. This shortfall affects primarily, but not exclusively, men, since communications from public and private service providers are generally directed at women.

1.3 BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP POLICY TO COORDINATE TIME IN CITIES

Owing to changes in society, time appears to evolve, accelerate, become fragmented, appears asynchronous, individualised or even causes conflicts. This is apparent in workers' timetables compared to those of the users, the active and inactive members of the population, men's and women's time, the time of those who can afford to buy other people's time and those who are at the mercy of time. Time, in a word, is a source of tension for men and women, organisations and the territory.

That is why it is crucial to rethink society and introduce new standards, e.g. for working parents with dependent children, working single parents, etc. in order to adjust time in step with this new reality.

Taking rhythms into consideration raises questions about social equality, democracy, the effectiveness of urban organisation and our concepts of life and cities. While managing time effectively can be very beneficial, failure to manage it well or to overcome imbalances can lead to social discrimination and exacerbate inequality.

The challenge of temporal policies lies in matching service timetables to people's demands. Service hours are still very rigid, at a time when schedules are so individualised. Demand is high for services with flexible hours, one good example of which are crèches operating at atypical hours. It is clear that shops, health services, public transport and schools operate at times that are poorly adapted to citizens and consumers. It is also obvious that services are not always well coordinated. For example, public transport schedules do not always coincide with cultural activities or night-time entertainment.

Elected officials in charge of temporal policies, social economy enterprises, traditional companies and all other employers and/or service providers should take action in the following areas:

- Pursue equality through the creation of structures, such as time-reconciliation bureaux;
- Seek win-win solutions, without weakening the situation of those who are already challenged by time issues;
- Offer tailor-made solutions to meet specific needs;
- Encourage participation to reach acceptable compromises.

Without collective efforts to accommodate future beneficiaries and users, service providers run the risk of failure.

Long-lasting partnerships involving the different local players and the population are essential.

Local authorities and social economy enterprises, working with similar principles and objectives, close to the population and the most disadvantaged people, have an important role to play. Different forms of cooperation between these two players, focusing on time-related problems, could set a good example and give impetus to the establishment of local strategies. For instance, the Dunkirk crèche, operating at atypical hours and managed by an association, is based on this type of partnership.

Any concerted initiative to improve policies and services does not necessarily have to come from the local authorities. For example, CEPS has demonstrated that people from civil society have the capacity and willingness to generate territorial dynamics to compel the reconciliation of time.

The goal is to build a hospitable city, where life is easy, under human and financial cost conditions that are acceptable to all, with satisfactory services and social cohesion. We therefore need a strategic vision of the end goal in terms of flexibility and adaptability in order to continually coordinate time-related supply and demand.

Can we respond to everyone's demands? How far can we go? Further questions arise concerning the position of public authorities, whether they should be permissive or interventionist. A broad debate on this topic is called for in order to limit any mishaps.

1.4 MOBILITY AND MOVEMENT PLANS

Arrangements for organising social time, particularly work time, also affect the structure and layout of urban areas, as well as the movement of people.

Longer commutes are also a limitation to be considered in reconciling time because they encompass both accessibility and pollution issues.

Some examples of initiatives that could lead to effective solutions are multi-company plans, carpooling, car-sharing and initiatives that promote other environmentally-friendly solutions, such as the Illico bus service in Dunkirk.

1.5 ASSESSING LAND-USE PLANNING

Land-use planning is a job to which local authorities give top priority and many services heed that priority. "Infrastructures, equipment and construction directly reflect policy choices in the sense that they help invigorate and renovate neighbourhoods and integrate areas or, conversely, bring in social segregation. But only in a few cases is the time dimension explicitly included".²

Although the time aspect is found in project programming and deployment, it is rarely considered in land-use planning and facilities over the long haul, as and when users appropriate them and in order to respond to the need for different uses over time or to meet users' needs.

One element for success is close cooperation with social economy and other local players, who are becoming ever more active and involved in land-use projects and, increasingly, initiate such projects.

1.6 TAKING A SECOND LOOK AT ACCESS TO SERVICE OFFERS

Accessibility to public and private services can be viewed from three angles:

- "Opening hours for services: expansion and harmonisation;
- Time reduction: waiting times, processing times, proximity;
- Access via information and communication technologies to reduce travel time"³, without overlooking that ICT solutions can also cause new other inequality problems.

² TEMPO TERRITORIAL (2006), "Services, entreprises, aménagement: les temps des territoires. Actes des journées "Tempor'elles de printemps"", *Bulletin de coordination nationale et transnational*, Special Edition 17-18.

³ *Op. cit.*

Experiences relating to access have been tested. For example, the idea of a *public service house* can offer a one-stop-shopping solution by providing information and fulfilling formalities for a range of public services. Moreover, governments could also decentralise and relocate activities to neighbourhoods, bringing them closer to the users.

Hours of services, such as schools, public transportation, shops and cultural events, should be in step with the working and living hours of the inhabitants in each territory. Actions to harmonise and coordinate service hours are meant to help citizens in their personal and collective plans and to resolve time reconciliation difficulties.

The time aspect in service demands is in the process of change. We have observed the following in some territories:

- An increase of leisure services and cultural events in evenings, at midday and on holidays;
- Extension of public service hours into the evening and at midday;
- An increase in flexible and *à la carte* hours of services;
- The introduction of atypical hours for specific services.

1.7 CHANGING WORK ARRANGEMENTS

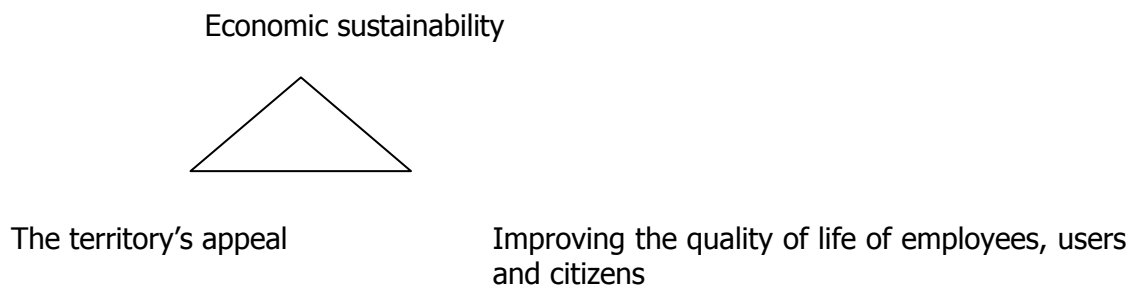
When women first began to call for the same work conditions as men, in particular in full time work, we might have expected trade unions, governments and employers to examine the work hours of men and women, since society was moving toward a higher percentage of working couples. This was never done. We should have examined the compatibility of these different tasks, i.e. family and work, and how they were shared by men and women.

Today, it is deplorable that the complications surrounding the reconciliation of work and private life, and the difficulties they cause, are relegated to the personal sphere, with the result that we tend to refrain from reflecting on work arrangements between employees and companies.

It is now imperative that these issues be placed at the top of the social dialogue agenda.

A thorough review of the way work is structured does not imply the introduction of measures reserved only for women, but rather general measures enabling both men and women to assume parental duties and obligations in turn. Therefore, employers, workers' representatives, child-care institutions, elected officials and human resource managers must make a big creative effort to establish work hours that not only meet the demands of world markets but also of working people and their families.

Rearranging work is an essential part of a win-win situation for employers, employees and the territory, as illustrated in the following triangle: ⁴



In light of its practices of participatory decision-making, the large number of women employees, its strong rooting at the local level as well as its extensive knowledge of client and employee needs, the social economy could promote these initiatives and develop new approaches and models applicable to other players.

There are many flexible work time experiments that improve time reconciliation and increase the quality of services and productivity. There are also experiences involving flexibility through teleworking. Reductions in work hours as well as time freed-up by holidays are also factors that promote reconciliation.

Employer and employee advice centres, such as those set up by local authorities in a few of the CARE project partner territories, could provide support to companies. But these targeted groups also need to be persuaded to use these services.

Negotiations in the territories between workers and employees, which are based on national law or national agreements in the branches, could include arrangements so that men and women employees could take a leave of absence to care for a sick child or attend to the serious health problems of a spouse or an elderly parent. Such arrangements should be encouraged as part of a new approach to time. They could also reduce the obstacles to women's employment.

Support from local authorities could include regulations to promote such changes in companies including, for example, social clauses in public contracts.

However, reorganising work calls for changes in the cultural practices of both employers and employees.

⁴ TEMPO TERRITORIAL (2006), "Services, entreprises, aménagement : les temps des territoires. Actes des journées "Tempor'elles de printemps"", *Bulletin de coordination nationale et transnational*, Special Edition 17-18 - [www.espacedestemps.com/ Experimenter/doc/EqualBL_1718_Tempo.pdf](http://www.espacedestemps.com/Experimenter/doc/EqualBL_1718_Tempo.pdf)

1.8 DEVELOPING NEW LOCAL SERVICES/CLUSTERS

The aim here is to move beyond changes in the work hours of economic activities and services by improving and developing new services.

To meet all the needs of employees, public and/or private services could, for example, be offered by a central office.

The idea is either to group services close to the workplace or to set up *interconnection points* to dispense services to users. These service points, which are served by public transport (trains, buses, underground and terminals), have become genuine transit hubs with their own personality, where the local population, commuters and employees, converge. If to that we add an urban area waiting to be developed, it would be worthwhile to consider that by "offering suitable services in these areas, such as basic shops, administrative services, afternoon markets and communication services, we could achieve better time reconciliation and time-efficiency for the users, allowing people to improve how they manage their time during and after work thanks to useful services. A better use of public transportation would also be achieved because people would find the services they need without having to use their car."⁵

The services envisaged could be very diverse and include care services for families, particularly for children, the elderly and the disabled; social welfare services, such as legal and tax advice, and housing; day-to-day services and leisure services, including catering, dry cleaning, gym facilities between 12 noon and 2 p.m. and midday markets.

Furthermore, in an effort to improve their brand image and secure employee loyalty, more and more companies are envisaging crèche services. While many large companies have their own crèches, it is often easier for a social enterprise or an SME to opt for multi-company day-care solutions, via a partnership with other nearby companies or local authorities. As observed in Dunkirk, professionals can offer infant care in the home at atypical unusual hours, bridging the gap with conventional care providers.

Such a pooling of services appears feasible and could also be done in areas outside infant care. Once again, social enterprises, whose purpose goes beyond economic interests, could play a pioneering role in the development of common initiatives with other social enterprises or conventional companies. Local authorities have the means to support this type of movement, either by providing resources, such as skills and premises, or by creating a legislative framework in support of this form of joint initiative. These regulations could tie in, for example, with public contracts or the decentralisation of public services, etc.

⁵ TEMPO TERRITORIAL (2006), "Services, entreprises, aménagement : les temps des territoires. Actes des journées "Tempor'elles de printemps", *Bulletin de coordination nationale et transnational*, Special Edition 17-18

These issues will be addressed by the REVES network under the DESEO project (Development of Districts of Equal Opportunities in Social Economy Territories).

We have seen that increasing the number of service offers improves the reconciliation of time, especially for women, but it is not enough to ensure genuine equality between men and women. In addition, while the mass development of quality childcare and reception services for young children, practical reception arrangements during holidays and on Wednesdays, as well as care services for the elderly, do in fact lead to job creation, they may also cause a loss of focus. For example, tensions could be exacerbated between service providers in disadvantaged populations and the beneficiaries, i.e. the people who are able to pay for the service. Lastly, it is not in the interests of the parents, the children or the community to outsource or delegate household work.

1.9 NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

The experiences of the CARE project partners have shown that the root of the problems relating to the reconciliation of family, public and work life as well as access to services is found in the poor coordination of the different service providers, the failure to adapt hours to the real needs of the citizens and the lack of participation structures. These difficulties raise another and much more complex issue, that of governance.

During certain stages of experimentation, some innovative joint initiatives involving various local players lost their momentum and potential owing to, for example, a public administration that was inaccessible, rigid and uncooperative. Even the intervention of certain elected officials was not enough to ensure the continuity of the actions.

It appears that the players in each territory are all too often regarded as participants, executives or producers of projects rather than the co-planners or co-initiators of entire local strategies. However, the re-assignment of responsibilities and tasks at local level cannot be achieved only by agreements and the contractual sharing of services. Like all other inclusive and sustainable local development issues, it requires a new kind of local governance, decision-making and new methods of participation recognised by all the local participants.

1.10 INITIATING NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Any local action under national and European governance and programming framework has its limits. For instance, the best intentions of local officials can come up against obstacles posed by national and European legislation.

An exchange of information and dialogue among the various levels of governance appear to be essential in order to achieve the efficiency, follow-ups and sustainability of any policy and administrative decision that has an impact on family and work reconciliation.

For this reason, European networks, such as REVES, should improve the flow of information among local, national and European levels concerning new and innovative local measures, sources of potential as well as any shortfalls. This would

help to expand national and European databases. The application of real codes of conduct by local authorities and social economy structures, via a process such as SRT®, could encourage other players to follow their example. On the basis of lessons from specific experiences and initiatives, the issues of family, work and public life reconciliation should be included in a range of national and European policies and topics, e.g. public contracts, transport policies, public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility.