



“ Reconciling Work and
Family in a Multi-
Active Society

Beyond policies and practices : ”
questioning the paradigms



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Starting point



- A simple observation: the balance between work and family stays a major issue for individuals as much as for society
 - Almost all countries now agree to help parents to meet the two objectives : to be involved on the labor market and in domestic/care activities.
 - The point is to allow everyone to work for an income: the public diagnoses appear sexually neutral.
 - Measures laid out in political agendas (or within companies) are losing their neutrality in practice.
- At their core, these policies target not men nor parents but women, as actual or potential mothers.



Current impasses




- ▶ We begin with general questions (for example, how to help parents to balance work and family life), but we offer only partial solutions (expecting mothers to earn incomes without changing the sexual division of productive and reproductive labor).
- ▶ Because “the so-called normal work situation was tailored to men who had a wife in the background to care of ‘everything else – children, meals, washing and cleaning, emotional equilibrium, everyday therapy, and so on” (Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*, 2001, p. 58).



To move forward

- ▶ Start from criticizing the organizational and institutional foundations of the labor societies of the 19th century and the welfare states of the 20th century
- ▶ Deconstruct the naturalness of practices and social contracts involving gender relations: the idea of a world centered on production, the assumption of a producer as lone individual (man or woman) but supported by a care-giver (a woman in general), the male breadwinner ideology...
- ▶ Deconstruct the social partition and the hierarchy of/and between productive and reproductive activities, and the gendered assignment of their completion.
- We have trouble thinking of non-employment in ways other than as insurance (unemployment, illness and disability, retirement) or aid (social services) matters.
- A person is called inactive if he or she is not present in the labor market, even though he or she may be deeply invested in following his or her children's schooling, in care work, in civic labor, etc
- When 'we' grant maternity, paternity or parental leave, 'we' give permission with reference to paid work (and not a recognition of a social investment with reference to care work).



To consider an alternative society

- ▶ Starting with new frames of reference to transform the labor society into a “multi-active society”: move towards a broad conception of work emphasizing and recognizing the usefulness of all activities contributing to the well-being and common good.
- ▶ Employment would be thought relative to other activities considered in terms of social investment
- ▶ The progressive construction of a new regime of activities (or work family regime)
 - the status of being “active” would no longer be defined in terms of a restrictive notion of employment;
 - a more inclusive notion of work, embracing care work and civic or community labor.



Organization of a multi-active society


- ▶ Real utopia : movements in this direction already exist (not a revolution but an evolution). To give a better consistency to different existing policies, measures, practices, values... taking into account the societal and institutional context: Norway is not USA!
- ▶ The labor market would still be a key factor in multi-activity, as much for men as for women. To avoid turning multi-activity into a mummy trap.
- ▶ To use the ILO's concept of decent work: having access to employment that is fairly remunerated and coupled with social protection but also it draws attention to the need to find balance between work and the other dimensions of personal and social life. Just a step because it does not yet ensure full public recognition of socially useful activities, particularly care activities in the private sphere .
- ▶ So we need a well thought out policy and articulate it to other existing public policies (in terms of services : childcare, elderly care, etc.) or workplace policies (flexible working hours, teleworking, time savings account, etc.).
- ▶ The formula that already exists in Belgium of 'paid time credit system', may serve as a reference for supporting a multi-active policy (even as we recalibrate and develop it: types of 'time credit', modalities of use, remuneration, etc.).



Social conditions



- Partners of social dialogue would take hold of this subject.
- Businesses and working environments should integrate work-family interface into their organizational plans.
- The State would oversee the support of secure transitions and the links between work, family and citizenship, and lifelong learning would be generally available.



Time credit system over the lifecourse

- ▶ 'Paternity time credit'
- ▶ 'Maternity time credit'
- ▶ 'Parental care time credit'
- ▶ 'Elder relative care time credit'
- ▶ 'Descendant care time credit' (for caring grandchildren for instance)
- ▶ 'Time credit for personal needs'
- ▶ 'Education time credit'
- ▶ 'Civic time credit'
- ▶ Etc.



Several questions of formidable complexity remain open.

- ▶ How to determine the monetary 'value' of work outside employment, without at the same time damaging the 'value' of paid labour?
- ▶ What would be the source of financing for the various types of 'time credit'?
- ▶ How to ensure 'social drawing rights' without destabilising the organisation of professional employment?
- ▶ Would a multi-active society be financially sustainable by the State (or even beneficial for public finances)?
- ▶ Would it be effective and efficient enough to keep going in the context of interdependences between societies and international economic competitiveness?
- ▶ Etc.



Thank you

