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Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work

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Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

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# **Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work**

*Changing social patterns of relations to work*

**Workpackage 7: Conclusions and recommendations**

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Project no. 028408 (CIT5)

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## Introduction

The SPReW project focuses on the factors leading to solidarity or tensions in intergenerational relations, in the area of work. Recent researches raised the hypothesis that the younger generation has different attitudes, forms of participation, expectations and engagement in work than the older generations. The pessimistic view concludes to an increased individualism, but this assumption is not founded on robust research. The project will provide a better understanding of the evolving relation that generations have to work. Such changes have important consequences on intergenerational relations at the workplace, on solidarity between generations, and on the relevance of specific work and employment policies as well as on other public policies.

The relation to work can be analysed through different angles: value given to work, expectations associated to work, vision of the future, relation to precariousness or mobility, more generally the construction of an identity through work and the linking with other key values. A link is also established between the relation to work and other correlated issues: family formation and lifestyles, intergenerational relations in society, social inclusion or exclusion. The gender dimension and the position of migrants are constitutive and transversal aspects of all research tasks. The project also analyses age policies related to work and employment and identifies good practices. The research methodology combines qualitative, quantitative, comparative and participatory approaches.

The key objectives are to draw out social patterns of relation to work for different generations, including the gender dimension; to study articulations with other societal fields (family formation and lifestyles, intergenerational relations, social cohesion); to develop awareness of public authorities and social actors on the generational dimensions in the relation to work and employment; to draw out guidelines for youth policies and ageing policies in this area.

### **The report**

On the basis of the results of the empirical phase and the cross-national comparative analysis, pathways and recommendations are elaborated for a better management of age and intergenerational relations in the area of work and correlated fields. These recommendations and pathways have been discussed in dialogue workshops with policy makers and social actors at national level in each country and at the European level.

### **The authors**

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## 1. Objectives and hypotheses

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### 1.1 *General objectives of the project*

The overall objective of this project is to examine the factors leading to solidarity or tensions in intergenerational relations, in the specific area of work and correlated fields. It intends to provide a better and updated understanding of the relation that diverse generations have with work, and to analyse the policy challenges and implications of these changes.

The key objectives of the project are:

- to draw out similarities and differences of relation to work for different generations, including the gender and ethnic dimensions;
- to study articulations with other societal fields (family formation and lifestyles, intergenerational relations, social cohesion);
- to develop awareness of public authorities and social actors on the generational dimensions in the relation to work and employment;
- to draw out guidelines for youth policies and ageing policies in this area.

### 1.2 *State of the art of scientific debate and conceptual framework of the research.*

The topic of generations and work develops around some dimensions that are considered central to define the relation to work in general and to highlight some specificities of the orientation to work in older and younger generations. A key element is identified in the position work occupies in people's life, summarised into the opposition between "distance" and "centrality" of work (Coupland, 1991; Cannon, 1994; Baethge, 1994; Gorz, 1997; Zoll, 2001). On this point it is important to underline that besides the cliché labelling the young generation as more detached from work and work as less important for them as a constructor of identities, it can be noted that the less central place that work occupies in young people lives may be read as a result of age rather than of generation; in particular during the period of entry into the adult roles young people tend to invest at the same time in different social areas other than work, such as friends, partners and other activities. Nevertheless some scholars underline the more peripheral place of work in life is influenced by some structural changes that must be taken into account such as the schooling influence on the relation/orientation to work in young people. Consistently it has been observed a relativisation of work among the higher qualified young people that is explained with the dissatisfaction for the end of a direct link between education – work and social mobility.

Young generation is often addressed as a generation "in negative," (Diamanti 1999) without distinctive characters and it is often defined by what it lacks more than what qualifies it: lack of sense of belonging, of solidarity, of values and of security together with difficulty in picturing themselves in any future. Yet these stereotypes do not always appear confirmed by the empirical studies and, as often occurs, they fail to notice young generation is characterised by different attitudes, values and knowledge rather than by indifference or disvalues. For

examples the dimension of autonomy and choice gains a new centrality in the young people's relation to work.

The transformations that spread in the work field starting from the 80's—de-standardisation, lean production, delocalisation, outsourcing—and, more recently, the technological innovation and the new competencies required on the labour market, result in the discontinuity between the present of work and a season of work characterised by standard jobs, linear careers, knowledge transmissions between senior and junior workers and by what has been called the perception of a “common destiny” between old and young generations. The rupture that took place in the work organisation opened the path to a diversification in attitudes and beliefs and called for a different regulation of the intergenerational exchange.

This rupture in the work framework is what mirrors in the definition of “generations at work,” which constitutes the objective of the SPReW project. To characterise a “generation” we need to identify peculiar socio-political phenomena that make the distinctiveness of a certain period and the transformation of work is this kind of event that crosscuts the different European countries, despite their specificities.

Concerning the relationships among generations and the elements of cooperation and tensions, scholars often insist on the mid-generation as the more protect one and on the two extreme generations as those who pay the costs of its benefits and security. But in fact a closer observation of the phenomena seems to prove relationship between generations to be more complex and the “balance of power” less univocal than it might appear. As this report will argue, the results of the SPReW field investigation confirm this complexity, showing how different age groups appear to be “winners” or “losers” depending on the aspect we take into consideration (e.g. the older are more exposed to knowledge obsolescence and the young, those who just entered the labour market are more exposed to economical stagnation and social insecurity and exclusion).

### **1.3 Implication for social cohesion**

The main challenge that the transformation in the work framework arises regards social cohesion. Work appears as a key element for the inclusion/exclusion processes but it is not clear how far this processes are influenced by intergenerational dynamics. The first aspect of social cohesion to be effected by work is *the entry phase in the labour market, that is no longer a linear and finished path* but tends to be replaced by a long period of instability that makes life choices concerning housing, family and children harder. This is potentially an area of tension between generations. The “older,” for example, are those who yesterday could benefit of entering the labour market in a period of economical richness and today can benefit from broad social protection and stability, till they are at work, and pensions when they retire. By contrast, the transition between studies and work for young people is today not simply longer but also characterised by “yo-yo” movement: youths may enter the labour market in unstable jobs and may exit it to pursue a new qualification and gain higher degrees; they may leave their parents' house for a period and then go back later on in a unfinished process of entering and exiting from youth to adulthood. This links to a second aspect connected to social cohesion: *the role of institutions of the welfare state that does not seem to be consistent with current developments of society*. The model of social security appears to be overstretched and insufficient to integrate in employment whole groups of population: low-qualified workers, migrant workers, women, ageing workers (who undergo a disqualification of their

competencies) and young workers who are often more qualified “than necessary.”. It has been argued the demand for autonomy and freedom that characterised life projects of young men and women requires new form of welfare and social regulation rather than the complete deregulation of a neo-liberal politics. To provide support more appropriate for the new, diversified needs of workers and to the economical contingency means, for example, to recognise forms of non-market activities such as care and education; to reshape the retirement system and extend the active life; to harmonise life and work times; to find a better balance between security and freedom. According to some more radical views, the present times call for a redefinition of the role of work as the main source of wealth redistribution and social protection and claim the need for a citizens minimum income independent from work.

A farther face of social cohesion refers to the *differences and possible divide between regions and between cities and countryside* and requires to pay attention to social consequences of these differences. Unpacked data about geographical area inside the same country show that different attributions and values are given to work depending on the general level of well-being of people in the area, it is the case of the North and South of Italy, as well as of West and East Germany and of Wallonia and Flemish regions in Belgium. As for the differences between countryside and city, housing problem is particularly relevant, especially because it is strictly linked to the chance of youth independency, of professional mobility and of full integration in community.

Some additional concerns are the effects of the two opposite problems of *unemployment and overwork as source of social isolation and de-solidarisation*. In addition, the *worsening of women place on the labour market* is a well documented issue. Women are more frequently confronted to unstable careers and drop in status compared to the level of education, especially in Hungary among SPReW six countries, their position on the labour market is worsening since the end of the regime and even in the young generation there is a strengthened of the gender division of roles (the breadwinner vs. the housekeeper).

#### **1.4 General hypothesis and key words**

If this is the general framework in which orientations to work are changing, the specific questions the project addressed are *how to characterise the orientation today* and *how to capture the generational dimensions of these orientations*. In particular the project was driven by some general hypothesis built around two pillars:

1. work orientation and generation as the preliminary concepts to shed some lights on by questioning which group of people we call generation and what sort of representation of generational relationships in work orientation emerge as distinctive;
2. lifestyle and family construction and social cohesion as the key elements to consider in order to provide an insight into the problem of generations and work.

The guiding hypothesis of the project are firstly driven by the aim of *clarifying which kind of balance between the two prevailing dimensions in the work orientation*, namely the instrumental and the expressive dimension, characterises the present orientation to work of people belonging to different generations: is there any difference between generations in referring to instrumental or expressive elements to qualify their relation to work? Or to put it more provocatively *is the sharp distinction between the two dimensions still appropriate to understand the representation of work?*

The first set of hypothesis concerns *lifestyle and family construction*, in particular:

- Family evolves- the traditional family model has eroded.
- In fewer families live more than two generations under the same roof, but young people remain longer in their family.
- The integration of women in the labour market has risen.
- There is a risk of conflicting needs between high qualified working women and women with children.
- The pluralisation of lifestyles is likely to increase.

Concerning *generation and inter-generational relations*, a set of hypothesis arises about the specific shape of the relationship between generations; they go from the fall of the classical model of father-son conflict, which characterises the contemporary more permissive society, to the fall of the model of knowledge transmission from “older” to “younger”:

- At the relational level, especially as far as societal values and life models are concerned, youth is often lacking of constraints to fight against in order to develop one one’s identity.
- The generational dynamic can no longer be explained with the father-son conflict.
- Intergenerational conflicts is due to diverging positions of interests in the system of social security.
- An increase in the family-based-inter-generation solidarity is expected.
- The often-feared “war of the generations” does not happen at the work place, nor in the family; speechlessness between generations can be observed.
- At the workplace only two generations meet and more often the mid-generation is amongst itself. The interaction between the young and the old generation is more and more rare.
- The transfer of knowledge between generation has lost its importance due to a number of reasons: the rapid change in the technology of the product devalues experience; the transition from analogue to digital technologies values the experience of the old experts; knowledge of the company milieu loses relevance due to permanent restructuring.
- The mid-generation is trying to isolate itself from the younger and the older generation and to take care of themselves first.
- The principle of seniority is regarded as an unfair preferential treatment and tends to be removed from company policies and collective regulations.

Referring to *social cohesion as a descriptor of integration of individual into societal institutions* such as labour market, school, family and other social networks in the area of sports and culture, politics and organisations as parties and union, religious communities, some guiding hypothesis to be tested emerge:

- The young are more affected by the risk of unemployment.
- Youths from disadvantaged families (immigrant, unemployed, poor) are pushed into permanent precariousness; these young go through poor and not very attractive areas of activity.

- The combination of professional-and family-based demands places great stress on the mid generation.
- The true danger for the cohesion of societies is their growing heterogeneity rather than open conflict: a side-by-side but speechless existence among different generations and societal groups.
- Socialisation through the media replaced the process of formation of communities in political, religious and union groups for the young generation. The mid-generation isolate itself in parties, churches and unions.
- Contrary to the prevailing trends small groups of young people organises themselves in small grass-root movements along political and societal conflicts.

## **2. Generations at work: the evidence of the research**

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### **2.1 The research process and the methodology**

The research process developed into several subsequent steps:

*Analysis of the existing literature on the topics and the drawing up of a framework of hypotheses (desk research)*

An integrated approach has been implemented regarding the various dimensions of the relation to work for the younger and older generations, covering analysis and hypotheses in different scientific disciplines (mainly sociology, economics, psychology, history, and statistics).

*Description of the changing over time of the relation to work, its meaning for workers belonging to different generations , the societal consequence of the change (analysis of statistical data, international surveys' data, qualitative research on the field).*

Existing documents, as national, European and international surveys, have been used together with a large empirical research. Such qualitative investigation consist of 150 individual narratives interviews (25 in each country, involving three different group of ages: under 30, from 30 to 50 and over 50; a mix of women and men, employed and unemployed, employees and self-employed workers) and 18 group interviews, in six European countries. The method for analysing narrative interviews is based on a combination of collective hermeneutics and qualitative content analysis. The group interviews followed narrative interviews, aiming at clarifying particular issues and at pointing out areas of solidarity and tensions between generations. The analysis of empirical material took into account the four investigation fields connected to the social patterns of relation to work: work itself; intergenerational relations; family and lifestyles; social cohesion.

*Highlighting the institutional factors which can lead to solidarity and social cohesion and the ones which may cause tensions among generations (cross-country comparative analysis)*

The cross-national analysis explains why comparable social and psychological trends concerning the changing relation to work are likely to entail differentiated impacts, according to the respective institutional environments and what kind of institutional frameworks are more likely to enhance intergenerational cooperation. The methodological approach of comparative analysis which has been applied refers to the neo-institutionalist theory.

*Providing social actors with useful ideas to manage generations at work (collection of good practices).*

A selection of the best practices targeted to youth issues, intergenerational cooperation, knowledge transfer and active ageing workforce has been realised in each country. On the basis of these examples and on the basis of the results of the empirical research, final proposals to social actors and well-funded recommendations have been drawn out, in order to ensure the European value-added of the research results.

## **2.2 The change of relation to work: how generation matters?**

First of all, from empirical evidence we can try to assess the relevance of the “generation” variable as for the change in labour. As a matter of fact, different generations face diverse historical contexts, i.e. a different mix of socio-economical opportunities and constraints and cultural frameworks. Moreover, they have to share labour market opportunities with former generations: there will necessarily be losers and winners... Anyway, how exactly the “generation” matters, in changing the relation to work?

From our results, we could observe that other variables - gender, education, socio-professional grouping, economical development, institutional contexts - may overwhelm the effect of the “generation” variable. Particularly “gender”, which has a strong influence in the positioning of work in her/his life and also “age”, which drives young people to a more expressive relation to work. Our results are consistent with major surveys which investigate attitudes toward work, such as the European Value Survey (EVS), the European Social survey (ESS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

However, historical and cultural differences among *age groups* do exist, as the surveys show. They result from:

- wealth development, which increases post-materialistic orientation (relevance of the content of work, polycentric attitude towards life, control of working hours, etc.);
- the big leap forward of tertiary education in last decades, which is related to increased expressive orientation as well;
- coming of the Information Society, which creates a huge digital divide between last generation and the others;
- increasing individualisation in the building of identity, which also affects attitude towards work, in the direction of more search of autonomy, self-development self-fulfilment;
- the deregulation of labour markets, which increases job precariousness;
- the women’s employment revolution, which raises the problem of work-life balance and at the same time questions gendered working models.

How far these overall phenomena contribute to create *generations*? In a strict sense, according to Mannheim, “generation units” are a production of historical events: "individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process". They take shape in opposition to the previous one, they become social movements and agents of change through a process of political self-consciousness (Mannheim 1970). In this sense not all the age groups are generations and not all the countries have the same generational boundaries.

In a broader sense, almost everybody agree in considering the relevance of institutional factors -like the education system, the family, the labour market regulation, the welfare state model, the type of capitalism - in drawing the boundaries among age-groups or generations.

From this point of view, with some secondary diversities in the different countries, we can identify three generations of workers being currently at work: people who were born before the end of fifties, people who have born between this date and the end of seventies and people born from this date on.

In fact, in the second half of the twentieth century almost everywhere in Europe a major protection of labour and the maximum of the development of welfare systems consolidated a generation of highly protected, strong and collectively represented labour force (the so-called Baby-boomers Generation).

Later on, following two world petrol crises, the welfare state financial crises and the consequent end of Keynesian policies all around Europe, at the beginning of the eighties came on to the scene a new, more exposed to unemployment generation of workers (the so-called X Generation). In the same period, the hugely increasingly participation of women to the labour market was the reason of a sharp generational transition from a “one-career generation” to the “dual-career generation”, with different priorities, aims and needs.

More recently, the necessity of welfare systems to pay pension provisions to a more and more large population rather than spend money in other social directions, together with the impact of the globalisation on Western economies and the increasing preference for flexible labour markets of most European governments, are producing a generation of more precarious, less collectively represented, less socially protected workers. They are currently defined as the Generation Y or the Millennial Generation (while someone call them roundly the “Baby-loser generation”..).

### **2.3 Three generations at work: a balance of weakness and strength for each group**

Although other variables intervene in shaping the relation to work, from our interviews and focus group generations resulted to be “objectively” quite differentiated.

With few differences among countries, generations are diversely positioned on the labour market:

- Young people (< 30) are more exposed to precariousness and unemployment but they benefit of positive educational and digital differential.
- The adult generation (30 to 50) usually enjoys a stable position in the labour market but it is more exposed to the difficulties related with keeping together career expectations and family care. Especially critical is the position of adult women.
- The elder generation (> 50) – when they are still at work – enjoy the best wages and security and the highest representation by trade unions but they are the most exposed in case of company restructuring because of deskilling.

Moreover, different generations also show different cultures and expectations towards work.

- Young people (< 30) ask for more social protection and higher income but also for more freedom and opportunity of self-development.
- The adult generation (30 to 50) asks for social and company support to better reconcile work and family but also for life-long learning measures in ageing-worker's perspective.
- The elder generation (> 50) asks for recognition of experience but also for the removal of constraints in working conditions

## **2.4 The quality of intergenerational relations: neither a real conflict, nor a true solidarity**

Main objective of our research was to analyse the relations among these three generations, in order to highlight evidence of existing or potential social conflict. A very rough conclusion on this point is that in the opinion of most of our interviewees it does not really emerge a “perception” of conflict among generations. Actually, from our interviews and focus groups we found many arguments to sustain the contrary or, at least, to minimize the issue.

First of all, “age” looks like an “unspoken” issue: although workers were questioned several times on the topic of relation with other generations, most of interviewees appeared not really interested in this subject. We wonder if “age” and “generation” might represent a kind of taboo (like gender).

Secondly, there is no full awareness of belonging to a generation: in the biographies, a clear perception of a social or cultural boundary among generations is seldom highlighted. This applies also to the younger generation of workers.

Third, other factors, which produce other belongings, appear more relevant as determinants of group cultures at workplace: to be a woman, to be in a qualified profession or hierarchical grade, to be an employee of a well known organisation...

Moreover, in some countries younger people do not even share the same workplace as elder ones. In most big companies, due to early retirement plans, the elder generation is missing. At the same time, young people are more likely to stay in more qualified tertiary jobs. Then, especially in some professions a real face-to-face among generations does not even take place. (ex. in call centres).

Anyway, as we have seen above, “objective” differences among generations, as far as working conditions are concerned, are confirmed by the empirical evidence. Then, we should consider the possibility that more awareness of generations may initiate social conflicts in the future. From this point of view, the research interest is directed to understand which group is more likely to be conflictive in future.

### **2.4.1 The relations between the two extreme groups**

The two extreme groups seem to face an identical problem, since both lack of a fair recognition at work. From one side, young people feel undervalued as for their education. They frequently complain about low wage and precarious jobs, despite better education and higher ICT knowledge in comparison with older ones. From the other, old people feel

undervalued as for their work experience. Above all, they fear about losing their job because they are aware companies are going not to consider the result of many years of learning-by-doing as a real resource any longer: as a matter of fact, old workers face often difficulty in finding a new job, as a consequence of the level of their wage.

The topic of “experience” has been much questioned in our project. In general terms, it resulted with evidence that the value of experience has been largely retrenched over years, both as a consequence of relevant technological change and also as a value itself (actually, the value of “innovation” resulted much higher in the work culture).

Anyway, between these extreme groups a certain amount of tension is evident. The reasons may be:

- a kind of incommunicability in the approach to work, due to a relevant diversity in the mix of competencies and especially in the “languages” (digital vs. analogical, global vs. local, etc.);
- the changing meaning attributed to work in different economical and social periods, where different values of work are prevailing: young people often don’t agree with old workers’ centrality of work, while the old ones complain about apparent young people disaffection to work;
- the psychological distance between ages: young workers appear both more cynic and more passionate towards work, while old workers often solved the cognitive dissonance between attainment and expectations telling their work story as a history of success.

This evidence suggests that the incomprehension are both a matter of age and of generations.

#### **2.4.2 The mid generation: the most invisible but the most problematic in the future?**

Except for some countries, like Italy, where a relevant number of workers over 30 still experiment precariousness, the mid-age generation (30-50) is the most likely to enjoy security benefits, stable jobs and good wages. Nevertheless, they often feel threatened both by the increasing deregulation of the labour market (their perception of the risk of precariousness is even greater than the younger workers’ who directly experiment it!) and by their lack of new skills in comparison to younger workers. From biographies and focus groups, they resulted a bit envious both of their older colleagues, who still enjoy early retirement and of younger ones, more at ease in the digital and flexible society.

From the point of view of our project, the quality of their skills, their position on the labour market, their attitude towards work are quite important issues to be known. In fact, they are soon going to be the future ageing- workforce and it is just referring to them that equitable and sustainable policies for ageing workforce have to be created.

Moreover, mid generation is the most exposed one, as for the work-life balance issue. The 30-50 age corresponds to building a family, caring of children and often also caring of elderly parents. From this perspective, adult (30-50) women appear to be the most critical inter and intra generational group.

## **2.5 The change of relation to work in an intergenerational perspective**

### **2.5.1 Are young people different?**

On the issue of differences among generations through the dichotomy “instrumental” vs. “expressive” orientation towards work (Inglehart et. al, 1977), different considerations among partners emerged.

A common opinion on the opportunity of avoiding to emphasise too much the description of this or that generation as the most expressive or the most instrumental has been reached. At the same time, attempts to create precise classifications resulted poorly effective and difficult to be considered statistically representative due to the limited dimension of the sample of interviewees.

Anyway, some shared evidence emerged:

- both the work orientations have been noticed in all the generation groups, although the incidence of each one was different;
- diversity in young workers’ orientation might be either a matter of generation or a matter of age.

Looking more in-depth in the country reports:

- Portugal: the key-variable for classifying the orientation to work has been recognised in the ability of “planning the future”, which did not result to be associated with age.
- Germany: the expressivity in the work orientation of young people does not appear to be necessarily linked to a generation (it is more likely to be associated with age).
- Hungary: many young people (but not the whole) view work as a “domain of development and self-fulfilment.”
- France: young people are “more attentive than the elder to the potential for fulfilment” but socio-professional grouping and high education are concerned variables as well.
- Italy: young people show a greater post-materialistic (expressive) orientation but, differently from France, this looks rather independent from educational level.
- Belgium: expressive and instrumental orientation are present in all the age groups.

In general, the younger generation – contrary to a widespread opinion that young people are more instrumental and less interested to work - emerged as the most concerned with a change of the orientation to work in the direction of a greater expressivity and acknowledgement of post-materialistic values.

Some of the features of their relation to work have been described as: “terrific at working with computers, brilliant as multitasking and very good at working in teams” but and also “having values” (Redmond, 2008). They are, of course, the best qualified generation since history. Although they expect “too much too soon” from their job, they seem to be immune to imposed authority and ask for mutual respect between them and their manager (Henry, 2008).

Also from our empirical analysis, the younger generation resulted passionate to work and having high expectations, both materialistic and post-materialistic, from their job but at the

same time giving great importance to other things in their life (“polycentric conception of life”). Moreover, younger people expect their work and their personal lives to work together: due to the influence of technology, they perceive work and life as seamlessly entwined, they want to stay in touch with friends and families from work, work from home, have flexible hours. Then, they resulted less afraid about instability than the previous generations: precariousness seems to be integrated in their mind as a normal event.

In general, we could observe that people who have invested in education are more demanding and develop bigger expectations of self-fulfilment toward work. These people, often youths with higher education and fewer family responsibility, prefer “work they like” to “safe job” and in the hope that later in the future they will be able to obtain both conditions, they even prefer to stay in less qualified but also less absorbing works (e.g. call-centres) to be free to change whenever they can. According to this view, the relativisation of work is the result of young people greater expectations rather than of their disillusion.

Which are our conclusions? Some change is occurring in the orientation to works, promoting a more expressive attitude, i.e. a greater request for self-fulfilment through work. It is not enough evident if the emerged diversities might be a “generation” effect, meaning that historical, cultural and institutional contexts make the “millennial generation” different from former others. On the contrary, some of the change are certainly an “age” effect: young people are always more passionate, they have higher expectations, they are more oriented to the content of work.

Anyway, neither generation nor age are the only drivers of the change which is happening in the relation to work. Among the others drivers of a more expressive orientation, the most important can be considered education and gender. Actually, both the educational level of workers - which raises attention to professional content of work and self-development – and the feminisation of the labour market – women appear to be more expressive, although they are likely to change their attitude when they have a family to care - significantly increased in recent years.

### **2.5.2 A gender/generation effect: the contamination of gender models**

Common considerations among partners were drawn concerning the relevance of the gender variable in shaping the change between generations. As a matter of fact, one of the most important evidence that has been highlighted by researchers investigating the change in the relation to work concerns the change in the culture of the family and the increasing centrality of work-life balance issues for both male and female workers.

In a general way, the research confirms that:

- Women without a child tend to have the same behaviour at workplace than men.
- Young men are (very) different from old men as for reconciling work and the family life.

Could these new phenomena be considered as emerging signals of the reducing of the dichotomy between the male and the female models of relation to work? As a matter of fact we could observe, from one side, that many young women want to have a career, they are more competitive, they give more importance to money. From the other, that young men - especially the qualified ones - claim better control on their working time and do not accept anymore putting behind their private life for work, especially when first baby arrives.

Anyway, the “female model” is hard to die. In fact, the research points out as well that:

- women’s working pattern changes after maternity, from a very expressive to a more instrumental one;
- mid generation women with strong investment in career have more negative experiences than men in work-life balance;
- work-life balance is even worsening for younger generation of women where they have to face both the persisting of strong traditional values and more employment difficulty after the de-regulation of the labour market (Hungary).

### **3. The influence of institutional contexts on intergenerational relations at work**

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#### **3.1 A cross-country comparison on institutional contexts**

We could have a more in depth understanding of the relation to work through generations by examining it on the background of institutional and cultural framework characterising the six European countries involved in the project. In order to identify what circumstances lead to deal more effectively with different, and often competing, needs of generations at work, we focused on both similarities and distinctions in the most relevant institutions: the welfare systems, the labour market regulation, the education and training system and the industrial relations system.

The purpose was to discover which features of the analysed institutional contexts are more favourable to develop solidarity - or at least reduce the risk of conflict - among generations. The overall objective being to orient well-founded recommendations to policy makers, both at local and European level, possibly taking into consideration the entire social model.

#### **3.2 What features of social institutions may affect the relations among generations?**

Although the influence of social institutions, with few differences, has probably been the more or less the same all over Europe, we may have more suggestions for the results of our research considering each country separately. Only in a comparative way, in fact, we can explore specific cultural and social diversities of each environment and the different impact they are producing in the balance of power among generations in the domain of work: job security, quality of working life, wage, career, etc.

This evidence will allow us first to highlight at which conditions social conflict among generations– or just simple tensions at workplace – might potentially arise and, secondly, to better understand which institutional environment and policies can, on the contrary, foster a greater solidarity and social cohesion among different age workers.

From this point of view, in each country, indicators to be taken into consideration and policies which can be considered favourable to a good balance between generations and fostering the best generational cohesion are:

- demography trends and policies aimed at keeping *a balanced birth rate over time*, in order to maintain a right equilibrium between the State expenditure for pensions and the social security contribution coming from employed workers (while actual longer life expectancy and low birth rates are changing the old-age dependency ratio and threatening the generational justice towards the younger generation);
- employment trends and labour market policies aimed at keeping *a stable activity rate among age cohorts*, both through a balanced flexibility in entries and exits (to prevent the dualisation of the labour market) and incentives aimed at hindering the market trend to prefer central-age more productive workers or at confronting company strategies aimed at dismissal of the more expensive older workers;
- structure of the education and training system and policies aimed at a better *transition from school to the labour market* for young workers, at increasing the *employability* of the whole workers or at facing *skill obsolescence* of older workers (since all these factors contribute to an equilibrated composition of skill competencies among workers of different age);
- dimension and composition of welfare expenditure and policies aimed at a balanced distribution of provisions – both money transfers and services – addressing the *different life cycle needs*: youth unemployment and transition to work, reconciling work and family obligations, giving help in case of dismissals and reduced income, etc.

Yet, also *cultural aspects* are likely to produce a relevant impact on the relations among generations. First of all, the *organisation of the family and its role in the economy*: households management, cohabitation, caring of family members, distribution of employment opportunities, internal redistribution of income:

- a tradition of centrality of the family in the economy, together with poor welfare provisions to young people, compel the families to prolong cohabitation and financial support to their young members (by consequence, both economic autonomy and marriage and procreation time are delayed);
- a culture of centrality of the family in the care-giving, together with little public or market services for families, orient older women workers to renounce to paid work for taking care of their old parents and of their grandchildren.

Connected to this, the *different gender roles in the family and in the parenthood*: they have important consequences, for example on the mid-age female participation in the labour market, on the gender and age distribution of part time jobs, on the company management of careers.

Among other social and institutional factors, one of the most relevant is *industrial relations institutions*: collective bargaining coverage, union membership, trade union presence at the workplace, trade-union influence on public opinion:

- high union membership among old workers is likely to condition union policies and collective bargaining towards the maintaining of older workers benefits at workplace (secure employment, seniority rules) and generous social protection, especially the state expenditure for pensions.
- union involvement in the unemployment allowance administration is likely to promote union joining also among young workers.

### **3.3 Which social model can better prevent the risk of intergenerational conflict?**

Given this framework of analysis, we can try to interpret the situation in our countries and also to give a kind of “*measure of the risk*” for the social cohesion coming from possible future conflict among generations.

From the analysis of the different national institutional contexts, major unbalances in the power of the three generations on the labour market resulted:

#### **3.3.1 The mid generation**

- In countries where a political economy oriented to liberalisation is prevailing, the *mid generation* (and particularly men) – which is the most productive - is going to be the preferred one by employers. Referring to Albert’s analysis of the variety of capitalism (1991), US and UK – but none of our partners countries – should have the higher probability of this kind of unbalance. Anyway, the increasing reduction of State intervention in the labour market (the so-called “deregulation”) may arise this risk – towards the other generations, of course – also in some of our countries, especially Italy, Portugal and perhaps Hungary. In a more creeping way, even in the others.
- However, for the above mentioned reasons, the *mid generation* is experiencing both a very strong “internal” competition together with an increasing weakness in comparison to young people’s more intuitive relation to IT. Moreover they are the most pressured by caring tasks, addressing both children and old parents.
- As a matter of facts, *mid generation women with family commitments* are especially at risk in those countries where both money transfers and services to families are poor (Italy and Portugal). Whereas in other countries, like Germany and to some extent also France, where relevant transfers to families are provided but public childcare is still scarce, 30-50 years-old women are often compelled to part time working.

#### **3.3.2 The younger generation**

*Younger workers* are likely to be particularly disadvantaged in those countries:

- where the state expenditure is more favourable to pensions and/or the unemployment expenditure – which can be considered a proxy of the financial support to younger workers – is particularly low: among our countries, this is especially the case of Italy and of Portugal;
- where during nineties some flexibilisation of hiring – even an overall deregulation of labour market - has been introduced, with the consequent increase of job precariousness especially among youth: this is more or less the case of all our countries, except Germany (nevertheless even in Germany young people are more affected by flexibilisation than other generations);
- where the union density is particularly higher in the elder age cohorts (which can be argued by the progressive lowering of unionisation over time), as in Germany and Italy but not in Belgium (where young people still join unions) and in France (where unions are traditionally less strong than elsewhere in Europe, so they have less incentives to protect the only group of older workers). No union data available for Portugal and Hungary.

By contrast, *younger workers* enjoy more advantages in those countries:

- where the educational and vocational systems are better coordinated and the transition from school to employment works well: this is the case, first of all of Germany, followed by France and Belgium. Especially apprenticeship plays an important role in Germany;
- where youth unemployment allowance is provided: the only country among ours is Belgium.

### 3.3.3 The older generation

The situation of *older workers* can be observed by two different point of view:

- on average, at present they don't look particularly at risk in our countries, given the persisting early retirement provisions in most of them (Hungary, Germany, Italy, Belgium; whereas Portugal recently entered a new perspective). So far, this policy succeeded in compensating the loss of skill and related productivity of old workers (together with the promoting youth employment). While, from now on, it is not going to be acceptable both for Lisbon employment rate targets and for the increasing demand of continuing to work coming from old workers and retired people.
- from an individual point of view, old workers are more at risk of job losses and income reduction in those countries where the natural erosion of their skills is less balanced by continuing vocational training programmes. Among our partners countries, Italy, Portugal and Hungary show the lowest share of participation of 55-64 years old workers in further education in Europe: around 4% vs. the 43% of Sweden (Eurostat, 2005).

Yet, *future old workers* – the mid generation of nowadays – are likely to be more disadvantaged than the present old generation, because they will experience the raising of retirement age with its obligations. This will happen everywhere. Anyway, old workers are expected to be more lucky in countries with a more balanced demographical trend and a higher younger employment.

Analysing the problem of the balance among generations from the point of view of Esping Andersen's (1990, 1999, 2002) and related theories, we could say that, while both liberal and Nordic countries have the (opposite) capabilities to find their own specific equilibrium, to find an intergeneration equity neo-corporatist and Mediterranean countries have to change some of their traditional institutional factors. Neo-corporatist ones – Germany and Belgium, and partly France – need a change just in their corporatist institutions, namely trade unions, which are requested to be more protective of other groups of workers than the only old industrial workers: young people and women (Cohen, 2006). As for Mediterranean countries – Italy, Portugal and to some extent also France – where a balanced social re-distribution is still lacking, we can just say that, in the end, in the re-distribution of the social protection through the substitution of the “external” solidarity among generations with an “internal”, the role of the family works. Even in containing the potential conflict among younger and older people. Nevertheless, the price is difficult to be measured, and it especially affects young people who are not protected by enough strong families.

## **4. Future conflict among generations may occur? Implications for policies**

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In this chapter we will try to draw some concluding remarks and suggestions for policies, on the basis of our analysis of the relations among generations at work.

The project results do not show the existence of a real “perception” of conflicting interests by interviewees of different generations: areas of both solidarity and tensions have been highlighted. Nevertheless, our results show “objective” differences in the quality of work of the three generations. Then, we should consider the possibility for the future that the consciousness of belonging to a less lucky generation may initiate social tensions.

Which kind of future tensions may we expect? Which specific policies can governments and social actors introduce to improve social cohesion in order to prevent such a conflict?

### **4.1 Given this intergenerational framework, how policies should be oriented?**

Taking into account the evidence from our research, institutional and company measures should be oriented at:

- re-balancing the *specific weakness* of each generation group on the labour market (i.e. more social protection for young workers, more retraining for the elder one, etc.), though avoiding the risk of increased future intergenerational unbalance;
- answering the *expectations* of each group (i.e. change in work organisation for young people, more family friendly policies at company level for the mid generations, humanisation of work for old workers, etc.);
- improving *understanding* between different age groups and foster intergenerational cooperation at work (also through the articulation of career paths and the modularisation of the training systems).

### **4.2 The collection of good examples of practices aimed at improving comprehension and solidarity among generations**

First, we will examine the “state of the art” of the policies experimented insofar in the five countries. The empirical data of the SPReW project include an overview of those national practices aimed at fostering the solidarity among generations at the workplace.

#### **4.2.1 A classification on the basis of the “content”**

First of all, the practices have been classified according to the issues they address and to their specific target. On the basis of their *content*, the practices can be divided into four types:

##### **a) Awareness campaigns**

These measures take into consideration the “unspoken” topic of generations. In particular, building awareness is regarded as the prerequisite to cope with intergenerational issues and transform them into an opportunity. The philosophy driving awareness campaign is: age diversity exists but may be a resource for companies and for workers. Awareness campaign

can be articulated in several ways: public debates on specific self-representations of different generations; workshops with social actors to formulate concrete recommendations; financial support to experiences of integration between generations. We found a good example of this kind of practices in the Campaign of the Fondation Roi Baudouin (BE).

***b) Building good relations between generations at work***

These kind of measures are aimed at improving the integration at workplace, especially in age polarised contexts. They may include information sessions at company level; training programmes for middle management; HR handbooks for age-diversity management. We found a good example of this kind of practices in the experience of a private company, the Accor Hotels Benelux (BE).

***c) Knowledge transfer between generations***

These are measures regarding the knowledge management of a specific age group or the exchange of knowledge between generations as the pillar of intergenerational solidarity. We found a good example of this kind of practices in the case of Lebenshilfe in Brême (DE): in order to improve communication and recognition between generations the company decided to initiate a project where young and old employees had to analyse and evaluate each-other competencies. Another interesting case is the project Mother-Daughter in Tuscany (IT), consisting in a mentoring exchange from expert women workers (or entrepreneurs) to young ones.

***d) Job integration, in intergenerational perspective***

These measures provide financial support to young entrepreneurs through intergenerational exchange. Some interesting cases were collected by our researchers. The Audax project (PT) aims at improving young people job integration in the case of familiar enterprises. Other projects, as Hand (IT), were aimed at introducing measures for the integration of young workers in ancient traditional professions. The Wallonie Entreprendre (BE) in particular aims at fostering and sponsoring the integration of new young people companies in local economic networks, while project Missiones Locales (FR) gives personalised help and guidance for young people through voluntary and unpaid mentors (parrain).

#### **4.2.2 A classification on the basis of the “initiator”**

On the basis of the *initiators*, the practices can be classified into two levels: institutional level and company level.

**a) Institutional level, i.e. practices initiated by central or local governments. At this level, practices are generally focused at the following goals**

- raising citizens’, governors’ and social partners’ awareness on intergenerational issues, as in the case of Fondation Roi Baudouin (BE);
- age managing, both in the case of projects targeted unemployed or deskilled over 45 workers (Vuurtoeren 45+, BE) and projects for the promotion of knowledge transmission by local agencies. Good examples are: Knowledge Pool 50 + (BE) where old workers are used as experts for young workers training; Aract in the Lorraine region (FR), which analyses current practices of knowledge transfer in the companies; the German agency Aqua-mark (DE), where personalised and specific vocational training courses and

consultancy for the management on how to handle age and skills development for workers threatened by unemployment are provided;

- promoting entrepreneurship among young people through the involvement of expert entrepreneurs. Good examples are: Audax (PT), Wallonie Entreprenre (BE), Mother-daughter mentoring (IT), Hand Project (IT).

**b) Company level, i.e. practices initiated by company managers or under the agreement of social partners, these practices focus on the following goals**

- building good relations at workplace between workers of different ages, as in the case of Accor Hotels (BE);
- assessing, updating, valorising older worker competencies. A good example is the project of retraining of over 45 workers in Mac-lab (IT);
- knowledge transfer from more experts to young workers sharing the same workplace. Good cases have been experienced by Somague Engineering (PT), where coaching sessions for young people are organised and employers are involved in the exploitation of age and experience; and a project of knowledge transferring from more experts to young in a no-profit organisation (DE).

Practices promoted at the institutional level are the more numerous. In most of the cases they have been initiated by *local institutions* (local government, employment agencies, chambers of commerce, public foundations). By contrast, at the company level we found less practices than we expected; most of them were initiated just by the management, *only few with the involvement of trade unions*.

**4.3 From results to recommendations: useful suggestions to governments and social actors, in order to enhance solidarity among generations and secure social cohesion**

From the analysis of the practices collected in the six countries that took part in the project some general characteristics can be pointed out:

- Most practices focus on a specific age group.
- Few practices have an intergenerational orientation.
- Youth related issues are mostly addressed by practices promoting entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer from old to young workers (not vice-versa) and mentoring.
- Age-diversity management is a considered issue, though most practices just focus on matters of knowledge transmission (not on the idea of age diversity as a resource or on the opportunity of a reciprocal recognition by different aged workers).
- Active ageing problems – including change in work organisation, ergonomics and flexible retirement - are not sufficiently addressed.
- Gender related issues –especially the mid generation work-life balance problems – are scarcely considered.

To a certain extent, there is a gap between the practices we collected and the evidence resulting from the empirical investigation (biographical interviews and group interviews). In

particular, most practices we found have just a limited focus, namely they tend to address one specific generation rather than taking into account the relationships between generations.

Moreover, the practices often shows, so to say, a one-way direction: they may aim at the fostering of the knowledge exchange between generations, but this exchange is mostly from the older age group to the younger one, which results in a disconnection between the practice and the emerging issues of the empirical research, such as the decrease in importance of “experience” (this was as well a driving hypothesis of the project) and the growing importance of “innovation” and competencies of the young generation (IT literacy, language skills).

Then, no practices are oriented at answering young people expectations for a better quality of working life (new forms of work organisation and larger autonomy in working time and space) or to promote a better integration of adult workers with family commitments (more articulated career opportunities, services and benefits for parents).

In general, from a comparison between empirical results and the collected practices emerges an overall picture that conveys a certain dissonance between needs of different generations and actual institutional and managerial practices.

#### **4.4 Distance from the European framework of policies**

*General objectives* of the European strategy for employment and work (Lisbon strategy, EES, EC Green Paper on demographic challenge, Youth pact, etc.) include: full employment and higher quality work, centrality of workers preferences and family changes, gender as a mainstream objective, active ageing and longer permanence at work, attracting and retaining young workforce, reconciliation between work and family, solidarity between generations.

If we look at the analysed practices on the background of the European institutional framework, it is important to notice that at European level the *topic of generations* is addressed mostly throughout the following issues:

- *Employment strategy*, namely by age management and incentives for older workers to stay longer on the labour market; integration of young people in the labour market; training for all age groups to increase adaptability; promoting solidarity within generations ensuring sustainable and equal social protection.
- *Demographic issues*, by focusing on supporting youth, women and older employment combining work and life cycle and by promoting a new pact between generations.
- *Equality*, in particular by means of new approach to age management through mutual learning among generations at the workplace multidimensional approach towards age gender as a mainstream issue also in the age perspective.
- *Education*, by means of the validation of formal and non-formal skills acquired in the course of working life.

The comparison with the European policy framework underlines again some distance between the European agenda and the practices initiated by central and local governments or social partners. In particular the distance concerns a lack of measures addressing the generational unbalance of the social protection benefits (unemployment, family supports, pensions); a lack

of a life-cycle approach in the policies; a lack of practices addressing the ageing workforce in the perspective of longer permanence at work.

#### **4.5 Recommendations to social actors**

Consistently, it is now possible to summarise the main implications of the research outcomes from the stand point of policy making.

We did not observe a real conflict among generations, though possible tensions can be foreseen especially for two reasons:

- the objective working conditions, in terms of employment opportunities, social security and collective representation has greatly changed as for the last generation;
- particularly in manufacturing, the traditional cooperation at workplace based on everyday practice of knowledge transmission between old workers and young workers does not work anymore, due to the sharp divide occurring between old industrial skills and new digital skills.

Moreover, the research highlighted that objective critical aspects are present in each generation (or age group): in particular, also the mid generation faces specific “generational” problems (as for their harder involvement in family commitments), while the old “lucky” ones are the most exposed to company reorganisation. By consequence, every group has different expectations as far as the quality of working life is concerned.

Then, new challenges seem to emerge and ask for social actors intervention, in order to foster social cohesion and enhance cooperation among different age groups. Central and local institutions and governments, trade unions and companies are requested to undertake initiatives and remove constraints in the following main areas:

##### ***Flexicurity***

This is now the main way to cope with young people’s job precariousness and social insecurity. Although they do not always ask for a stable job, they need more protection during transitions from education to employment, from one job to another, during leaves for training and skill updating. Anyway, flexicurity policies will be also useful for other generations when they have to face up to periods of unemployment or retrain.

##### ***Organisation of work***

We could observe both a certain “ideological” opposition coming from younger generation toward the traditional hierarchy based company organisation and also toward time and space constraints and a rather “objective” difficulty to cope with this rigidity of adult workers, especially mothers. In general, companies do not seem to be aware that a big cultural change is coming on, as for workers’ different expectations in the relation to work.

##### ***Work life balance and life cycle***

The balance between work and other aspects of the life is not just a female issue anymore. A good balance does not only call for a new flexible organisation of work but also for services and benefits addressing parents of young children and all workers with family care obligations. Moreover to meet workers’ (especially women’s) career expectations, firms

should adopt different rules for career paths, leaving employees the chance to alternate hard/less hard commitment to work in relation to their life cycle.

### ***Lifelong training and knowledge transmission***

This policy is important for all the generations. Traditional practices of knowledge transmission and valorisation of experience can be useful in some industrial or professional environments. Nevertheless, after digitalisation and the wide spreading of Information and Communication Technologies, skill maintenance cannot rely anymore just on this kind of practice. In the case of elder generation, the obsolescence of traditional skills in manufacturing and the lacking of foreign languages competencies and client orientation in service sector call for specific retrain intervention. Similarly, competencies of the younger generations – especially digital ones which keep changing - should periodically be updated.

## **4.6 Suggestions to different targets of policy actors**

### ***Central government***

Central governors should introduce appropriate social security measures, in the framework of a flexicurity policy that could ensure:

- more security provisions for youth employment, in order to protect them against period of unemployment and low income and guaranteeing them health and maternity rights;
- flexible retirement measures for the elderly, in order to allow them to combine less working hours with full security during last years of career;
- ensure a good lifelong training system and high employability to workers of every generation;
- family service and benefits (paid leaves and transfers to children or not self-sufficient family members) to help workers to meet life-cycle needs and to support more balanced demographical trends.

### ***Local governors and local institutions***

Local governors and local institutions may have a relevant role in:

- organising awareness campaigns on the topic of inter generation cooperation;
- financial supports for projects of mentoring and knowledge exchange between old workers (and entrepreneurs) and young workers (and entrepreneurs);
- creating family services at local level;
- monitoring of the state of the art of existing best practices.

### ***Social partners***

Employers and trade unions at company level may have important role in:

- changing the organisation of work and the performance evaluation systems, in order to increase autonomy, management of the time, self-development opportunities for young workers;

- introducing new tools for the harmonisation of career opportunities and family care for mid generation, especially women;
- introducing ergonomics and humanisation of the working organisation: shorter hours, lighter workloads and improving the workplace environment for older workers;
- contrasting age discrimination, through measures of removing prejudices against old workers;
- introducing measures aimed at encouraging cooperation and knowledge exchange between old and young workers.

### ***Human resource managers***

Specific practices to be introduced by company HR managers could be:

- age-diversity management, inspired to a managerial philosophy which considers different age related attitudes and competencies as resources and oriented to facilitate mutual understanding among different age groups;
- practices of knowledge management, i.e. assessment, valorisation and exchange of skills and experience regarding old and young workers and knowledge transmission in both directions;
- more recognition of experience of old workers, also involving them in mentoring projects;
- designing new training systems and career paths according to heterogeneous needs in different life cycle phases;
- enhance job satisfaction, especially addressing young people's expectation of autonomy, mid generation's needs for flexible working, old generation's needs to avoid too heavy and demanding jobs.

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