

Generations at work: areas of solidarity and tensions

Patricia Vendramin
Fondation Travail-Université



Generations at work
Brussels, 16th May 2008

Content

**A Place and profile of generations:
a European perspective**

**B Generations at work:
towards a generations conflict?**



A Place and profile of generations: a European perspective

Education

Transition to adulthood

Labour market

Social policies

Some conclusions

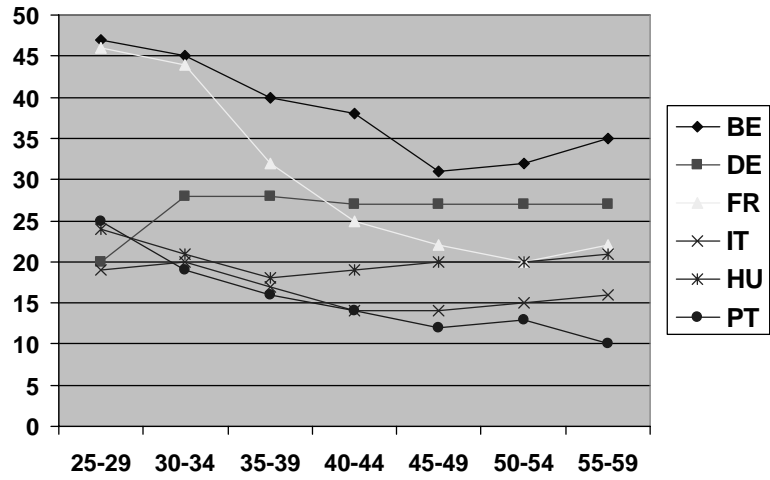


Education

- **Constant increase of levels of education.**
- **An increasing gender difference,
favourable to women**

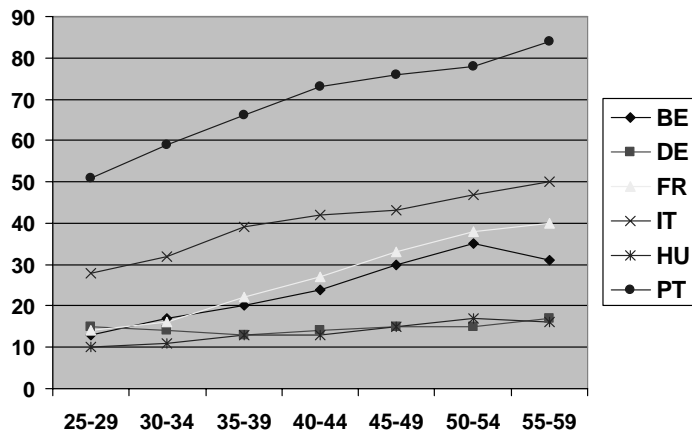
Percentage of population with completed tertiary education (iscd 5-6) / age, 2006

Eurostat: labour force survey, 2006



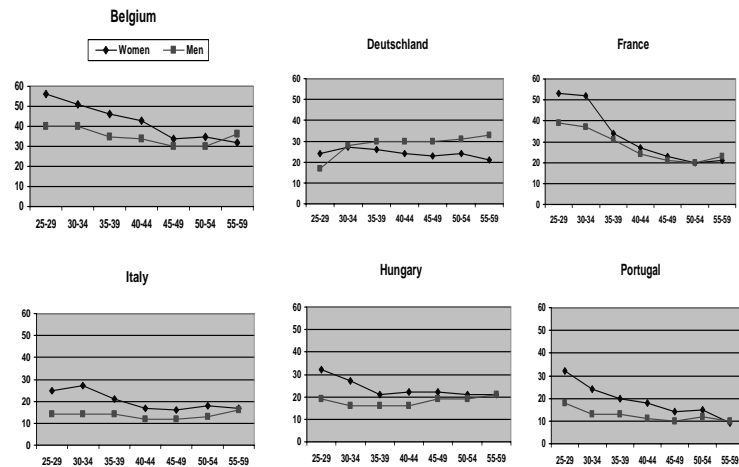
Percentage of population with at most lower secondary education, (iscd 0-2) / age

Eurostat: labour force survey 2006



Percentage of population with completed tertiary education, (iscd 5-6) / men – women / age, 2006

Eurostat: labour force survey, 2006



Transition to adulthood

- Transitions to adulthood are institutionalised through:
 - Public policies and expenditures
 - Families benefits, youth benefits, financing of education, housing benefits, age thresholds...
 - Educational systems and their links with the labour market
 - Strong or weak linkage between education and work, rigid sequences between education and work, reversibility (or not) of steps...
 - Familial cultures
 - Perception of financial dependency of youth regarding their family, more or less familialist societies

Median age for leaving parents (average 1994-1999)



Source : Panel européen des ménages, calculs C. Van de Velde sur les six premières vagues 1994-1999

Transition to adulthood

■ Trends:

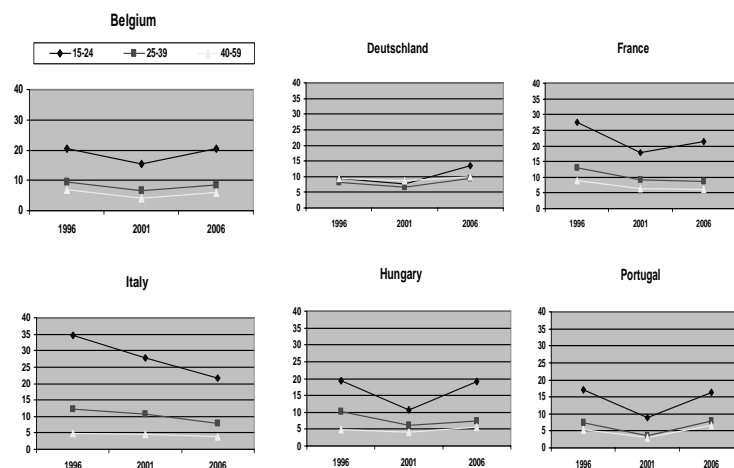
- De-cohabitation comes later when access to employment and status are more precarious.
- Birth rates are lower when access to independence is problematical.
- Articulation between social protection benefits and intrafamilial solidarity shapes access to independence.

Labour market

- Young workers are the first adjustment variable
- Older workers are the second adjustment variable (but their situation is less precarious because they benefit from more social protection expenditures).
- Illusion of a direct link between young and old employment (communicating vessels).
- Women constitute an additional adaptation variable (+ unequal distribution of status)

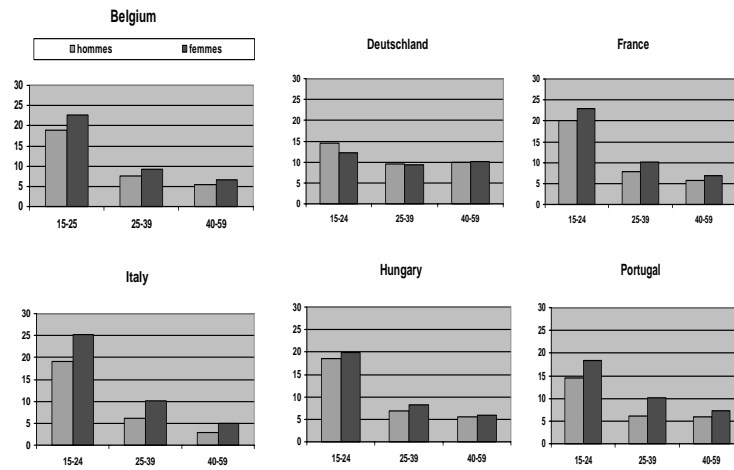
Unemployment rates / age, 1996-2006

Eurostat: labour force survey, 2006



Unemployment rates / age / gender, 2006

Eurostat: labour force survey



Social policies

- They shape individuals' trajectories
- Esping-Andersen : typology of Welfare-States
 - 3 pillars of social protection
 - Family (reciprocity principle)
 - Market (monetary exchange)
 - Public sector (redistribution)
 - Typology of social protection systems:
 - Liberal regime
 - Social-democrat regime
 - Corporatist or conservative regime / continental or Mediterranean

Social protection expenditures 2000

Source: Eurostat - European system of integrated social protection statistics (Esspros)
Reference: Living condition in Europe, Statistical pocketbook, theme 3 : population and social conditions, 2003 edition, European commission.

	DK highest	EU-15	BE	DE	FR	IT	PT
Per capita in EUR							
	9384	6155	6477	7211	6954	5082	2553
Per capita in purchasing power standards							
	7754	6155	6458	705	6748	5943	3675
Social protection benefits by groups of functions (as a percentage of total benefits)							
Older age and survivors' benefits	38.0	46.4	43.8	42.2	44.0	63.4	45.6
Sickness, healthcare and disability	32.2	35.4	33.8	36.1	34.9	31.0	43.6
Unemployment	10.5	6.3	11.9	8.4	6.9	1.7	3.8
Family and children	13.1	8.2	9.1	10.6	9.6	3.8	5.5

A Place et profile of generations: Some conclusions

- Young workers are increasingly qualified compared to other generations
- A strong domination of women regarding levels of qualification
- Age groups are unequally "used" to adjust to cyclical changes
- A differentiated access to social protection benefits
- Labour market models and welfare state models shape individual trajectories.

B Generations at work: towards a generations conflict?

A conflict between generations: reality and fantasy

Generations are different

Topics under discussion

Extreme age groups

Middle generation

Tensions

Organisational choices

Challenges at different levels

A conflict between generations: reality and fantasy

- **In the discourses > an intergenerational risk at work**
 - Why ? / Which ideas support this statement ?
- **Age / generation**
 - Age: permanence of a differentiated perception of ages.
 - Generation: an age group belonging to a specific social context.
 - Illustration though Hungary – Generations belong to different political regimes



A conflict between generations: reality and fantasy

- Denial of the importance of age + no awareness of belonging to a generation = status quo.
- A conflict between generations would suppose that a cohort (ex. young) would be aware of a common social situation, and that the cleavage between generations would be perceived as a structuring dimension of these inequities.
- What can initiate a social movement is the awareness of differentiated characteristics linked to structural conditions and affecting a particular group.



Generations are different

- Generations are shaped by cultural, economical, social and technological changes.
- The main differences between generations concern:
 - The balance between work and the other areas of life;
 - The meaning of work;
 - Family roles;
 - New forms of work organisation;
 - A growing precariousness of the relation to employment and the erosion of the job for life model.
- Many approaches to generations focus on cultural differences.

Topics under discussion

- Attitudes, often associated to the topic "motivation".
 - Aptitudes regarding ICT, as "figurehead" of 20 years of modernisation.
 - Diversification of trajectories in relation to age.
 - Human relations and expectations regarding working environment, social relations, solidarity...
 - Knowledge and ways of working, with a differentiated assessment of the ways of working, knowledge transmission issues.
-
- Position of young workers is the more discussed in each country.
 - Discourses about generations mainly concern extreme age groups.

Extreme age groups

- **Selective exclusion of extreme age groups but with differentiated status:**
 - Widespread economic weakness of young people.
 - Older workers, active or not active, have more favourable social protection benefits than the young people. Exception: HU
 - Focus on the 30-49 (only 20 years upon 45 for an entire career)
- **Devaluation/deskilling of young and older workers**
 - Lack of recognition of experience (older)
 - Devaluation of education and degrees together with an increased level of education (young)
- **Experience versus innovation**
 - Innovation has a positive connotation (= youth)



Middle generation

- **Suspended between the advantages of the old one and the increasing deregulation and challenge affecting the young one**
- **Conscious that they will have to work longer without the advantages of the former generation**
- **Material and professional limits of the chosen career paths are achieved.**
 - The chances of advancement seem low
 - Part of the expressive needs turns into routine
- **Impact on the relation to work of parents (middle generation) confronted to the difficulties of their children to get a stable job**



Tensions

- **The lack of recognition**
 - engagement on the long term, status, income...
- **Concern employment rather than work**
- **Within the same age groups**
- **Between adjacent groups**

- **Mutual stereotypes are resources when conflicts occur.**

Organisational choices

- **Frameworks supporting co-operative dynamics**
 - formalized devices and institutional supports (e.g. mentors, sponsorship...)
 - Mixed and balanced age groups
 - Stability of teams
- **Frameworks supporting distant relations**
 - HR policies that favour homogeneous teams
 - Lack of new entrants; segmented management and professional specialisation by age
 - Intensification of work and relational isolation.

Organisational choices

- **Frameworks open to conflicts**
 - Lack of recognition (rebound effect)
 - Young people
 - Downgrading situations, break of promises (progression, recruitment...)
 - Confining in a status of trainee or underling.
 - Seniors
 - Relegation in peripheral activities regarding the core business of the company
 - Destabilisation of the internal labour markets, breaking in traditional mobility networks
 - Rationalisation of the ways of working and codification of knowledge



Challenges at different levels

Macro level: society

- **The institutionalisation of the economic weakness of youth (below 30)**
- **Doubts on education as the key to employment (devaluation of education)**
- **Lengthening of careers (for pension schemes) versus a labour market organised around the 30-49**
- **Gap between social policies (based on breadwinner model) and socio-cultural changes**
- **No gender perspective - not sustainable on the long term.**



Challenges at different levels

Meso level: enterprises

- **The "deskilling" of age categories.**
- **In countries with strong trade-union tradition, trade unions are centred on the middle generation and the protection of existing rights**
- **A very flexible labour market but quite rigid career models (e.g. DE).**
- **Non reversible trajectories - importance of the first work experiences for the next steps in the career (FR, BE)**



Challenges at different levels

Macro level: society

- **Return to intra-familial solidarity**
 - IT: 60% of the 18-34 still live with their parents
 - Only country that has no allowances for unemployed people without work experience (first employment)
 - Contribution to youth independence but symbolic dependence
- **Appeal to intra-familial solidarity – opposite to cultural norms (regarding independence.....)**