



Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work

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Context of the research

SPReW is a research project funded under the 6th framework programme of the European Union, within priority 7 (Citizens and governance in the knowledge-based society). It is a two years project started the 1st of June 2006.

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 project involves researchers from six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal) and stakeholders (French Ministry of Labour; Social Development Agency of the European Trade Union Confederation).

The quantitative approach (deliverable 4)

This fourth report consists of an inventory of relevant quantitative surveys conducted at the national or regional level in all the countries included in the partnership. It also gives an overview of quantitative survey schemes conducted at the European and international levels. It provides a transversal overview of all the surveys inventoried and points out interesting conclusions regarding the SPReW issues. In addition, this report gathers some quantitative data about each country that support a good understanding of the results of the quantitative and qualitative workpackages. More in-depth analysis of a wider set of European statistical indicators is presented in the third part of the report, devoted to presentation and discussion of relevant international surveys, notably the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Value Survey (EVS) and the module work orientation of the International Social Science Programme (ISSP).

An overview of the large inventory of national quantitative surveys shows interesting results giving complementary standpoints to the results of the qualitative approach (workpackage 3). It shows many convergences with the conclusions of the qualitative approach but also stresses specific findings and complementary issues:

- *Quite all the analysed quantitative surveys demonstrate the dominance of expressive orientations towards work.* Most of the surveys, not all, also make obvious that age is not a significant and discriminating variable in the analysis of the relation to work.
- *They also provide consistent information on the complexity of integration and the dualisation processes.*

- *Obviously, most of the surveys demonstrate more differences linked to gender than to age.* However, despite significant inequalities between men and women, in quite all countries, the gender divide is not considered as more explicative than the generational divide.
- *Only a part of the surveys give information on the dynamic dimension of work situations and trajectories.*
- *At least, most of the surveys provide little information about relations between generations.* This topic should certainly be developed in future surveys.

The analysis of good policy practices (deliverable 5)

After focusing on both targeted qualitative and quantitative empirical information, collected through interviews and quantitative analysis in the six countries involved in the project, this fifth report proposes a collection of “good policy practices” in the field of youth, employment and ageing policies that have an intergenerational perspective and that can be learning experiences. The purpose of this report is to support the transition between research results and policymaking. This overview of policy practices and orientations has been made at the national and the European levels.

The first part of the report deals with experiences at the national level, covering specific fields, and also refers to targeted policy areas: the relation to diverse *work components* (precariousness, mobility and especially knowledge management, in particular connected to the perception of overall organisational and technological changes); the relations between the *relation to work and family formation and structure; etc.* Nevertheless, the core of the selection of good practices focuses, above all, on the *intergenerational relations* at work as a mainstream theme. High degree of attention is paid to intergenerational aspects affecting work and employment trends; to the debate concerning younger workers and ageing workers, in terms of cooperation or conflict; to the challenges linked to intergenerational relations at work in terms of transmission of knowledge, solidarity, career patterns, perception of changes; to the forms of intergenerational relationship also outside work.

At the national level, the report proposes, on the first hand, a classification on the basis of the content: awareness campaigns; building good relations between generations at work; knowledge transfer between generations; and job integration in intergenerational perspective. On the second hand, practices are classified on the basis of the initiator. 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.*

Deep fragmentation in the approaches

The research of good (policy) practices at national level provides a series of findings, which may lead to general considerations.

On the one hand, a general attention to demographic and generational issues connected to the working life has emerged. Institutional and private actors, as well as organisations, both at private, national or international level, consider age management as an important issue. Almost all the Governments, facing the demographic change, have settled several policy initiatives towards the increasing of occupational, economic and social integration as well from the age point of view.

Nevertheless, even the most general interventions have to take into account a high degree of fragmentation of the labour market and as well as of the working society. The outcomes of the research of good practices carried out at national level reflect this fragmentation and its influence on the drawing of possible solutions to occupational and social issues under the generational point of view. In fact, most of the practices appear as mostly disconnected from the intergenerational perspective, and tend to consider age management policies mainly from the standpoint of one age group.

Also, it seems that the fragmentation affecting the approach towards generations is present also with regards to the gender perspective. It seems that the approach of younger workers, as well as older ones, is not gendered. The relation to work and gender are not treated in connection, whatever can be the policy level.

A gap between practices and evidence collected during the empirical investigation

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. 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).

Distance from the European framework of policies

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

A cross-national comparative analysis (deliverable 6)

In order to identify what circumstances lead to deal more effectively with different, and often competing, needs of generations at work, the sixth report focuses on both similarities and distinctions in institutional and cultural frameworks characterising the six European countries involved in the project. 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.

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

The comparison takes in consideration the most relevant indicators which can be considered favourable to a good balance between generations and fostering better generational cohesion: demographic trends and policies aiming 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; employment trends and labour market policies aiming at keeping *a stable activity rate among age cohorts*; structure of the education and training system and policies aiming at a better *transition from school to the labour market* for young workers or at facing *skills obsolescence* of older workers; dimension and composition of welfare expenditure and policies aiming at a balanced distribution of provisions – both money transfers and services – addressing the *different life course 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. Connected to this, the *different gender roles in the family and in the parenthood* 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 and generous social protection, especially the state expenditure for pensions. Moreover, union involvement in the unemployment allowance administration is likely to promote union joining also among young workers.

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

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

Where an economic policy oriented to liberalisation is prevailing, the *mid generation* (and particularly men) – which is the most productive – is going to be preferred by employers. Anyway, the increasing reduction of State intervention in the labour market (the so-called “deregulation”) may transfer this risk towards the other generations. However, 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. At least, those *future old workers* will experience the postponement of effective retirement age with its obligations.

Of course, *younger workers* are likely to be particularly disadvantaged in countries where the State expenditure is more favourable to pensions and/or unemployment. This is especially the case of Italy and Portugal. They are also affected by the flexibilisation of hiring, with the consequent increase of job precariousness especially among youth. By contrast, *younger workers* enjoy more advantages in countries where the educational and vocational systems are better coordinated and the transition from school to employment works well (like in Germany) and where youth unemployment allowance is provided: the only country among the consortium is Belgium.

The situation of *older workers* can be observed from two different points 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. However, from now on, it is not going to be sustainable both for Lisbon employment rate targets and for the increasing demand of continuing to work coming from old workers and retired people. Moreover, 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 (Italy, Portugal and Hungary).

Conclusions and recommendations (deliverable 7)

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

Recommendations to social actors

The research highlights that objective critical aspects are present in each age group. By consequence, every group has different expectations as far as the quality of working life is concerned. New challenges 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* 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 skills updating. Anyway, flexicurity policies can be also useful for other generations when they have to face up to periods of unemployment or retrain, provided a socially sustainable understanding of flexicurity.
- In general, companies do not seem to be aware that a big cultural change is coming on, concerning the *organisation of work and workers' different expectations in the relation to work*. We could observe both a certain "ideological" opposition coming from the younger generation toward the traditional hierarchy-based company organisation and also toward time and space constraints, and a rather "objective" difficulty, especially for mothers, to cope with the rigidity of adult workers.
- *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 course.
- *Lifelong training and knowledge transmission* 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, in the case of elder generation, the obsolescence of traditional skills in manufacturing and the lacking of foreign languages competencies and client orientation in the service sector call for specific retraining intervention. Similarly, competencies of the younger generations – especially digital ones which keep changing – should periodically be updated.

Suggestions to different targets of policy actors

- *Central governments* 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 periods 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; ensuring a good lifelong training system and high employability to workers of every generation; family services and benefits (paid leaves and transfers to children or not self-sufficient family members) to help workers to meet life course needs and to support more balanced demographical trends.

- *Local governments* and local institutions may have a relevant role in: organising awareness campaigns on the topic of intergenerational cooperation; financial support 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, time management, self-development opportunities for young workers; introducing new tools for the harmonisation of career opportunities and family care for the mid generation, especially women; introducing ergonomics and humanisation of the work organisation: shorter hours, lighter workloads and improvements in the workplace environment for older workers; removing age discrimination, through measures of removing prejudices against old workers; introducing measures aimed at encouraging cooperation and reciprocal knowledge exchange between old and young workers.
- 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 course 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.

Other targeted reports

- A **final report** gathers synthesis contributions of all workpackages to the project. It provides an entire picture of the research process and results.
- An **executive summary** gives an overview of the key results of the project and the recommendations that are suggested.
- A **policy brief** points out the main challenges raised at the end of the research and suggests pathways for policy makers and social actors.
- A **press release** provides a one-page summary that gives a quick look to the project findings.

More information

All the reports are downloadable on the web site of the project as well as others contributions of the consortium to conferences and publications.

<http://www.ftu-namur.org/SPREW/>

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