

WP 7 – Social care and Work-care balance (IT)






Project

WORKCARE SYNERGIES was a transversal support action aimed at disseminating previous research results concerning work-life balance, obtained in European Framework projects. Each country team taking part in the project (Austria, United Kingdom, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Portugal) disseminated different results and had a specific program of dissemination by events directed at specific audiences.

Project Objectives in Italy

- To disseminate at local level and to specific audiences previous research results deriving from Framework Programme 5, 6 e 7 calls (documentation a key messages) on social care and its relation to work-life balance
- To disseminate at national and international level such results by periodic newsletter to be sent to selected and interested audiences
- To transfer at local level and at European level the gathered knowledge
- If possible to present main results to the European Parliament

List of dissemination events:

	23.03.2011	IT	Padua	Policy oriented local events in schools
	14.04.2011	IT	Naples	Policy oriented local events in schools
	05.05.2011	IT	Florence	Policy oriented local events in schools
	10.06.2011	IT	Prato	Policy oriented local events in schools
	11.06.2011	IT	Florence	NGO focussed public event
	24.10.2011	IT	Rome	Policy oriented local events in schools
	24.10.2011	IT	Rome	Policy oriented local events with companies
	25.10.2011	IT	Naples	Policy oriented local events with companies
	07.11.2011	IT	Florence	Policy makers public event
	02/03.12.2011	IT	Cordoba	IESA International Seminar
	17.12.2011	IT	Pescara	Public event with Policy makers and Schools

Information- and Discussion Events of the Italian team:

The Italian team, after finalising in the first year the film which was necessary for the local dissemination activities, realized:

- 5 events in total in Italian secondary schools in Padua, Florence, Prato, Rome and Naples
- 2 events in small firms in the outskirts of Rome and Naples
- a public meeting with representatives of the Italian Third Sector
- a public meeting with Italian policy makers from European Parliament, from Italian Chamber of Deputies and from Italian Senate, from Tuscany Region and Local Communities of Florence and Prato. Also some Italian Consigliere di Parità (Equality Consultants) attended the meeting

This allowed us, following this event and the interest it caused, to have a further meeting organised by the Provincial government of Pescara (Abruzzi Region), which is intended as the first one in a sensitizing initiative which will be held in superior schools of the Province during 2012, with a similar methodology to ours. Thus the Province's President invited Prof. Rossana Trifiletti and Dott.ssa Elena Elia to present the project and to screen the film "Daily life stories" realized for Workcare Synergies to students of different ages on December 17th. The project team (Prof.ssa Rossana Trifiletti and Dott.ssa Elena Elia) were also invited to present the results of all activities during the international meeting "Work-family dilemmas across Europe" organised by the Instituto de Estudios sociales avanzados of Cordoba and held in Cordoba on December 2nd and 3rd 2011. We held two presentations, the first one about the results of Workcare and Soccare we built upon in the dissemination activity and the second one about the project's architecture in Italy and its main results. Both presentations are due to be transferred in a scientific publication of the meeting's proceedings, into two separated papers, foreseen in a next number of the ISI review "Revista Internacional de Sociologia".

Internet Links:

General information about the project, local dissemination themes, all events and their contents can be downloaded from the WORKCARESYNERGIES project homepage (www.workcaresynergies.eu).

Detailed information on events held by the Italian team from University of Florence (i.e. working materials, films, power point presentations, summaries of events) can be found on the Italian country page (<http://workcaresynergies.eu/work-care-tensions/>).

General presentation of the project can also be found on the Italian sites www.ingenero.it www.minori.it and on <http://www.elle.it/Sorelle-Italia/progetto-workcare-synergies-conciliazione>

Participants:

Participants to the events held in Italy were numerous students from different parts of Italy (over 199 students) and their teachers (7), 29 workers from the small companies we held events in. The NGO public event was attended by representatives of the Italian Third Sector as well as representatives from local institutions and experts on the subject. The policy makers event was attended by Equality Consultants (Consigliere di Parità) coming from different Italian regions, experts on the subject and politicians coming from the European Parliament, the Italian Parliament, the Tuscan Regional Administration, the town council of Florence and Prato.

Content of the events:

1. Events in schools

All the events in schools had the same structure, even if the team could a bit adapt it to the specific circumstances that were found in each school (number and age of participants, their keenness to discuss). Each meeting was usually between 2 and 3 hours long and we cared to

let them have a discussion paper to read before (available on the website), in order to get them well acquainted with the topics and with some possible discussion themes. The meeting was always opened by an introduction about the project by Prof. Rossana Trifiletti, which explained the construction of the film “Everyday life stories” which was then screened. At the end of the screening the students were divided up into 2 or 3 groups (depended on the total number) to discuss (a focus group methodology was used) on work-life balance moving from their personal and family experience, from the film and other themes emerging from the discussion. Each group was then required to share their discussion experience with all the others in a small plenary session in which the theme was further discussed with the aim of coming to some conclusions participants could feel as their own.

2. Events in companies

The events in companies adopted a very similar structure, even if a little bit adapted to the different environments (time of the day, number of participants and their keenness to discuss). Each meeting was usually between 1 and half and 2 hours long. In their case too we cared to let them have a discussion paper to read before (available on the website), in order to get them well acquainted with the topics and with some possible discussion themes. The meeting was always opened by an introduction about the project by Dr. Elena Elia and then the film “Everyday life stories” was screened. At the end of the screening a guided discussion (a focus group methodology was used) on work-life balance moving from their personal and family experience, from the film and other themes emerging from the discussion.

3. NGO Public event

The NGP public event was held in Florence, hosted by the Istituto degli Innocenti (program available on the website). The event was opened by the President of the Istituto degli Innocenti with an introduction on the event and its theme, followed by a deeper introduction held by Prof. Trifiletti. Reports from Prof. Trifiletti and Dr. Elia on results from the events held in schools followed (available on the website). The initial expectation to be able to host also the students who had been involved in the events in the NGO public event could not be fulfilled since the intense study period within the schools prevented them from coming. Also a report from Prof. Trappolin from University of Padua (available on the website) followed and by comparing the WCS results to other Italian research projects' results gave the participants more materials for discussion.

4. Policy makers public event

The policy makers public event was held in Florence, hosted by the University and specifically from the “Cesare Alfieri” Political Science Faculty of which the Political Science and Sociology Department coordinating the research project in Italy in the person of Prof. Rossana Trifiletti is part. The event (program available on the website) was opened by the Dean of the Faculty who greeted and welcomed the participants, followed by a presentation of the project and its overall results held by Prof. Trifiletti. Reports on the activities carried out in schools, in companies and of the Third Sector representatives public event followed

(all materials are available on the website). Also a lecture by Dr. Maria Piazza (available on the website) followed, who played the role of discussant in relation to all results which had emerged. The event closure was a round table attended by policy makers and coordinated by Prof. Laura Balbo.

Main results emerging from discussions

Events in schools:

Among the most significant themes which spontaneously emerged from the discussions, three are the ones we would like to go deeper into here and they are:

- Gender differences;
- “New fathers and mothers”
- Suggestions for policies

Regarding the first theme, boys and girls seem to clearly know that their future family experience will be influenced by gender contracts – some of them slightly renewed, the most quite traditional – somehow imposed to them from the society and which they only partially feel they fit in.

Those models are more linked to the power system rather than to a shared imaginary.

“It's easy too see it from my point of view, in 16 years that I live there has always be a male Prime Minster. In Italy I don't think there has ever been a woman who stood for election as Prime Minister or Speaker of the House”

“But as long as men have the power, the circumstances won't change”

Family models have a great influence too, either in the form of the models created by parents or the consumer society

“It is difficult, since we are raised this way. They start when we are kids, to the boy a car is given, to the girl a doll, yet ready and boxed... the new Ciccibello [i.e. a doll]... I used to play only with dinosaurs and I never saw a doll, but still... thy raise us this way...”

And in some cases the responsibility of the male privilege is given especially to mothers:

“My mother educated my brother this way... she is used to the stereotype that women in the house... now she works and needs a hand, but I argue a lot with my brother”

The image of the male breadwinner is still widespread and therefore also the one of the woman staying at home with the children (and this is both true for boys and for girls, even if a little more for the first ones and with some territorial differences, in the sense that the model is much more present in the South rather than in the North, with also the paradox that women from the South who keep a distance from the model do so in a more radical way)

This implies also a wider cultural distance which can be seen in the South between boys and girls of the same age, at least from boys and some of the girls, even if are only special occasions, such as our discussions, which make it explicit.

When we ask boys and girls if these models are binding to them, opinions differ, though, in the sense that some of the girls accept, especially in the South, to subordinate work to family, taken that there is enough time for their personal achievement before children

come. Girls from the Centre and the North are rarely keen to accept this trade-off, even because of the family models they grew up in.

Anyway, putting themselves in the shoes of mothers and fathers, the juxtaposition relate to gender roles become much lighter and the need for a better equality becomes more evident: Facing the need to care for a child, a better equality is sought either in terms of sharing duties and roles, either in terms of the joy to be parents, often considering a great shift in fatherhood from the past.

From this point of view a great deal of naivety emerges that, even taking into account the present stereotypes, sees in the future a great deal of opportunities, a possibility to negotiate solutions that everyone will seek on his or her own.

This has especially to do with the education of children:

“Because the mother gives you something and the father gives you other. It would be best to have them in full, not less”

Facing this certainties given for granted, what strikes above all is that youngsters don't seem to perceive a real problem connected to work-life balance and they don't frame the question as a matter of civil rights.

Moreover, it clearly emerges that an anti-politics point of view hides the real possibility to see a welfare system which could really help them make the right choices in becoming parents.

“Also the Government if it would do something it would ask for taxes from us to do it.”

“They [the politicians] only think for themselves – what do they care of those who will come after them...- politicians think only for themselves – it would be enough to cut their salaries...”

Events in companies:

Workers mainly frame work-life balance as a problem linked to the “time” factor. Long hours and rigid schedules imposed by the working environment – especially where assembly lines are involved – are the first constraints workers have to face when in the need to solve family problems. Part-time, as well as schedule flexibility, can be seen as potential solutions, but they still are too hard to be put in place either because part-time in Italy is still too risky (once you get it, it is too often hard to go back to full time if you want to), either because schedule flexibility represents a cost for the company which is often a too heavy burden to carry if we are not talking small and informal adjustments workers put in place between themselves and for very short times, so that the impact on the company's productivity is very low. It is emphasized that in some cases, though, schedule flexibility, especially in starting and leaving work could even turn out to be an advantage for the company and not only a cost. It's peculiar, instead, that themes which are well known in literature and from European research projects such as those referring to the loyalty of employee and the cuts in absenteeism that family friendly policies usually grant.

There are other three aspects which were put in evidence by workers: first of all the lack of family services within companies or near them. Workers are well aware of the costs work-life balance services would represent for their companies, especially since they are small and

medium sized companies, but the possibility to create common solutions, even between companies who insist on the same territory, could be explored, resulting in a benefit for everyone and more affordable costs. An important issue is then the one regarding the hard time workers have in synchronizing schedules, energies, even the intensity of duties between fathers and mothers, between husbands and wives. This is a very important dimension which opens up a not yet well explored scenario, at least at national research level, but which has a lot to do with the issue of quality rather than quantity of time. Working hours are not questioned, but rather the time that is everyday needed to go to work and to return home at night. When this swing takes a lot of time, it is considered to be something society could work on mainly by investing on public transport, even if everybody well knows how hard a time public transport is facing due to the lack of financing caused by the reduction in funding to local authorities.

A lack in visibility and information regarding work-life balance policies and rights is then evident. The educational issue regarding work-life balance matters is frequent in the words of all the people participating in the events, since it is frequently underlined how crucial being well aware of the issue is for everyone – workers, employers and also students - and how important is to be able to recognize the advantages everyone can take from the existing laws and, in a more general sense, to be aware of the positive effects an improvement in the quality of work could have for workers in their private and working life. Making the return from a maternal leave lighter and less damaging on female workers – this aspect was well pointed out also by male workers – could for instance ease a potentially tense situation within the company.

It also emerged how well known is how much easier to take a leave to care for a small child is in respect to take one to care for an old parent or relative, but also how much this yet is and more will be in the future a challenge both for female and male workers.

Another emerging aspect is how hard is to break the traditional male breadwinner model. Linked to all this is also the fact that even expectations and good proposals couples make when they form step back when work-life balance tensions, mainly linked to the difficulty to deal with the sharing of domestic duties on a daily basis in couples where both work, emerge.

It is acknowledged employers can really make the difference, especially in small and medium sized companies, where they have often previously been employees, and therefore can better understand their workers' point of view. Lastly ,a shared awareness takes place that by implementing public services directed to families a raise in women's employment could take place resulting in a positive multiplying effect also at a national level, with an increase in income in the short a medium term. This knowledge doesn't end up in a claim in terms of rights though, as it also happens for students, not even where collaboration among workers or with the employer are already put in place.

NGO Public event

Main themes which emerged from the public event with NGO representatives are:

- Gender differences, fighting gender stereotypes and promoting a more “balanced” culture

- Building networks capacity and working on the forefront
- Managing work-life balance (sometimes even reversed) on the workplace, daily, also working on stereotypes
- Recommendations to policy makers

Regarding the Third sector representatives' perspective on the theme, they often refer to a continuous engagement they have in projects directly or indirectly dealing with work-life balance. They work a lot with students and youngsters in general and the feedback they receive is very good, they are interested. Too often though these experiences are in danger to be interrupted - even where they produce positive results - by the lack of financing and a reduced possibility for the public sector to invest in this kind of projects. Mostly within the Third Sector, the awareness of the need and the opportunity to build cooperative networks between public and private bodies to build more effective interventions together – even on single local areas - is widespread and rooted.

Evident is the ability Third Sector organizations have to “read” the feelings moving on territories, sometimes well before other bodies, and to start working on them, on the edges, so to speak. In saying this we refer to some experiences they have put in place to preserve some themes which are even not yet well taken into consideration by public bodies, such as the protection of maternity leaves for self employed women who are at risk of becoming even more precarious on the labour market than the real “temps” are when we don't adequately take into account what having to deal with a maternity or a burdening caring activity really means for them. The dealing with other people's work-life balance issues by offering services (often care services, such as the ones directed to children or elderly people), thus allowing mothers and fathers, male and female workers to reach a better balance the different spheres of their lives is also strong in Third Sector Organizations daily life. They also deal with work-life balance issues within their organizations, often taking up a sort of “reversed work-life balance perspective” which allows them to safeguard male professionals in working environments where they are minority, such as educational services.

What the Third Sector primarily asks the political system mainly is:

- Not to lose sight on the centrality of the theme, not steering from it as it seems to be happening recently starting to talk about “equality for all” in a broader meaning than – which is certainly fair but risks to put in danger the specificity that has to do with gender equality, putting and a lot of the work that has been done so far.
- To politically and financially support interventions, even experimental ones the Third Sector puts in place
- To be able to listen to other people's experiences, to enhance them and to fully let them carry out their effects

Policy makers public event

Policy makers who participated in the event recognized the importance of the activity and the perspective it tried to look at the theme with. They considered the project both important and original, not aiming at producing knowledge through research, but rather at

disseminating a work-life balance culture, especially among youngsters in Italy. They also acknowledged the value of listening that was put in place by WCS and it starting point. Not only transferring knowledge to youngsters is important, in fact, but also – and probably more nowadays – getting to know how they picture their future regarding these issues, how the imaginary and symbolic word which will influence so deeply their future choices.

It's obviously necessary that the initiatives like the one carried out with this project keep on going in time, have a good structure and able to reach deep into territories such as the Italian one, which are yet so different in their parts, while they root also into the school system. The different results produced by our discussions in schools depended upon the willing of teachers to take up the theme afterwards and to keep on working on it: this also emerged from students' words who spoke during the policy makers public event.

The commitment to support the initiative was spread through different governance levels, even since it perfectly fits into the agendas of both national and international politicians. The needs which emerged during the project precisely correspond to the bill which will soon be relaunched within the Italian Senate - described during the round table – and which aims at level all maternity leaves regardless the type of contract the person holds and follows this way the European directive, and also introducing a mandatory 15 days paternity leave, and also to some local initiatives Regions or Town Councils are trying to implement in order to enhance childcare services.

It's also unanimously acknowledged that all the initiatives which are currently taking place and those which will be set up for the future at local level must be part of a more complex intervention system and thus no only be able to act to their full potential, but also to intersect, laying the foundations of that gender mainstreaming Italy is yet trying to build and which evidently requires a shift in the developing model we are referring to.

Conclusions

- ✦ The integrated architecture of the project - proceeding step by step from the events in schools to those in firms and to the meeting with Third Sector representatives and concluding with the meeting where all results have “symbolically” been “handed over” to policy-makers, supposed to develop new strategies – revealed useful and able to connect point of views and discourses which until now are too separated in our country .
- ✦ The youngsters’ participation to events and, afterwards, to the final meeting was of a good quality, showing how much investing in them for this topics is necessary; however, all this should be done with more continuity and searching a better integration with normal school programs, with the invaluable collaboration of teachers interested in topical matters.
- ✦ In our country, even if it is seldom possible to see work-life balance problems steadily present in public discourse, many people in different circumstances do deal with them, and people of all ages are deeply affected and sensitive to the topics.
- ✦ The richness in experiences and projects dealing with these problems, even if sometimes only small adjustments put in place in families, in the workplace, in the

services world “producing a culture” about them, should be taken into account and supported by the Public hand, in order to avoid to let them too fragmented and unable to be put into system, but rather in order to transform isolated experiences into circulating good practices.

- ⤴ That involves that it's the State as a whole, at all governance levels - and not only sensitive persons within them – who should capitalize this estate as a basis on which effective policies could be formulated: such policies would be able not only to impact on persons' and communities' lives, but would increase our country quality of life and its economic and productivity performances.