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Brief Report
Research Project

Work Changes Gender

**Towards a new organisation of men's lives
emerging forms of work and opportunities for
gender equality**

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Interim Report Summary of the Research Project

The project Work Changes Gender is supported with funds from the 5th European research master program. Research teams in six European countries are dealing with the actual changes in male working conditions, their interrelation with a changing male self-assessment, and the hereby evolving chances for the equality of sexes. The erosion of standard forms of work implies, that the “traditional“ picture of the breadwinner does no longer correlate with reality for most men. Which new relationships in employment replace the old model? Can a change of “models of man“ keep up with a changing labour market? Work Changes Gender gains information on Europe-wide labour market-policies and socio-political developments and behavioural patterns to cope with these changes. In addition perspectives for a supportive social and political work are to be evaluated.

Work Changes Gender

The world of labour is going through rapid changes: in Berlin only every third man is “classically“ employed. The research project : Towards a new organisation of men’s lives – emerging forms of work and opportunities for gender equality, in short: Work Changes Gender is concerned with these current changes in male concepts of life.

In an international comparison the upheavals, and, therefore, the change in male self-assessment and the possibilities for gender equality are analysed.

Main Areas of Research

The analysis is divided in three main areas of research:

1. “New Forms of Labour and Gender Differentiation“

The first part of the study is concerned with social conditions: An investigation of the different European labour markets will explain the actual trends in development and the actual situation. The goal is to show the unequal working conditions for men and women and to become aware of changes in the labour markets.

2. “The Organisation of Time in Male Life -new institutional models“

In a second step we examine the structural conditions on an internal company level, that either foster or hinder new forms of socially secure labour. A special focus is put upon those companies and branches of trade that expect a high degree of flexibility and self-determined time management from their employees. What perspectives of a new „working-culture“ for men can be seen?

3. “Ways of a new positioning of men“

To identify possibilities that put men in a position to deal constructively with breaks and insecurities, occupational biographies are analysed on an individual level. By interpreting in-depth interviews, a greater understanding of how men understand their changing role in society. Furthermore we ask for ways to support men in these processes of change.

”Man Becomes Human Through His Occupation“

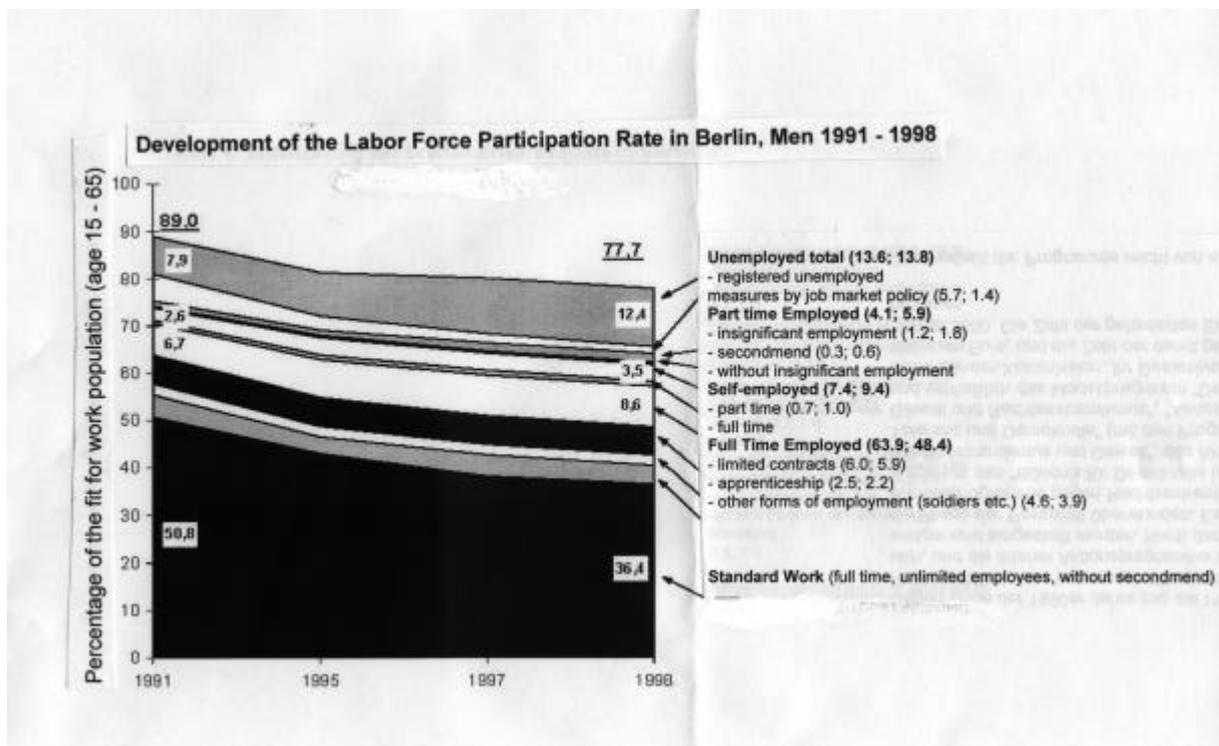
This rather proud sentence by the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel leaves us with a stale taste today: there is no alternative to their occupation for many men. Traditional (19%) and pragmatic (26%) men base their identity on paid employment. Many insecure men (37%) feel the same; only for new men (20%) other parts of life are of a higher relevance (Paul Zulehner, Rainer Volz, researchers on masculinity). And many men, who tried to set other emphasises in their lives, got stuck with their occupation (Wassilos Fthenakis, researcher on family).

No matter what: careerist or breadwinner - the predominant concepts of masculinity in society are based on labour. But it is not only about making a living; the predominant ways of structuring time, the mediation of social contacts, the allocation of prestige and status, the confrontation with reality, and self-esteem are based on labour.

The development of identity via occupation seems hard to conceive without continuous and secure labour. The rate of employment for men is about 80%, for women 62% in former West Germany and 72% in former East Germany (Christina Klenner, sociologist). And only 10% of the men have a smaller contribution to household-income than their partners (Emnid-Bus questionnaire).

The vanishing of standard work

The number of “fit for work“ men with an permanent fulltime job decreases all over Europe. Berlin represents a particularly good example: Only one third (32,3%) of men are employed in an unlimited fulltime job. Only soldiers and civil servants work under similarly protected conditions.



¹ Heidi Oschimansky, Günther Schmid: Wandel der Erwerbsformen Berlin und die Bundesrepublik im Vergleich, Discussion Paper FS 1 00–204, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung 2000

All over Germany less than half of the men work in “secure“ jobs. Many other men work part time, with fixed-term contracts, or self-employed. They find themselves in uncertain labour conditions, with discontinuities in employment and low wages or with no work at all.

“In times of rapid change, men are hit by their weak spot: The central definition of a male life loses its basis, if labour is more and more socially devaluated or vanishes all together. The social cleavage between winners and losers of this process intensifies.“

Hans-Joachim Lenz, researcher on men

Under which circumstances can people - either individuals or organisations - deal with these breaks? Work Changes Gender is looking for an answer to this question.

Blind Spots in Gender Equality Processes

“How important it is that women can reconcile children and career, I can hear every day. At home.“

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Social democratic election campaign poster 2002

The perception of men and masculinity in the field of gender equality - despite all differences in the participating partner-countries - seems to show some common blind spots:

■ Men are not perceived as special target group for gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming politics is often identified with only affirmative action towards women. It still seems to be taken for granted that only women have a problem with this reconciliation whilst men identify themselves through their occupation. Only on a mediate level men are involved in fostering the acceptance of women's equality of opportunities, e.g. helping women to get into “male“ occupations or positions. Men's participation in upbringing or housekeeping is not demanded on behalf of the men: It is only seen as “easing the burden“ for women. Large parts of equity oriented policies go past the interests and problems of men. In this perspective men seem to be “strategic objects“ in an equity oriented policies which focus on women.

Experiences from former GDR and FRG show that different models of working and concepts of life do not automatically lead to different models of masculinity.

In the old FRG the model of the (male) breadwinner and the (female) co-earner was dominant, while the double income model was established in the GDR. But this did not lead to a increased male involvement in child care. This task was split between women and official care-institutions. Today men can rely on legislative or company regulations when being involved in child care, but they experience no support on a “cultural level“. Exceeding the equity oriented policies up until now, alternatives that overcome the classic models of masculinity must be made more attractive.

■ **Not enough emphasis is put on informal “working culture“ in organisations**

A culture of work according to principles of male bonds hinders an advancing equity of gender in organisations, companies, and administrations. This culture shows in the management of companies through informal exclusion, hidden rules, that only hand-picked persons get introduced to the subordination of all social contacts under the premises of the job, and by a strong representation of these male leagues to the outside. A predominant working culture like this one thwarts not only occupational advancements for women and non-conformist men. It also affects the common understanding of achievement, the occupational dealing with time, kinds of hierarchy, and the estimation and valuation of different occupations and works. Concepts of masculinity, that concentrate on occupation and career, and be it as a breadwinner for a family, are strengthened with this culture of work. This status quo is also preserved by the fact that most men do not perceive inequity and discrimination based on gender - a “non-perception“ that is driven by interest,

■ **Subjective experience of the decision-makers are to rarely discussed..**

The individual experiences of decision-makers are crucial to the question if they are able to see other than male concerns in their decisions. Hereby managers have a great influence on decisions concerning the question, whether a new informal working culture can arise next to formal rules and principles of reconciliation. This culture would acknowledge for men and women, that raising children for fifteen or more years requires occupational flexibility.

The manager of a larger Austrian company explained, that he preferred to hire persons with children, because of the social responsibility of the company. He himself had been on educational leave before he started working in that company. But in most companies the personnel managers have no understanding for men who want less working hours: *“You want to work less? Well - don't you have a wife that can care for your children?“*

■ **Political or operational regulations are almost always related to standard working structures**

While persons working part-time are at least sometimes included in agreements and regulations concerning equality, those working on different forms of fixed-term contracts are hardly ever taken into account. The fact, that working contracts are often fixed-term, is not yet an issue in politics. In science, fixed-term working contracts are still looked upon as a transitional phase between vocational training and job, which leads to an unlimited working contract or to marriage and being a “housewife“. Freelancers are not seen as members of the organisation and are not included in program fostering equality, although working in the organisation on a continuous level.

The radical changes in the labour market seem to indicate that interruptions in employment, fixed-term working contracts, and part-time work are not only to be found in the transition from between school/university to occupation. *Work Changes Gender* is furthermore of the opinion that the present changes of the forms of work point further: Non-standard forms of work can become a permanent condition for more and more men and women.

The Influence of the Upbringing on Having a Unlimited Full-Time Job

A study on the transition from education to occupation in France was evaluated by Work Changes Gender. The results lead to the conclusion that boys and girls have different parental support in their occupational choice.

■ Juveniles who live longer with their parents, tend to take longer time for the different steps it takes to get a full-time job. Of the male adolescents with a lower educational level, 60% lived in the parental house for three years after being out of school, while only 38% of the females stayed with their parents for that long. With a higher educational level, this difference decreases.

■ Young women leave the parental house earlier. Women leaving their parental home have a higher chance to get an unlimited job than men.

■ Girls and woman with the worst relations to their families show the highest probability in getting “only” a fixed term job.

■ Half of those who found a job immediately after completing their vocational training, stayed with their parents for the longest part of the three years, 19% left the parental house to live with a partner, 18% to live alone. (Said Hanchane, economist)

The residence time in the parental house differs with gender, and this residence time, on the other hand, has a significant impact on the chance to achieve a full-time job. The educational level of the father has no influence.

Could it be that sons, due to the decreasing securities on the labour market, keep living in the “Hotel Mama” - by which their chances to find a job increase - until they find a partner? On the other hand, the daughters chances to find a job increase the earlier they leave the parental house and take a step towards individual autonomy.

The arbitrary access to (male) working power is taken as given

“There is still a culture of working more - that is, between 12 and 14 hours, six days a week - rather than less in the company. This working culture shows especially in the research-department and on the management level.”

(Works council’s member in a big German company)

“Only the one whose light still burns late at night takes steps on the career ladder.”

(Christine Bergmann, former German Minister for Family Affairs)

“This also shows in not using the parental leave. Nowadays the children are sent into company own kindergarten and parents work fulltime.”

(Work council member of a large chemical manufacturer, Germany).

50% of the men say that parental leave would have a negative impact on their career.

(IAB-Report 2001, Research Institute of the German Employment Office)

“Anybody who wants to move up on the career ladder here has to spend some time abroad. This applies mainly to the scientific staff. And here also it is mostly men that decide to take this step.”

(Female works council member in a large company)

But these critical voices also overlook that the predominant identification with the job is closely related to overcome conceptions of masculinity:

„Men who say: I want to go on parental leave, so that my wife can reconcile work and family, are told by their colleagues: If you are not ready to sacrifice your family, you are not a real guy, and we can not entrust this job to you.“

(Michael Kimmel, researcher on masculinity and sociologist, USA)

Outbreak Fantasies: Crossing the Atlantic

Concerning the experiences of working time-counsellors, men and women wish, and chose, different working time-models to reconcile private and professional life.

Women rather prefer working time-models, which guarantee the simultaneous implementation of labour, household, family, and spare time. Many men would rather look for working time-models that give them a chance to leave the „working world“ behind from time to time. The satisfying reconciliation between tasks concerning labour and private life is warranted via a „one after the other“, a kind of a sequence serial model, for those men.

Those men were denoted as “Atlantic crossers“ by working time counsellor Dirk Mescher (Hamburg, Germany).

They want to do “something completely different“, drop out for a while and fulfill childhood dreams. Mostly they want to ease the burden of the working situation and the living situation they are in. This situation is experienced as overstressed by those men, and therefore they want to escape it. On the other hand solutions to help fulfill daily duties (e.g. reduction of working hours) do not emerge.

“I'd wish to go away for a year or longer - with my family one year in a bus. Travelling, travelling, travelling - this would be my biggest wish, just unwinding from the mad rush and the circumstances. Sometimes I wish I had a totally different life, but later, not now - and then, someday I would do something completely different.

(Stephan G., Graz, Austria)

“My dream is to be a self-employed writer. To have the power of disposition over time. Not only over all the spare time I have now, but completely.”

(Jörg V., Graz)

Why are these wishes transferred to reality in the fewest cases?

Reconciliation is also important for men

First evaluations of the interviews with men show that some men do not only desire working times that guarantee reconciliation of daily duties, but they also put these interests in practice:

“Maybe I want to start one of those two year Wifi-classes. This is a EDP-fundamentals training. The Advantage is, that it is in the evening. Well, it is easier for me than to find somebody to look after the kids. Except Fridays, when the class would start at 2 p.m. But then I could talk with my mother, so she won't have any appointments then.”

(Gerd, single parent, Graz)

“You said that you do not want to be bound around the clock. Why not?”
“Because I have a private life and private interests. Because I'm not only interested in work, but also in other things. I'm interested in a private life - that's a family life in that sense. Relationship. I'm interested in art. I'm interested in literature. I need time to think. Because the work I do, what I accomplish is - of course - a question of time. And if I'd work as a jurisperit again with 60 to 70 working hours a week, if I would work as a lawyer, I wouldn't have all that. Everything would circle around work. That is not it. I think I would become stunted.”

(Renè K., Graz)

Work Changes Gender presumes that men are able to start working according to their own exceptional time requests under a special condition:

at the point, when they can perceive their own routine needs and musts without limitation through an inflexible self concept.

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Contact

- Dissens e.V.
Allee der Kosmonauten 67
D - 12681 Berlin, Germany
fon: +49 (0)30 54 98 75-30
fax: +49 (0)30 54 98 75-31
<http://www.dissens.de>
research@dissens.de
Marc Gärtner M.A., Prof. Dr. Stephan Höyng, Dr. Ralf Puchert,
Soz.-Wiss. Vera Riesenfeld, Dipl.Soz.-Wiss. Klaus Schwerma
- Catholic University, Berlin, Germany
Prof. Dr. Stephan Höyng: hoeyng@kfb-berlin.de
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Dept. Economia Aplicada, Edifici B, Campus Universitari S/N
08193 Bellaterra, Spain
<http://www.uab.es>
Dr. Xavier Ramos: Xavi.Ramos@uab.es
- University of National and World Economy
Centre for Social Research and Human Resources Development
Student town "Hristo Botev"
1100 Sofia, Bulgaria
<http://www.unwe.acad.bg>
Prof. Margarita Atanassova: matanass@mb.bia-bg.com
- Arbeitsforschingsinstitutet (Work Research Institute)
Stensberggt.29
0034 Oslo, Norway
<http://www.afi-wri.no/index.htm>
Dr. Øystein Gullvåg Holter: oeholter@online.no
- Bar Ilan University Department of Economics
52900 Ramat Gan, Israel
<http://www.biu.ac.il>
Prof. Jacques Silber: silberj@mail.biu.ac.il
- Männerberatungstelle Graz
Bischofsplatz 1/1
8010 Graz, Austria
<http://www.maennerberatung.at>
Christian Scambor: scambor@maennerberatung.at