

## Mediterranean perspectives on reconciling family and work, 1965-1995

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### 1. Background

This project has been conceived primarily as a comparative study of the recent processes of family change in three South European countries- Greece, Italy and Spain- during the Second Demographic Transition. Since the 1960s family and the institution of marriage in European societies have both been immersed in a process of profound changes where a number of different dimensions of the transformation of the socio-economic and cultural reality converge. Since 1965, a reduction in the fertility rate and an increase in the divorce rate has taken place in most European countries, at the same time women entered the labour market with a varying intensity and timing across Europe. Further investigation of these issues is important for two reasons. Since the start of the Second Demographic Transition, Mediterranean countries have shown a number of interesting singularities, suggesting the existence of a 'Mediterranean model' as a different pattern from those observed elsewhere in Europe. Within its characteristics there were two basic fronts where demographic and family situation in the South looked different: fertility decline and women's participation in paid employment. While there was a late but sharp decline in fertility levels in the three countries, participation of women in paid employment remains the lowest in Europe. But how can we explain these differences of the Mediterranean countries? Do they respond to differences in timing or in the pattern? The study's main hypothesis will be that these differences from other European countries and regions were mainly due *to reasons of pattern*, therefore highlighting the existence of a "Mediterranean model" and, that it is especially the different characteristics of the role of women in these societies and their relation to formal work and family responsibilities that seem more important in the shaping of the behaviour observed during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Policy making in respect to benefits towards working mothers and the family is weak in south European countries. For most of the southern women it would be impossible to reconcile family and work if they rely solely in benefits or welfare provisions. These are only a small part in women's network and available resources for taking care of children, family and work. The project will try to draw several implications for policy making, such as meanings of work for women of three southern countries, types of work that are shown to have been more 'friendly' to women, southern women's patterns of work in terms of continuation, withdrawal and/or interrupted employment, as well as life course related work/family frames based on changing demographic and family trends. Finally, an attempt to show that common policy

may generate quite different reconciliation systems, which are supported by common forms family organisation.

## **2. The theory/ questions/approaches**

" The first research need is to expand and develop the research literature within the Southern countries of Europe. The different historical experiences of women within these countries would add to our understanding of the developing gender order in Europe" (J. Plantenga and J. Rubery: Women and Work, DG Employment and Social Affairs, 1999, p.4)

One of the principal tasks addressed in this study is to show the interaction between work and family in times of transition, at the same time it will highlight the particularities of a specific region of Europe that of the Mediterranean area. In respect to women's participation into the labour market one can speculate that it is the particular ways in which women develop reconciliation strategies to combine both responsibilities that will show the role of family and state in changing labour market participation, as well as how are these conditioned by gender representations within and outside the workplace. We will therefore establish as a main question for this study to look at *how did the "two-roles" model fit into south European women's lives*. As "two-roles" model we take that established by earlier literature when describing the two roles that women adopt when raising children and caring for a family at the same time they are engaged in paid employment (Myrdal and Klain, 1956). Such a model has produced interesting debates on female labour participation, as it has been associated usually both with family related events and labour market structures. Constrains that women faced in order to maintain their jobs, as well as the conflict that women faced for reconciling both roles, are important aspects to consider for policy making.

Until recently, there has been a limited research on the role of the welfare state in the southern countries. The absence of research has in part reflected the relatively weak development of the state welfare systems and the invisibility of the southern countries in the typologies of Esping-Andersen. These problems have been reflected in some studies which include a specific Mediterranean model, in which family is the breadwinner, a classification which fits with Betio and Villa's hypothesis of the emergence of a Mediterranean path to the emancipation of women. While the EU Commission has played an important role in stimulating research on the position of women in the labour market, there is now a need to complement such research with more conceptual thinking and policy analysis.

## **3. Design/ methods/data**

There are three countries to be compared in the project, Greece, Italy and Spain, during three decades at the end of the twentieth century. These countries have been selected because of many similarities in the ways that demographic and family changes occurred during the period of study, but also because within their similarities there are important differences that through more light to the Mediterranean case. These three countries have been characterised

as 'traditional' for the greater part of the period under consideration as resulted from analysis of basic demographic indicators (marriages, divorces, cohabitation, births out of marriage, etc) and other forms in family change. Yet, these countries have shown to follow different trends in female participation in paid employment, as well as a different way of dealing with 'traditionality' through gender orders, both in the world of work as well as in the family sphere.

The period of study, i.e.: 1965-1995, has been initially selected because it offers a general frame of a transition period both in terms of politico-economic reforms, as well as in terms of a demographic transition. In these aspects the three countries have had similar but also different experiences. Institutionally the study also considers the importance of an EC level, which after the mid-1980s has given the opportunity for common objectives in policy making issues and therefore for comparative studies of that kind.

Data are to be obtained in various forms. Qualitative data are required both for descriptive statistics of demographic events and labour participation during the last three decades, as well as for analysis of attitudes and generational comparisons through surveys. On the other hand, qualitative data, obtained with the use of semi-structured interviews with various age groups of working women, are of great importance for showing the different reconciling strategies among southern women as well as the various meanings that work and paid employment has for women of different birth-cohorts. What this part will hopefully illustrate is that aspirations and everyday practice are heterogeneous and complex, even within a supposedly similar cultural context.

For the project we will make use of:

- Labour Force Survey (LFS),
- Demographic series published by Eurostat,
- Family and Fertility Survey (FFS, approved by UNECE)
- qualitative data obtained from 60 semi-structured interviews with southern women (ask for plan of interviews and sample criteria)

### **Bibliographical References**

-Rubery et al, 1996: Trends and Prospects for Women's Employment in the 1990s. Report of the European Commission's Network of experts on the Situation of Women in the Labour Market.

-Bettio and Villa, 1996: A Mediterranean Perspective on the break-down of the relationship between participation and fertility, Discussion Paper, no 5, Universita di Trento.

- Women and Work, DG Employment and Social Affairs, 1999.