

TIME BALANCING IN FRANCE

Time policies in France today are based on the idea that the inhabitants of a town all have different life rhythms, and these differences can sometimes engender or create inequalities because accessibility to city services can be compromised. The aim of the city of Paris *Time Office* is to analyse the differences between the life rhythms of Parisians and the services offered by the city in order to better adapt these services to people's life rhythms and to provide specific solutions to facilitate access to the city's services. Reflection and action are taking place regarding time balancing, and the Time Office is in close collaboration with the city of Paris Observatory of Female/Male equality on this subject.

Some French historical information to place the time balance debate in context :

From as early as the 70s, French public policies developed facilities for young children aged from 0 to 6, in order to accompany the massive arrival of women into the labour market. Community crèches multiplied. In the 80s, with the employment crisis, the public authorities encouraged having children looked after at home by means of tax deductions to favour the taking on of staff at home.

These measures led to particularly remarkable consequences compared with the rest of Europe. French women today combine an employment rate of 80% between ages 20 and 50 (of whom 70% full-time) and fertility amongst the highest in Europe.

A paradox persists in public policies on equality :

- **Childcare facilities are offered, and city time policies enable services to be better adapted to users' needs**, thanks to *Time Offices* which create dialogue between all the players affected in the city.

- Yet **measures are taken which go against the management of time and professional equality**, such as the parental education allocation (PEA) which proposes an income of 741 euros to one of the parents who wishes to stop work to bring up his/her child for the first 3 years. Yet nothing is done to encourage fathers to take this leave. **Women, who more often than not have the lowest salary in the household, are giving up their jobs** to get this type of assistance. (98% are women, 2% are men). Yet this measure has significant, negative consequences

when it comes to going back to work at the end of this period. A large number of women then remain out of active work.

Furthermore, **the part-time work widely developed in the 90s has never sought to reconcile social time**, but instead to reduce the raging unemployment in France. Yet this way of working is today, more often than not, associated with unusual hours, far from being suited to the constraints of family life. If we want to move towards greater equality between women and men, and if the public authorities want to help women and men to balance the various social time, one of the objectives could be to limit part-time work to “restricted” hours.

The arrival of the 35 hour week :

Since the arrival of the 35 hour working week in France, **39% of beneficiaries believe that this has improved their balance** between their professional life and “family life”, this expression not meaning merely the presence of children. For **46%**, however, **it has not changed anything**, and for 15%, it has even made this balance worse.

When French people are asked about the impact of the 35 hour week on their professional and family life, the most frequent responses are of the type “it’s deteriorated the quality of my work, but the quality of my personal life has improved”. **For 30% of employees, the introduction of the 35 hour week is responsible for a deterioration in their working conditions and workload**, and in particular for managers, those working in commerce and employees with unusual hours.

It is **women working full-time with young children** who most often say that they benefit organisationally from the 35 hour working week, but only when they can choose when to take their reduced working hours. They usually take advantage to carry out domestic tasks instead of doing them at the weekend, and they become even more invisible to members of the family working outside. They often take every other Wednesday off. In all cases, the aim is to spend more time with their children.

Let us remember that in France, mothers spend twice as much time on domestic activities and the children than fathers, even though 80% of them work between the ages of 20 and 50. On the other hand, men allow themselves $\frac{1}{2}$ hour a day more leisure time than women.

In spite of the specifics of France with the 35 hour week, there are **massive changes in the way we work today**, which are not specific to France.

These trends are inherent in the **notion of flexibility at work** :

- **Unforeseeability of working hours** : one third of employees do not know their working hours more than one week in advance, and often a lot less.
- **Irregularity** : one employee in two has alternating and often short-term hours (hours change from one week to the next)
- **Staggered hours** : more than half of all employees regularly or occasionally work nights or on Saturday or Sunday.

Yet it is these changing hours or shifts which cause the most problems when it comes to balancing time.

Other elements come into play in the changes in the organisation of work :

- **Autonomy at work**, which includes managing and dividing up one's working hours, could give the impression that it makes it easier to balance home and professional life. But this is not at all the case. **Those who are the most autonomous in managing their work time also have irregular, unforeseeable and long hours.** They **also occasionally work staggered hours** at night or weekends. Freedom to be involved in managing work time tends instead to force employees to extend their working hours, and makes life situations very uncomfortable.
- **Densification of work**, with little space for unexpected events associated with a **the number of staff being calculated at the bare minimum**, gives the feeling of **only ever working under pressure**. Work which is increasingly organised on a project basis involves measuring work more on a piecework basis than according to the time spent on the job, which also tends to densify the work.

From the point of view of a private life, **community services are considered to be poorly adapted by 50 %** of employees. School hours and school rhythms are also badly adjusted to the rhythm of work for 20

% of parents, and **crèche hours cause problems for 30 % of young parents**. However, very few employees find their working hours badly adjusted: the problems, therefore, are in the management of social time, flexibility between frontiers and harmonisation with the spouse's hours, when there is one...

Arrangements and expectations of the employees questioned as part of the Chronospost / Ipsos investigations¹ :

For the time being, the arrangements revealed by individuals on a day-to-day basis to reconcile professional and home lives, are based around **informal permeability of both spheres**. It is about opening the doors of the house to work and opening the windows of the company to the home life, for men just as much as for women.

But ideally, in order to achieve a home/work balance :

- 40% of employees would like to delegate household tasks to a third party,
- 36% would like to change their working hours,
- 35% would like to have services or facilities at their place of work,
- 33% are in favour of telecommuting, 49% of them women,
- 26% would like to change their spouse's working hours and/or school rhythms.

Overall, expectations are moving more towards flexibility in organising working hours depending on personal constraints, and not those of the employer.

Juggling and giving up :

Women are more often forced to **give up activities for themselves**, and sometimes go as far as giving up having a child or significantly deferring the moment of conception. These women believe that changing their working hours and above all **greater availability of their spouse** would enable them to better manage the balance between their professional and home lives.

Reflecting in a sex-based active way on reconciling social time enables the question to be raised more about the **contribution of men**

¹ All our sources come from 2 surveys : 2001 and 2003 : Chronopost/Institut Ipsos the results of which are published and analysed in the Tempos reviews numbered from 1 to 4.

in the private sphere, and to bring into the public debate what is still too often the subject of small-scale, private arrangements today. **It is time to “wash the dirty washing in public”**, so that the debate comes out of the private sphere and marital conflicts which that generates.

Today we have become aware of the need to look to men if we want to improve the quality of life when it comes to matters of balance.

Two findings lead us to raise questions :

- Men want to spend more time with their families, and with their children in particular. On this matter, the value of the “family” seems to be gradually ousting the value of “work”.
- Furthermore, **women are more often forced to give up elements of their lives** in order to achieve a home/work balance: their leisure time, their social, associative and activist lives, but also part of their career.

If, in an ideal world, men one day invest as much as women in the private sphere, in terms of domestic tasks, education and looking after children, they will also be forced more often to juggle their professional and home lives, and they will sometimes have to give up activities even at the heart of their home lives. Time balancing between men and women is certainly about sharing tasks, but it is also about “sharing giving up things”. To illustrate this fact more positively, the perception of educating children and domestic tasks must be able to evolve in men’s eyes so that they can “choose” these activities tomorrow instead of others today ... The difficulty is not to talk about giving things up.

It would be enriching to re-question the men today to measure what their degree of motivation is to give themselves this prospect of re-juggling, or even giving things up.

Giving up does not only occur as part of juggling day-to-day activities. It is also part of the social and professional image which everyone gives out.

Indeed, are men ready to abandon certain images which they enjoy today, such as always appearing more available and more committed than women in the eyes of their employer? How can they abandon these images without feeling dispossessed, without a strong pay-off in terms of their identity construction?

It is essential to consider what could **stop and motivate men, whether fathers or not, from/to trying to re-balance their social time with**

their wives. Few studies have been carried out on this subject. Let us not forget, either, the cultural dimension of defining roles within couples: women, too, are not always happy to share their role as nursing parent and protector, especially of a baby. They still sometimes defend their territory in the domestic sphere and in looking after children. An inter-generational comparison is essential for this type of subject.

The professional sphere has a major role to play in the **process of accepting the new face of the male employee**, who might refuse a meeting at 5 o'clock to go and collect his children from school, or who might simply leave his job if his child was ill, without being pointed at and having his professional performance doubted.

Experiments in the field of balancing work and home life:

The Equal programme promoted numerous experiments in France which were listed in the Racine file on the Internet for the period 2001-2004.

By subject, they related to :

- time management within companies
- services for people or families
- territorial networks and the link between time and territory
- the notion of integration and re-integration periods.

The experiments of the City of Paris' *Time Office*:

At local level, to improve the lives of Parisians, in 2002 the Mayor of Paris created a *Time Office* responsible for **analysing the discrepancies between the life rhythms of Parisians and the services offered by the city** so as to **better adapt these services to the life rhythms of these people** and to provide specific solutions to facilitate the lives of Parisian men and women.

As regards families, this policy seeks to improve **their daily lives, enabling them to manage their life time better**, but it also includes **educational challenges regarding the time of children and adolescents** and, in particular, the time between when school finishes and the parents come home.

Method of the Time Office :

- **To find out more about the practices of families:** by carrying out studies and field work in the form of local meetings or discussions with local players: people responsible for local facilities, associations...
- **To devise local experiments** and then **generalise them.**

Specific action:

In the field of balancing time within families, the work of the Time Office highlighted the need for better coordination of user information:

1. Better information about services: childcare and leisure

- The Time Office set up a “**Paris families**” telephone line to enable families to organise children’s time.
- It also produced a **guide to leisure and free time** for children.

2. Providing services adapted to the rhythms of parents by enlarging childcare to include children from 0 to 3 years:

The goal of the Time Office is to take account of the needs of families in their diversity: full-time, part-time, unusual hours, seeking jobs...

- A dozen or so community crèches or childcare facilities in the associative sector already take children early in the morning or late in the evening and sometimes at weekends. Three new structures with extended hours were created in 2004, one of which is the **Franco-Chinese crèche** which is open Monday to Friday from **7.30 am to 8.30 pm** and on **Saturday from 7.30 am to 6.30 pm**.
- The 18 public hospitals in Paris have **hospital crèches open from 6 am to 10 pm and** at weekends for their staff. A partnership with the City of Paris enables places to be made available to children in the area whose parents work unusual hours.
- The third avenue is experimenting with a new service: **the DOMINO service**. This **link childcare** enables parents whose working hours are unusual, to bridge the gap between their usual childcare arrangements and additional childcare for staggered hours. The originality of this service is that it is provided at home. The setting up of this service will be accompanied by an assessment which will be carried out by the Time Office.
- The new regulations for municipal crèches provide for **shared cots** : in future it will be possible to accept children part-time, less than four days a week on certain conditions and to organise the occupation of cots so that more than one child can benefit from them.

In the **corporate universe**, the Time Office is working on the **development of corporate caretaking**: services paid for by the company for the benefit of staff to make their private lives easier: delivery service, ironing, baby-sitting...