




Changes in work and quality of life

Giovanna Altieri, Cristina Oteri, Marcello Pedaci (IRES)

Carla Dahl-Jørgensen, Hans Torvatn (SINTEF)

works
CHANGES IN WORK

CIT3-CT-2005-006193



Copyright (2005) © Work organisation and restructuring in the knowledge society - WORKS project
Project number: CIT3-CT-2005-006193

All rights reserved. No part of the report may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording; and may not be quoted or cited, without prior permission in writing from the Project Co-ordinator.

The authors are solely responsible for the content of this report. It does not represent the opinion of the Community. The Community is not responsible for any use that might be made of data/information appearing therein.

1. Introduction: quality of work and life

Economists and sociologists have been absorbed in defining the concept of quality of life since 1970, indeed the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach is now widely recognised. In fact there is general consensus that the concept of “quality of life” includes various dimensions of individuals’ well-being. Yet, in spite of this, a single, shared definition on quality of life has not been reached and there are various unresolved problems in measuring this phenomenon.

The various approaches used have led scholars to adopt either a “macro” or “micro” perspective, placing emphasis on objective indicators in the former and subjective indicator in the latter.

In economic literature there are mainly macro indicators, as for example, average per capita income, employment and unemployment rates, inequality index (such as the Gini index). Furthermore, most economists do not agree on the use of ‘subjective’ indicators given the difficulty in interpreting qualitative variables (Lloyd & Auld, 2002).

In the last report of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2004), the necessity for a micro perspective approach is stressed, where individuals’ living conditions and perceptions are key aspects. In this context the macroscopic features linked to the socio-economic situation are important to place individuals in their reference context but are not sufficient to identify the objectives of individuals and their expectations. At the same time, individual perceptions and opinions are easier to understand if linked to objective living conditions. Recent attempts to measure the quality of life have gone in this direction.¹ Even in this paper we have assumed an integrative approach between objective and subjective dimensions: to analyse the quality of life not only does income and material conditions have to be taken into account but also interrelations between the various subjective living dimensions.

This paper focuses on the relationship between work and quality of life. Work plays a central role in people’s lives, not only because it is the main source of income for most of the population giving access to provisions (material or immaterial goods and resources that can be purchased) (Dahrendorf, 1988) and in many European countries even entitlements (citizenship rights conferring legitimate access to benefits/services through legal means available in society) but also because it is still a fundamental element in the construction of identity as well as a way of achieving satisfaction. In particular main reflections will be illustrated on the effects of changes occurring in the labour market on individuals’ quality of life. An attempt will be made to answer the following questions:

¹ Of the various contributions, we can mention Forward (2003) who proposed the following categorisation: Physical - health status; Psychical - self mastery, self-efficacy, love, satisfaction, happiness, morale, self-esteem, perceived control over life, social comparisons, expectations of life, beliefs, aspirations; Social private - social network, social support, level of income, education, job; Social public - community, climate, social security, quality of housing, pollution, aesthetic surroundings, traffic, transport, incidence of crime, equality, equity. More recently Hees J (2005) (SOCQUIT project) identified 5 dimensions: Material well-being, Physical well being, Emotional well being, Development & activity, Social well-being

- How do new working patterns of different occupational groups affect the quality of life in the short and the long term taking into account national institutional contexts?
- In what specific ways are changes in work organisations introducing health and safety problems and which social groups and occupations are particularly affected by it?
- In what ways do changes in working time structures impact on the quality of life?

2. Changes in the labour market, unstable jobs and quality of life

In the flexible society (or service or knowledge society) work is undergoing profound changes, a real 'metamorphosis of work' (Gorz, 1988) affecting its contents, contractual forms as well as the modalities, spaces and times of its execution. First of all, employment relationships have changed; new contractual arrangements have emerged and are becoming widespread. In all western countries an increasing and significant number of workers perform their job without the traditional open-ended contract. In other words, they have employment relationships that are generally - but not correctly - termed 'atypical'. To assess the effects of these new forms of employment in terms of quality of life, it is necessary to examine their qualitative importance, their socio-economic impacts, rather than their quantitative dimension.

Interpretations of such changes are not univocal with contrasting opinions in literature, either optimist or pessimistic; prospects for continual improvement or for negative trends. Most economic literature deals with the issue from a macro perspective in an attempt to understand the effects of the diffusion of unstable jobs on the improvement in employment opportunities for the various segments of the population. Some try to pinpoint the consequences of an increase in atypical employment relationships on employment trends. It is stated that greater flexibility in employment relationships can make the market more fluid leading to an increase in jobs. However, effects on employment are linked to the institutional characteristics of each country, namely the welfare system, labour market and economic policies.

In the Italian situation, for example, it has been noted that «literature on the "transition to postfordism" tends to irritatingly lament the loss of stability, security and predictability of the old model of social regulation. In fact the "new jobs" are a prerogative of those who [...] were the excluded from the labour market: young people and women. These individuals enter the labour market the hard way, from the back door. A door that should not be [...] casually left wide open yet it would be counterproductive to attempt to close it» (Barbieri & Mingione, 2003: 16).

Of the positive effects highlighted, there is also the possibility that through the use of non standard jobs there is a reduction in hidden or irregular work as it satisfies the enterprises need for flexibility (Salvati, 1988).

On the other hand, some studies claim that non standard jobs cannot reduce unemployment. The "deregulation" and "flexibilisation" of the labour market would not have any significant effects on unemployment, at most it could modify the structure and produce greater inequality in income distribution (Oecd,1999; Esping Andersen, 1999; De Grip, Hoesenberg & Willems, 1999; Regini, 1998).

Literature also examines the consequences of unstable jobs on living conditions: on the strategies of individuals, on their expectations, on the definition of their social identity, on

the type of emotional tensions they have to cope with. The starting point is the observation of work paths: they become fragmented, lose uniformity and linearity, taking the shape of work chunks with periods of hyper-employment, underemployment but also unemployment. Work discontinuity is thus experienced by workers on temporary contracts. Discontinuity which has become a feature of the present modernisation phase (Giddens, 1990). Freedom and insecurity are the key aspects to interpret current behaviours and their impact on individuals and on their quality of life. For many people changes in employment relationships bring about the inherent potentiality of a positive change, an increase in freedom, greater self-awareness and satisfaction (Habermas, 1987; Laurent, 1993). Freedom intended as the power of individuals to live a life that they can fully appreciate, and to increase the choices available to them (Sen, 1999).

From this viewpoint, changes in employment relationships are collocated within the historical process of individualisation, intended as the individual's emancipation process from obligatory forms of belonging to the traditional society (Paci, 2005; Barbier & Nadel, 2000). Yet some authors stress how the rise in unstable jobs is creating risks and uncertainties. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) states that we are indeed free in the present modernisation phase, something our ancestors could only dream of, however this greater freedom comes at a high cost: insecurity. The «dimension of emancipation» seems to give way, in other words, to the «dimension of disillusionment». It is a «risky freedom»: autonomy, emancipation, liberation are accompanied by a increase in risks, uncertainties and even anomie (Beck, 1986). The effects of insecurity on people's lives have been analysed in many empirical studies which have shown that the impact on individuals is not exclusively economical, namely related to the loss of income continuity, as it can also profoundly modify their plans, well-being, societal relations, community life and even their character. (Sennett, 1999)

In such a situation, people who have unstable jobs earn money but at times not continuously² as well as a deficit of rights and pension/welfare protection. These individuals have limited 'empowerment,' intended as the power to purchase goods and resources to attain social well-being and more generally freedom to pursue objectives considered important (Sen, 1992). In such a situation the individuals involved in forms of atypical work risk precipitating/remaining in situations of precariousness and social vulnerability, (Ranci, 2002) with the risk of not being able to freely plan their own career and existential course (Bauman, 2000).

Many studies examine the consequences work continuity can have on the individual's career. Work paths characterised by the frenetic alternation of jobs «do not allow any significant professional experience to be accumulated and transferred from one employer to another» (Gallino, 200: 42). Frequent changes in company, position, task, contract structures a «DIY biography» (Beck, 1999). And this can provoke dissatisfaction, frustration, disorientation. What's more, such situations «seems to prelude making a sustained narrative out of one's labours, and so a career» (Sennett, 1998: 122) and therefore a professional and social identity cannot be constructed.

² Many studies show that workers with unstable jobs usually have low wages inappropriate to the work performed and responsibilities held (Altieri & Oteri, 2003; Kvasnicka & Werwartz, 2002; Bellmann, 2004).

There are also less pessimistic analyses that perceive the possibility of “fluid” individual identities that adapt to changes (Bauman, 2000) and so in these situations unstable jobs do not represent an obstacle. It has also been noted that the worsening of employment relationships has been accompanied by an improvement in work contents (Accornero, 1997; Paci, 2005), offering workers greater possibilities for job satisfaction and self-fulfilment. However even these authors warn of excess risks especially for particular groups of workers: the less educated with less social capital and networks, women who are trying to get back into the labour market after a period of inactivity and in general ‘older’ job-seekers; but also young people who are not able to construct a coherent career path and a strong occupational position. An individual whether male or female from any social class or geographical area can be exposed to the risk of insecurity and discontinuity (Saraceno, 2005). From the inquiry promoted by the European Commission on “precariousness and social exclusion” (Gallie & Paugam 2003), it emerged that low-skilled workers are more exposed not so much to job loss but to the inability to find another job in the case of dismissal. The low or lack of skills (training) is added to the low quality of work performed. (Laffi, 1998; Paugam, 2000; Fullin, 2004).

In many interpretations, the consequences of changes in employment relationships on individuals’ quality of life is related to the characteristics of welfare systems. Family-based systems, like in Southern European countries, provoke the reproduction of the effects illustrated above, as they leave precarious workers without any forms of social protection; contrary to what may happen in more universalistic systems as in Northern European countries. As noted by Esping-Andersen (1999), welfare systems are modifying after exogenous shocks, following globalisation processes and changes underway in the economic, technological-productive structure. According to some such a transition phase is characterised by insufficient coverage from risks as new social protection forms have still not been developed. Others speak of a more structural trend, the «de-collectivisation» of protection; of a reduction in general regulations (Dore, 2004; Barbieri & Mingione, 2003; Regini, 2000), and of «social property» - a package of protection and rights to support the worker (Castel & Haroche, 2002; Castel, 2003). These authors warn of the risks of the individualisation of social protection: for example unemployment, impossibility of working due to illness, childbirth, etc which become individual problems to be faced without making use of social protection tools (Rosanvallon, 1995). Beck (1986) predicts «new forms of guilt attribution»: life events that used to be considered “the luck of the draw” are more frequently perceived as personal failures.

3. Changes in working condition

By working condition we mean the conditions under which an employee works. It is a feature of how work and the work process have been organised, and as such should not be considered a feature of individual judgement (Christis, 1998 in Oeij & Wiezer, 2002). There are two major forms of working conditions: contractual affiliation and work environment. Both forms of working conditions tend to have a direct effect on health and safety issues.

By contractual affiliation to work we will be referring to the contractual arrangement under which work is undertaken. This includes number of working hours, where and

when work should be conducted, pay and salary system, bargaining system, what (if any) form of unionisation, rights to parental leave, intellectual property rights and other forms of obligations and rights between employer and employee. Contractual affiliation to work will be regulated both by local law and by a work contract between the parts. This aspect of contract is known as the legal and formal contract between the employer and employee. In the literature emphasis is also placed on the informal, social and psychological contract that takes place between employer and employees. In relation to working conditions however, we will be focusing primarily on the legal form of contractual affiliation because they form important elements of the working conditions. The other form of working condition is the work environment and by which we mean physical, organisational and psycho-social aspects of the work place. It is within the complexity of this concept that an overview of the working conditions of Europe will be summarised.

Flexibility also is more widespread in all aspects of work: working time (round-the-clock and part time work), work organisation (multi-skilling, teamwork and empowerment) and employment status (an increase in the number of employees working under non-permanent contracts). It is important to point out however, that there are great national variations within the EU in regards to some factors relevant to working conditions. Likewise there are variations between the 15 EU Member States (EU15) and the New Member States (NMS) in that the nature of work in the NMS is more industrial oriented rather than customer driven and that the NMS report worse working conditions, poorer health, less satisfaction with health services and lower job security (European Foundation, 2004).

Surveys undertaken by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2002) summarises the following trends on working conditions for the EU15:

Working time: More women than men work part-time (32% versus 6%), but here too we find big variations from country to country. People who are self-employed work longer working hours on the average, 46 hours a week compared to employees who work around 36.5 hours. Round the clock work is also present, with more than one out of two workers working at least one Saturday per month and one in four working one Sunday per month. Shift work is also the norm for 20% of the workers, and 19% report that they work at least one night per month. Almost one fifth of all workers (19%) claim that working time flexibility collides with family and social commitments.

Repetitive work: Repetitive work is still widespread in the workplaces. There has been only a slight decline over the last decade. There is also no reported difference between the genders. Those who do report repetitive tasks are more prone to developing musculoskeletal problem.

Intensity at work: Work showed to be getting more and more intensive over the last years, and that over 50% of workers claim to work at high speed or to tight deadlines. Likewise more than two in five workers claim that they do not manage to finish their work in time.

Work intensity has increased, partly because of constant readjustments, project-oriented work, individual contracts, and result-based salaries.

Control over work (work autonomy): One third of the workers claim that they have little or no control over their work while only three out of five workers are able to decide when to take holidays. There are however differences in control over tasks between dif-

ferent groups of workers. For example, plant and machine operators and sales and service workers have experienced a sharp decline in their control over work. At a sectoral level, transport and communication workers are similarly affected. There are also gender differences in this regard with men having more influence than women over their working time and employees on permanent contracts having more influence than those with fixed-term or temporary agency contracts. Furthermore, occupational groups with a high level of professional skills have most control over their working time.

Gender segregation: Gender segregation and inequalities is still prevent at the work place. Men and women do not tend to occupy the same type of jobs. Men are more numerous in clerical, sales, professional and managerial positions and when in the same occupations as women, they tend to have more senior positions. Gender inequalities are also prevalent in that women earn less than men and they have less control over their time. Women also experience family workload to be heavier because of housework and child-care.

Harassment, violence and intimidation: Unfortunately this remains a feature of the workplace with 4 to 15% of workers in different EU countries reporting that they are subjected to intimidation and harassment. There seems to be some underreporting taking place especially in countries that have not put this topic on the public agenda. Likewise it is important to look into the extent to which the prevalence is due to the increasing number of female working in frontline positions in the service sector and the opening of the 24-hour society.

Temporary workers: Temporary work is becoming a more usual employment characteristic. In 2000 there were 20% of employees who were on fixed-term employment and studies show that they are more exposed to a higher level of work intensity and physical hazards compared to permanent workers.

The general description for understanding these changes under which people work has been described by a number of working life researchers as boundless or boundaryless. Work places have become boundless when it comes to where and when the employees work, their work conditions, - and also the organisation that employees are employed by. Businesses have extended their service hours, and adopted technology that makes it possible for employees to work almost whenever and wherever they want, - or rather, according to client supply and consumer preferences. The situation puts the individual under immense pressure to define his or her own boundaries. A study undertaken by Aronsson (2002), found that some employees handled the problem of defining boundaries without problems and in general benefit from the new work life situation. However, many experience great stress due to the amount of work, and of being individually responsible (*ibidem*). Employees are also stressed by having the work tempo controlled by customers, by fluent networks that must always be maintained, by the massive amount of information to handle, and by the quick changes and pressures towards constantly developing one's skills and competences. Several researchers claim thereby that each individual worker is far more alone in defending herself, than was the case before (Aronsson, 2002; Olsen, 2003). The result could be long-term sickness absenteeism, which has become one of the greatest challenges of today's society. Along the same lines, Olsen (2003) emphasises the importance of distinguishing between flexibility for the workers and for the company. He claims that the human ability to adapt to new conditions is currently being overcharged, and that the human reaction to this is resistance.

Csonka (2003) studied an aspect of work conditions that can be referred to as "the developing work", characterised by broader and more varied work tasks, greater challenges and extended autonomy for the employees. However she found that this type of work was less widespread than is commonly assumed. Work conditions such as these were often used as a "reward" to officials or managers in companies guided by more traditional management philosophies. She claims that in spite of all the attention directed towards new flexible work forms, there are little proves of this development. This could possibly be because factors that enhance flexibility, also restrain it, for example customer orientation (fulfilling customers' special demands), new technology (that needs to be learnt), and internationalisation (decisions made far from production units). A similar argument could be said when it comes to spatial flexibility and "placelessness" of the new jobs. A study conducted by Aronsson (2002) on workers with home offices showed that the freedom of working in one's own home gradually diminished as more and more control mechanisms on the part of the company were introduced. This study concluded that this is an example that flexibility often happens on the conditions of only one part: the company.

Gunnarsson (2001) who also studied flexible workers, - or "nomads", as she calls them claimed that the challenge for organisations or companies is the ever-changing balance between organisational stability and organisational flexibility. The flexible "nomads" depend on the stability, presence and accessibility of other types of workers (such as secretaries, managers, assistants, etc). These workers are what Gunnarsson calls "grounded" and problematises the individualisation of workers and claims that this trend makes it difficult for researchers to study workers as a group.

Another crucial aspect of today's working condition is so-called *temporal flexibility*, that is: flexible working hours. Temporal flexibility implies that it is to some extent up to the individual worker to organise her own work day, and make sure the work is done in the right manner and at the right time. Such arrangements give the employee great responsibilities and puts her under pressure to be her own manager. In some jobs, the employee also has the choice between working from the office or at home. The employee, then, is under great pressure when it comes to defining boundaries. Several researchers have studied the trend towards employees spending more and more time at work, and less and less time at home. Sørensen (2000), for example, has conducted a study of workers in the IT sector and found that for some of them work has become "a new home". She introduces the concept of "honey trap jobs" to describe these jobs that are so exciting and interesting for the employees that they get trapped with their work and let it absorb all their time.

The organisation of parents' time at work and at home, and how they adapt to each other becomes an interesting topic in this respect. In a study undertaken by Abrahamsen and Storvik (2002) they insist that both parents work time must be considered in order to understand a worker's experience of work-family conflict. Their research has showed that the experience of a conflict between work time and family time has a gender dimension. For men the number of hours worked seem to be less decisive for the experience of balance between home and work. For women, the majority experience the conflicting demands of work and family as very unsatisfactory. As a consequence of the development already described there is an increase in the demand of so-called atypical terms of employment, and the question of temporary contracts become an important issue.

4. The consequences of changes in work on health and safety

According to a survey on working conditions undertaken in 2000 (Paoli & Merlie, 2001) the general picture is that worker's perceptions of their health and safety and risk perception, has shown an improvement over the last fifteen years. However the worsening of important factors of working condition such as: intensification of work, prevalence of repetitive movements, high-speed work, work pace determined by others, and flexible employment practises as well as continued exposure to physical hazards at the work place, causes continued health problems for workers. In addition to these factors several researchers has identified organisational change processes, as possible health risks (Saksvik, 1996; Landsbergis, Cahill & Schnall, 1999; Westerlund, Ferrie, Hagberg, Jeding, Oxenstierna, Theorell, 2004). It seems that the content of the change process, expansion, restructuring, lay-offs and downsizing or other are of less importance than how the process is carried out, in determining the health risks.

The most prevalent health problems are musculoskeletal disorders, stress and work-related sick leave and that these work-related health problems are worsening compared to 1995. The above mentioned survey which was undertaken among 21,500 workers across all EU Member States presented the following figures: backache (33%), stress (28%), muscular pains in the neck and shoulders (23%) and overall fatigue (23%) (Paoli & Merlie, 2001). The conclusions of the survey was also that there is a strong correlation between the high level of work intensity, repetitive work and the above mentioned health problems at work.

It was long presumed that with technological development, as well as the growing proportion of the work force being employed in the service and knowledge-production sector, working life would have resulted in less risk on the "traditional" physical hazards, such as exposure to dangerous chemicals, and work tasks demanding great physical efforts. In a way this is true, but it also is very much depended on the type of technology in use at work. For example a survey showed that the use of new technologies (use of computer) result in fewer physical health problems such as allergies/asthma, while the use of machine technology produces more musculoskeletal health problems and allergies/asthma. Likewise workers using machine technology tend to be less satisfied with their working conditions (European Foundation, 2001). However as Jefferys, Mispelblom Beyer and Thørnquist (2001) noted, we do not know enough for example about the consequences of spending long days in front of the computer screen, at the same time the use of computers is rising continuously. In a survey undertaken about technology and working condition, it showed that a little over one third of workers report no use of technology in their work situation, while a third used computers and the rest use only machine technologies or machine technologies combined with computers (European Foundation, 2002). However, the survey also pointed out that the use of technology by service workers is as yet not as well documented. Likewise, there is a great national and regional variations within the Member States, for example the Netherlands having a high use of computer technology by employed workers compared to Portugal, and the northern European countries having more workers using computer compared to the southern European countries (ibidem, 2002).

The above mentioned survey of the European Foundation undertaken in 2000 also showed that the exposure to physical risk factors such as noise, vibrations, dangerous

substances, heat, cold, heavy lifting and so forth remains prevalent. The survey showed that the proportion of workers exposed to some of the physical risk factors at least 25% of the time, remains high. Furthermore the survey indicated that it is mostly male workers who are exposed to these physical risk exposures, but that painful and tiring positions are common for both sexes. Likewise, non-permanent employees, in other words those recruited from temporary agencies and who are on fixed-term contracts, are more exposed to heavy loads and painful position than employees on indefinite contract.

The general picture in regards to health and safety is that there are no research showing that there are fewer health problems among workers, but rather, new health problems seem to be replacing some old ones. For example, one of the great challenges related to health and work environment today is the growth of psycho-social problems, such as stress and burn-outs. As opposed to health problems of a more physical/chemical/medicinal kind, the "new" health problems make it complicated for work life researchers to identify risky work places (Aronsson & Sjögren, 1994). Van Otter (2003) has presented figures showing that during the 90s there was huge increase of health problems such as tiredness, sleeplessness, anxiety, aching shoulders, and difficulties of taking one's mind off work. The psycho-social pressure experienced by employees has therefore been the focus of many studies on health, safety and environment in work life.

The development within work life has also caused changes in the gender-related dispersion of health problems. For example, according to Sørensen (1998), there are now more women than men who work in physically demanding jobs in Norway. One might thus expect that health problems related to physical efforts will become more common among women than men. Furthermore, health problems in general are more common among temporary employed than among those who hold permanent jobs, and there is a larger proportion of women holding temporary employment (Aronsson, Gustafsson & Dallner, 2000).

Health problems arising from the work-family conflict is another more recent development of today's work life. Work-family conflict occurs when the pressures from the work and family domain are incompatible, in the sense that having to attend to one set of demands prevents one from being able to attend the other set. There exists a lot of research in this area, clearly demonstrating the negative health impact of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Barling, 1992; Frone, 2003; Hammer, Saksvik, Nytrø, Torvatn & Bayazit, 2004). This is also a gendered issue. Torn between demands of jobs and children, from the statics on women's participation in work life, it would seem that women try to solve the conflict by reducing their participation in work life, through part time or temporary works, or simply withdrawing from work for a period. Further, while much research has been done on the problems faced by parents, less has been done on the problems faced by the need to take care of elderly relatives. In an aging Europe this is a problem that is likely to increase in the future, and in some countries this is a relatively large problem. In a survey undertaken in Norway for instance, 23 per cent of the work force had elderly relatives they were responsible for and needed to take care of (Torvatn & Molden, 2001).

Work-related stress, according to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, is experienced when the demands at the work-place are greater than the employee is able to handle or control. Stress can be related to the pressure of always having to be flexible and creative, acquire new skills and competences, show good social and organisational

skills, motivation, commitment and engagement (Barker, 1933). Stress is, for example, very common in project-oriented, team-based work. This form of work can be characterised as *social engineering* (ibidem), because there is a strong focus on the social and organisational connection the work enters into. The members of the team often charge the other team members with experiences of stress, and thus stress can become a shared experience. Whereas before it was the manager who put pressure on the employees, today it is often one's own colleagues who constitute the main stress factor. According to Barker (ibidem) this is because there has been a shift from vertical to horizontal control.

Strain and health problems can also be caused by emotional exhaustion provoked by customer service work. Most of these jobs imply a great deal of so-called emotional work, that is, work that requires that the employee manifests or suppresses emotional expressions or experiences as part of the work performance (Sørensen, 1998). This implies somehow a blurring of the borders between private feelings and professional efforts. The pressure this puts on the employees' private inner sphere can cause great stress.

Two clear trends seem to mark the development within the service and knowledge-production sector: Standardisation, resulting in the "McJobs" and tailor-made services, resulting in more qualifying jobs. In the jobs where tailor-made services are offered, a great deal of responsibility is delegated to the so-called front-line workers (those employees who deal with the customers face to face). Consequently, the importance of personal capital, such as knowledge, competence and co-operational skills has increased (Dahl-Jørgensen & Saksvik, 2005). This is a trend in both private and public sector. The new responsibility is experienced differently by both customers and employees. According to Forseth (2002), working with customers can be experienced as both a strain and a reward. The reward is related to the immediate positive feedback that customers may give. The strain can be related to the fact that the customer to a great extent controls the work tempo, the work task, etc. Typically, promotion implies a move away from customers and into the so-called "back stage" jobs (ibidem). Due to the gender divisions still persisting, this means there are more women working in the front-line, and more men in the protected "back stage".

A burn-out is not to be confused with stress, rather it is characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, experience of poorer performance, and cynicism. A number of researchers (see for example Roness and Mathiesen 2002) have approached burn-outs as a social, organisational and individual problem. One of the most disturbing aspects of burn-outs, is that it occurs more and more often among young employees. However it should be noted that burn-out is not limited to, nor necessarily most prevalent, in the work force. A Swedish national study on burn-out found that burn-outs were more prevalent among unemployed than employed (Hallsten, Bellagh & Gustavson, 2002). However, some are critical of the type of attention burn-outs have received in the public debate were it appears as a "middle-class and upper-class problem" (Wahl 2002). The fact that the working class have experienced the same changes when it comes to demands in work life, somehow seem to be invisible in the debate.

Studies are also indicating high-strained work situations will only increase in the future and which will imply that more workers will be experiencing a worsening of health issues such as stress, musculoskeletal problems, burn out and low job satisfaction (European Foundation, 2001; 2002). High-strain jobs which are creating health problems are for example skilled blue-collar workers, in the transport sector, catering and in metal manu-

facturing. This strain is felt among the younger workers, and equally among male and female workers (Dhondt, 1998, in European Foundation, 2002).

There is hence a strong correlation between work organisation and the health outcomes (Landsbergis et. al, 1999). Work autonomy is on the increase, fuelled both by the popularity of new forms of organisation like project work or team based, as well as demands of an increasingly educated work force that does not accept traditional forms of control over their work. However, as pointed out earlier, several of this new work organisations are in themselves creating more stress. For example, one study showed that work places that combine organisational change such as team work, JIT, TQM and computerisation will not only achieve high productivity, but also an increase in the number of occupational injuries and illnesses (Askenazy in European Foundation 2002). Teambased organisations creates powerfull norms of productivity, enforced by the team members (Barker, 1993) but the increase in autonomy is not sufficient to compensate for the increase in work intensity. The role of autonomy and control in occupational health is more complicated and weaker (de Jonge & Kompier, 1997; Eriksen & Ursin, 199; Troup & Dewe, 2002) than what was stipulated in the well known job demand-control model of Karasek (1979), where increase in autonomy supposedly should counter the negative effects of increased demands. Instead of reducing strain it seems that autonomy in some cases adds to the strain created by the increase in demands.

The increase of long-term sickness absenteeism noted in several countries is claimed to be related then to deteriorated working conditions, especially when it comes to increased work pressure and reduced control of the work on the part of the worker (Wikman & Marklund, 2003). Saksvik (1996) for example studied health problems and long-term sickness absenteeism caused by work environment. He claims that downsizing and dismissals, as well as the limited influence employees have on their work environment are important causes of sickness absenteeism. The growth in long-term sickness absenteeism has occupied the attention of many Nordic researchers. They have particularly focused on those groups of people that become marginalised from the new work-life, through unemployment and sick leaves. Aronsson (2002) notes that there is a clear bipartition in work life between those who have a steady job and those who are excluded due to sickness absenteeism, unemployment and early retirement. This last group constitutes an estimated one fifth of the entire workforce, and the situation is therefore sometimes referred to as the "20% community".

5. The necessity for work/life balance

The flexible society, contrary to the industrial society, is a society constantly active where work, shopping, cultural, leisure, sports activities etc. are possible 24 hours a day. Today workers are required to be increasingly more flexible in terms of working time. The effects on the individual's quality of life can obviously be positive or negative. Although these requirements mainly reflect the needs of enterprises (and meet with resistance and opposition from the unions) they can also respond to some of the workers' requirements if activated in specific forms and measures. If on the one hand, it is positive that some services (public utility but also cultural and leisure) are organised in such as way as to be more accessible to everyone, on the other hand, the workers involved in the provision of such

services have to put up with the effects of this 'de-standardisation' of working hours or 'de-synchronisation of times' (Accornero, 2004). This has also an effect on the community in terms of social relations. (Accornero, 2004; Gallino, 2002). If «in the past the concentration of hours could facilitate relations and consolidate solidarity yet penalise less linear lives and less uniform needs; today the dispersion of hours can hinder relations and undermine solidarity but also reward original requests and the role of chance» (Accornero, 2004: 1079).

Many studies reveal how the effects of de-standardisation processes of working hours are not equally distributed among the various sections of the population; such processes produce the supply of working hour packages – often associated with various contractual protection standards – which are segmented according to social category, gender and ethnic group. In general some groups of people tend to have excessively long working hours others too short not allowing them to have a decent income, yet others have antisocial hours. For example, the weaker segments of the population tend to have short or antisocial hours.

Despite social processes underway and the new demand for greater work/life balance, today the latter is predominant over the other hours. A trend characterised by great gender and age inequality (Paci, 2005). For example, in Italy but generally in all Mediterranean countries, adult men display a hyper-participation in work but with great marginality in other spheres of life: their working time, including overtime, has remained above 40 hours a week and many adult men often have a second job. On the contrary, in all European countries, albeit with some differences, women occupy most part-time jobs.

A number of researches have highlighted that women, both workers and non, have less time availability than men (Altieri, 2004). They are burdened with most of the domestic and care work. (Alteri & Oteri, 2003). Therefore, the part-time arrangement has allowed women to work as it has the potential to achieve a good balance between income and professional continuity requirements, the opportunity to remain in the labour market and taking on the responsibility of family care work. Many studies have highlighted the relationship between the percentage of part time jobs and the growth in female occupation. However, even the use of this arrangement can expose the individuals involved to a series of risks: the possibility of balancing work and private life depends on the norms in force in the various countries; and in particular if it is recognised as a regular form of employment with basic social protection coverage, as well as not penalising the part timer by impeding career prospects and more gratifying work contents (Hemerijck, 2002). These risks have been indicated in several empirical researches. The part time arrangement can achieve work/life balance only under some specific conditions: when there is no obligation to work inconvenient shifts or hours that change from one week to another requiring continual organisational changes to reconcile paid work with care work (Saraceno, 2005). Some studies have highlighted that the gender (being a woman), the social status (married, mother) reduce future occupational opportunities of part time workers compared with those on a full time basis (Istat, 2002; Ministry of Labour, 2000). It is not the part time arrangement with reduced opportunities but the reasons behind it: reconciling work and family responsibilities.

Studies on the 24 hour society have highlighted different forms of invasiveness of work in individual's private life. One of these is hyper-employment which produces psycho-physical problems especially as it reduces the possibility of participating in other spheres

of life just as important as work for the individual's well-being (Paci, 2005). This is particularly frequent among the so-called 'professionals' or 'knowledge workers' that due to restraints formally set by flexible organisation (for example in the case of the 'deskless job') or due to necessity, work from home, on the train or in airport departure lounges. There is thus the risk that work becomes "a time without confines" and at the same time "a non place" (Gallino, 2002). Vice versa to achieve a good quality of life work must be done in a time and place completely different from free time as from other moments of private life (Paci, 2005).

To conclude, it should be highlighted that the EU is presently promoting policies on work/life balance that constitute an essential element of an overall strategy aimed at creating new well-being and new employment. From this perspective, work/life balance is defined as «an individual's attempt to find suitable time arrangements and time options that allow the best possible coordination of requirements of work with time requirements for personal life. The work/life balance reflects social change, such as the rise of dual-career families, single parenthood and the extension of care to cover older family members, but also the need to maintain employability in a more uncertain labour market» (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003: 55).

6. Conclusions and research hypotheses

The quality of work in all its dimensions linked to relations, conditions, times, contents, significantly influences quality of life. As demonstrated by many sources of literature changes in working modalities and times have on the one hand a 'liberating' potential for individuals, yet, on the other bring risks both at the individual and collective levels. A first risk concerns the threat to social integration or social cohesion. This is a common, primary asset, the continuation of the classic problem of social order, in sociological terms. It concerns the stability of relations between individuals, the harmony and cohabitation among various sectors and groups of society. However it should not be forgotten that a satisfactory level of social integration requires some pre-requisites, namely a job and a welfare system which ensures protection, security and possibilities for self-fulfilment.

A second risk is the social exclusion of given targets of the population. In particular weaker individuals (older workers, single parent families, women going back to work, immigrants, workers dismissed from production industry, those with a low education level, people with disabilities) who risk paying the higher 'human cost' (Gallino) without having had the chance to seize the 'opportunities' that the post modern society could offer if regulated and well-managed. In such a sense as highlighted by (Castel, 2004) the policies of social inclusion, intended as participation of the individual in various systems and social organisation progress can play a decisive role.

As we have seen quality of work comprises quality of time; presupposes time less colonised by work giving the individual the possibility to do other activities and achieve a new balance between work and private life, thus augmenting individual and collective well-being.

Stemming from this recognition, some interrogatives/research hypotheses can be identified for further examination.

- Which mechanisms can encourage a new division and distribution of care and market work between the genders and generations and thus led to the redefinition of social models towards more balanced solutions to increase quality of life of all individuals?
- What are the main factors that contribute to the definition of positive results or vice versa negative results of discontinuous and atypical work paths?
- How can a greater work-life balance trigger the activation of virtuous mechanisms of growth in consumption and as a consequence work demand? And what could be the effects in terms of active citizenship and re-appropriation of social ties?
- Which forms of new organisation can be more inclusive, thus opening the labour market for more marginal groups (elderly, ethnic minorities, disabled etc), enhancing the quality of life for these groups and their participation in the society.
- How should we understand and research the role of the global value chains in today's working conditions?
- Which forms of new organisation can encourage more worker autonomy without increasing demands, stress and resulting musculoskeletal disorders?

Bibliography

- Abrahamsen, B & Storvik, A. E. (2002). "Hvem opplever tidsklemma? Barnefamilienes lønnsarbeid og foreldrenes yrke". In: Søkelys på arbeidsmarkedet, no.2/2002, s. 233-242
- Accornero A. (1997), *Era il secolo del Lavoro*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Accornero A. (2004), "Lavorare di più per guadagnare (e consumare) come prima?", *Il Mulino*, n. 6.
- Altieri G. & Oteri C. (2003), *Terzo rapporto sul lavoro atipico: verso la stabilizzazione del precariato?*, Roma, Ires working paper.
- Altieri G. (2004), "Un mercato del lavoro poco femminilizzato. Tendenze, problemi, politiche", in *Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale*, n. 4.
- Aronson, G. (2002) "Det gränslösa arbetets dubbla ansikte". Interview Forskningsrådet för arbetsliv och socialvetenskap, URL: www.fas.forskning.se/forskare/2002/aronsson.asp
- Barbier J.C. & Nadel H. (2000), *La flexibilité du travail et de l'emploi*, Paris, Flammarion.
- Barbieri P. & Mingione E. (2003), "Il futuro del lavoro: perché occorre un nuovo welfare state", in *Assistenza sociale*, n. 1-2, Gennaio-Giugno.
- Barker, J. R. (1993). Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(3), 408-437.
- Barker, J. R. (1993). *Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams*. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(3), 408-437.
- Barling, J. (1992). *Employment, stress and family functioning*. Chichester, England: Wiley.
- Bauman Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bauman Z. (2001), *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Beck U. (1986), *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Beck U. (1999), *Schöne neue Arbeitswelt. Vision: Weltbürgergesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag GmbH.
- Bellmann L. (2004), "Zur Entwicklung der Leitharbeit in Deutschland", in *Sozialer Fortschritt*, n. 53.
- Castel R. & Haroche C. (2002), *Propriété privée, propriété sociale, propriété de soi*, Paris, Fayard.
- Castel R. (2003), *L'insécurité sociale. Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?*, Paris, Édition de Seuil.
- Csonka, A. (2003). "Nye ledelsesformer og det udviklende arbejde". In: [socialforskningsinstituttet]: *Menneskelige ressourcer i arbejdslivet*. En antologi om samspil mellem organisation, arbejde og miljø. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet
- Dahl-Jørgensen, C., & Saksvik, P. Ø. (2005). An evaluation of the impact of two workplace interventions on the health of service workers. *International Journal of Health Services*, 35, 529-549.
- Dahrendorf R. (1988), *The Modern Social Conflict. An Essay on the Politics of Liberty*, New York, Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

- De Grip A., Hoevenberg J. & Willems E. (1997), "Atypical Employment in the European Union", in *International Labour Review*, vol. 136, n. 1.
- de Jonge, J., & Kompier, M. A. J. (1997). A critical examination of the Demand-Control-Support model from a work psychological perspective. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 4(4), 235-258.
- Dore R. (2004), *New Forms and Meanings of Work in an Increasingly Globalized World*, Geneva, International Labour Organization.
- Eriksen, H. R., & Ursin, H. (1999). Subjective health complaints: Is coping more important than control. *Work & Stress*, 13(3), 238-252.
- Esping-Andersen G. (1999), *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2003), *A new organisation of time over working life*, Dublin, Foundation paper.
- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2004), *Quality of life in Europe. First European Quality of Life survey*, Dublin, Foundation paper.
- Forward S. (2003), *State-of-the-art report on Life Quality assessment in the field of transport and mobility*, Public Report from WP1.
- Frone, M. R. (2003). Work-family balance. In J. Quick & L. E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology* (pp. 143-162). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fullin G. (2004), *Vivere l'instabilità del lavoro*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Gallie D. & Paugman S. (2003), *Social precariousness and social integration*, Bruxelles, European Commission, Directorate-General Employment, Eurobarometer 56.1
- Gallino L. (2001), *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Bari, Laterza.
- Gallino L. (2002), *Lavoro flessibile, società flessibile: progetto riformista o rischio per l'integrazione sociale?*, Paper from the conference "Forme del lavoro e qualità della vita in Ticino", Università della Svizzera Italiana.
- Giddens A. (1990), *The consequences of modernity*, The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University.
- Gorz A. (1988), *Métamorphoses du travail. Quête du sens. Critique de la raison économique*, Paris, Éditions Galilée.
- Greenhaus, J. B., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of management review*, 10, 76-89.
- Gunnarsson, E. (2001). "Nomader och "jordade" i flexible Organisationslandskap". URL: www.genus.gu.se/konferens/mansforskning/paper_ewa_gunnarsson.pdf
- Habermas J. (1985), *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Hallsten, L., Bellagh, K., & Gustavson, K. (2002). *Utbränning i Sverige- en populationsstudie* (No. 2002:06). Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.
- Hammer, T. H., Saksvik, P. Ø., Nytrø, K., Torvatn, H., & Bayazit, M. (2004). Expanding the psychosocial work environment: Workplace norms and work-family conflict as correlates of stress and health. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 9, 83-97.
- Hemerijck A. (2002), "Come cambia il modello sociale europeo", in *Stato e mercato*, n. 65.
- Holt, H. (2003). "Indflytelse på egen arbejdstid som løsningen på tilpasningen mellem arbejdsliv og familieliv". In: *Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv*, no.3/2003

- Istat (2002), *Rapporto annuale 2001*, Roma.
- Jefferys, S., Mispelblom B.F. & Thörnquist, C. (editors). (2001). *European Working Lives*. Cheltenham, UK : Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd
- Karasek, R. A. (1979). Jobs demands, Jobs Decision Latitude and Mental Strain: implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, 285-307.
- Kvasnicka M. & Werwatz A. (2002), "Lohneffekte der Zeitarbeit", in *DIW-Wochenbericht*, n. 69.
- Laffi S. (1998), *Logiche di comportamento in situazioni di passaggio: mobilità, reinserimento, disoccupazione*, Milano, Università degli studi di Milano.
- Landsbergis, P. A., Cahill, J., & Schnall, P. (1999). The impact of lean production and related new systems of work organisation on worker health. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 4, 108-130.
- Laurent A. (1993), *Histoire de l'individualisme*, Paris, Puf.
- Lloyd K. M. & Auld C. J. (2002), "The role of leisure in determining quality of life: Issues of content and measurement", in *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 57.
- Marklund, S., & Wikman, A. (2002). *Innledning*. In S. Marklund (Ed.), *Arbetsliv och hälsa 2000* (pp. 9-25). Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.
- Ministero del Lavoro e della previdenza sociale (2000), *Rapporto di monitoraggio sulle politiche occupazionali e del lavoro*, n. 2, Roma.
- Oecd (1999), *Employment Outlook*, Paris.
- Oeij, P.R.A., & Wiezer N.M. (2002) *New work organisation, working conditions and quality of work: towards the flexible firm? European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, Dublin
- Olesen, H. S. (2003). "Bøjelighed eller tilbøjelighed - træer og levende mennesker". In: *Tidsskrift for arbejdsliv*, no.3/2003
- Paci M. (2005), *Nuovi lavori, nuovo welfare. Sicurezza e libertà nella società attiva*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Paugam S. (2000), *Le salarié de la précarité*, Paris, Puf.
- Ranci C. (2002), *Le nuove disuguaglianze sociali in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Regini M. (1998), *The effects of labour market de-regulation on unemployment: a critical review of the different research approaches and of the empirical evidence*, Bruxelles, European Commission, Directorate DG XII.
- Regini M. (2000), *Modelli di capitalismo*, Bari, Laterza.
- Rosanvallon P. (1995), *La nouvelle question sociale*, Paris, Édition de Seuil.
- Saksvik, P. Ø. (1996). Attendance Pressure During Organizational Change. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 3(1), 47-59.
- Salvati M. (1988), "Mercato del lavoro e relazioni industriali. Note in margine al dibattito su flessibilità e occupazione", in *Politica economica*, n. 1.
- Saraceno C. (2005), "Le differenze che contano tra i lavoratori atipici", in *Sociologia del lavoro*, n. 97.
- Sen A. (1992), *Inequality Reexamined*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Sen A. (1999), *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Sennett R. (1998), *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, New York-London, W.W. Norton & Company.
- Sørensen, B. A., Dahl-Jørgensen, C. & Skogstad, A. (1998). *Arbeid og arbeidshelse i pleie- og omsorgssektoren*. Oslo : Arbeidsforskningsinstituttet
- Sørensen, B.A.: "Fremtidens arbeidsliv – en "hønningfelle" for velutdannede kvinner og menn?". Lecture presented at "Feminism 2000. Biology – Technology – Politics", conference in Bergen April 2000.
- Torp, H. (2002). "Faktisk og ønsket arbeidstid i Europa: Forskjeller mellom kvinner og menn". In: Søkelys på arbeidsmarkedet, no.1/2002, s.11-21
- Torvatn, H., & Molden, T. H. (2001). *HMS-tilstanden i Norge i år 2001- Occupational health and safety in Norway in 2001* (No. STF38 A01027). Trondheim: SINTEF Teknologiledelse.
- Troup, C., & Dewe, P. (2002). Exploring the nature of control and its role in the appraisal of workplace stress. *Work & Stress*, 16(4), 335-355.
- Wahl, Asbjørn. (2002). "Arbeidslivets brutalisering under markedliberalismen". In: Roness and Berge Mathiesen (editors): *Utbrent. Krevende jobber – gode liv?*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget
- Westerlund, H., Ferrie, J., Hagberg, J., Jeding, K., Oxenstierna, G., & Theorell, T. (2004). Workplace expansion, long-term sickness absence, and hospital admission. *The Lancet*, 363, 1193-1197.