



**For a « rubik'scubic » approach of paternal involvement**

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## **CURA-WAROL**

In past years, researchers have focused on the problems involved in work-life articulation or balance, that is between personal and professional life, and the issues related to extending one's career or attempting to change one's working arrangements at the end of active working life. In the wake of the current demographic decline and possible shortages of skilled labour in some sectors, organisations seek to identify ways to attract employees and retain them. For their part, workers search for improved quality of life, working time arrangements, and support or means to accommodate their choice of activities. Most scientific research therefore indicates that public authorities and social actors should define new working arrangements, working schedules and new approaches to the management of working ages in an effort to re-design work organization not only for ageing workers but for employed working parents through measures that allow a better balance between work and personal/family life over the lifespan.

In this context, CURA-WAROL studies existing work-family systems as well as issues related to managing working ages and times (retirement, early retirement, working times and schedules, to name a few), and the position of social actors regarding these measures and any other programs or experiments likely to be explored or implemented.

### **The CURA- WAROL network offers:**

- ▶ Relevant results based on research
- ▶ Reliable resources for pedagogical or other objectives;
- ▶ Access to university knowledge and experts and also to non- or para-governmental agencies concerned with working ages and social times issues (work-family articulation or balance, ageing and end of career, municipal family policies);
- ▶ Data and statistics on questions that bear on the management and regulation of working ages and social times.

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## ARUC-GATS

L'Alliance de recherche université communauté sur la Gestion des âges et des temps sociaux (ARUC-GATS) s'intéresse aux dispositifs existants de conciliation emploi-famille, et de gestion des âges et des temps (retraites, préretraites, temps de travail et horaires de travail notamment), ainsi qu'aux positions des acteurs sociaux concernant ces modalités et toutes autres qui pourraient être expérimentées. Elle s'intéresse également aux réalités d'emploi et aux aspirations de la main-d'œuvre. Dans ce cadre, l'ARUC-GATS cherche notamment à connaître les positions des acteurs sociaux et à déterminer quels aménagements seraient souhaitables pour accroître le taux d'activité, mais aussi pour offrir de meilleures conditions de travail aux salariés vieillissants ou ayant des personnes à charge (c.-à-d. enfants ou personnes âgées avec incapacités).

L'ARUC-GATS comprend trois axes de recherche principaux à savoir :

**Axe 1. Conciliation emploi famille (CEF)**

**Axe2. Vieillesse et Fin de carrière (FIC)**

**Axe 3. Milieux de vie, Politiques familiales et municipales (VIE)**

La présente recherche s'inscrit plus spécifiquement dans ce dernier axe. Dans ce Chantier d'action partenariale (CAP) sur les milieux de vie, on s'intéresse au rôle de l'acteur municipal ou régional, en ce qui concerne le rôle du milieu de vie dans la vie familiale et l'articulation entre les responsabilités professionnelles et la vie personnelle. Dans ce cadre, l'ARUC analyse les pratiques et politiques en place au Québec, mais effectue aussi des comparaisons avec le reste du Canada et l'international.

# For a « rubik'scubic » approach of paternal involvement

Bernard Fusulier and Jacques Marquet \*

A large number of studies underline the wish for fathers to take part in the care of children from the start, some underlining the figure of the « new father », in contrast with that of the authoritarian breadwinner head of household father (see Lewis and O'Brien, 1987 ; Welzer-Lang, 2000 ; Hobson, 2002 ; Doucet, 2006). However, today, it is still men, and more specifically fathers, who are the most involved in their job, who use less parental leave, etc. (see Duyvendak and Stavenuiter, 2004 ; Deven, 2005 ; O'Brien, Brandth and Kvande, 2007). How can this apparent paradox be understood, where the behaviour of fathers in work/family articulation does not necessarily correspond to their wishes and to the new social imaginary ? What prevents more male participation in the care of children ? Why are public policies, aimed at favouring such participation, not very successful ? What are the obstacles for men who wish to favour home and family work ? Etc. .<sup>1</sup>

In France, A.-M. Devreux's perspective, presented in 1985 in an article *Les différentes étapes de la déconstruction-reconstruction des objets et des concepts : trois exemples*, seems particularly appropriate and allows to see more than a paradoxal vision of the phenomenon, and also answers some of these questions, while not being limited to an explanation through male domination and a universe of sense hiding the reality of social gender relations. The author suggests to study parenthood through a triple articulation : that of the production and reproduction spheres, that of female and male, that of pragmatic and symbolic levels.

## *The rubik'scubic model*

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<sup>1</sup> These questions are the object of an issue of the journal *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, directed by the authors and published in 2007: « Articuler vie familiale et vie professionnelle : une entrée par les pères » (Volume XXXVIII, n°2).

A simple example allows to measure the scope of this model : longer maternity leaves. If the analysis of the effects of such a measure were restricted to what is pragmatically found in the private sphere for women, it would emphasize the benefit for women in terms of satisfaction and health protection. A.-M. Devreux invites us to a more complex analysis. Would affording parental leave to women only be equivalent, at the symbolic level, to supporting a reading that would naturalize maternity and, at the pragmatic level, to increasing the disparity between the investment of fathers and mothers towards the children ? In the professional sphere, would this penalize women compared to men ? The answers seem obvious.

This tri-dimensional model can be presented as a cube. As for the famous cube invented by E. Rubik in 1974, one element cannot make a move without automatically affecting the neighbouring elements. A.-M. Devreux thus invites us to a « rubik'scubic » approach that takes into account all the dimensions of the issue.

The development we present here is based on this analysis model, while making it more complex by taking into account the macro-, meso- and micro-social levels of analysis. In fact, the composition effects can be differentiated, or even have opposite meanings, according to the level studied. Thus, at the conjugal level, a policy that favours taking chores, for example ironing, out of the family sphere and towards low-cost services carried out by women, can allow a more egalitarian married life while participating in the reproduction of gender inequalities at a more collective level. Figure 1 is an attempt at presenting this « three-level rubik'scubic » approach while emphasizing some examples of economical, political, social and cultural factors that influence their dynamics.

*Insert figure 1 (see end of text).*

The strength of this rubik'scubic model is that it considers these three dimensions in their interstructure and not separately. Thus, it first articulates the domestic and professional spheres, along the idea that the family is not a closed place that could only be seen from the domestic space. In other words, for our purpose, the production sphere must intervene in the view of paternity, which cannot be restricted to the sole male practices linked to reproduction, caring for and raising children, as well as the domestic paths of men. Then, in those two spheres, the analysis focuses on the gender division of the work : what is the place of men and women, on the pragmatic and symbolic levels, in the production sphere and in the reproduction (domestic and family) sphere ?

A.-M. Devreux's thought is remarkably synthesized by M.-B. Tahon and F. de Pesloüan : « In this perspective, paternity [...] is defined with respect to the place of women (more specifically wives) in the division of the work in the family and in the production sphere, and maternity is defined in relation to the concrete and symbolic

place given to women in the gender division of work, according to the place occupied by men [...] » (Tahon and Pesloïan, 1989, 449).<sup>2</sup>

### ***Societal context and paternal involvement***

The professional and domestic spheres are closely articulated. Beyond a certain threshold which varies according to structural, cultural, institutional and organisational, or even individual, parameters, a larger involvement in one can only be done by disengaging in another. This is particularly obvious in Japan, where men and women both predominantly consider that the insufficient involvement of men in parenthood can be explained by the hours they spend at work (Taga, 2007). The negative correlation between the time spent at paid work and the time spent at caring for children can be established by the scientific literature on the issue. Moreover, Milkie *et al.* (cited by Drew and Daverth, 2007) underline that the more time the parents spend in employment, the less they spend with their children, and this for both men and women.

However, if it were only a question of working time, another distribution between men and women could probably be imagined. But many elements testify to the dominant place of men in the production sphere, on the pragmatic as well as symbolic levels : wage differences benefitting men, management posts mainly occupied by men, part time temporary jobs and leave for domestic and family reasons mainly used by women, work ethics built around the figure of the heroic male... All these elements contribute to the idea that male paid work is more important than female paid work and that, in consequence, the father remains the main breadwinner for the household. Something happens which would be a sort of « gratification arithmetics ». In a couple, sometimes for reasons linked to the logic of matrimony itself (Barrère-Maurisson, 2003), the man, who is usually older, more qualified and (thus) better placed in the labour market than his wife, has superior professional career and wages. This induces a conjugal calculation where the husband, even when a child is born, pursues or even increases his professional investment whereas the wife will invest more in the domestic sphere. S. Lee, D. McCann and J. Messenger (2007) show that, among married couples with children, the paid working time of men tends to increase with the number of children, when it is the contrary for women. When it is question of reducing the paid working time to take care of domestic chores, the most rational calculation from a strictly economic point of view remains for the women to leave (partially or completely) the professional sphere.

The calculation is the same, from Tokyo to Dublin, from Stockholm to Ouagadougou. The response is all the more generalized that the underlying ideology behind this economical reasoning is a tendency to biologize, to naturalize maternity not only in its reproduction, but also nutritive, sanitary and educational components. This ideology

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<sup>2</sup> «Dans cette perspective, la paternité [...] se définit par rapport à la place des femmes (en particulier des conjointes) dans la division du travail dans la famille et dans la sphère de la production et la maternité se construit en relation à la place faite concrètement et symboliquement aux femmes dans la division sexuelle du travail, en fonction de la place occupée par les hommes [...]»

remains very present and manifest. In many countries, parental leaves are seen as an extension of maternity leave (Drew, 2005). Here is another example. While carrying out a research on managers in a large ironworks undertaking in Wallonia, B. Fusulier, D. Laloy and E. Sanchez (2007) noted that on the symbolic level, beyond differences observed according to various statutory categories, the use of legal leaves for parental reasons is considered to be more legitimate for women than for men.

The articulation of the professional and family spheres, of male and female, of pragmatic and symbolic, is also obvious when considering the repercussions of the evolution of the labour market on the domestic sphere and the different reactions it causes in men and in women. Japan is a perfect example. F. Taga (2007) shows that until the seventies, the *salarymen* fathers with lifelong guaranteed employment showed their loyalty to their employer by accumulating overtime dedicated sometimes to work, sometimes to other socializing activities organized by the enterprise (requirement of « company-ism » - Hanada, 1997). In a context of increased competition, the crisis in this system changes the situation for fathers who are not assured to be able to remain in their role of breadwinner : on the one hand, the new situation that carries a risk of staking on an uncertain professional career, could be a chance for them to invest more in their relationship with their children ; on the other hand, the fragility of their job could also lead them to over-invest in this sphere in order to keep all the chances to consolidate their job and, thus, to keep their social role of male breadwinner. Furthermore, the unstability of the working world also affects feminine behaviours in so far as it can bring women to reconsider leaving the labour market or reducing their working time ; today's pressures on employment could lead them to imagine leaving the professional sphere as a last resort.

In what could be seen as a totally different context, in Burkina Faso, J. Mazzocchetti (2007) observes that the serious socio-economic crisis in the country has prevented many young men, even highly educated, to reach the status of head of family. They are faced with a dilemma : to abandon the idea of paternity, which does not necessarily mean not « pregnating » a woman and then, when it happens, the development of matri-centered families, or to invent a paternal relationship that is not nourishing or authoritarian. Difficult invention !

The capacity for public policies to maintain a true equality between men and women in the family and professional spheres depends on the more or less adequate consideration of all the various dimensions underlined by A.-M. Devreux. The Swedish example is striking. When the parental leave was global (1974 reform) and could be indistinctively used by the father or the mother, the fathers used it very little, mainly « leaving » their leaves to the mothers. The introduction of a non-transferable month (« the month of the father ») in 1995, then of a second month in 2002, caused a significant increase of parental leave taken by fathers (Chronhlom, 2007). The egalitarian ideology very present in Swedish society had to be supported by measures allowing the choice to be economically less discriminating. On the contrary, it can be reasonably thought that the lack of success of Japanese policies in promoting paternal

implications in caring of children can be explained by a combination of factors including the patriarchal society, the regulation of the production sphere, and insufficiently attractive public policies (Fusulier, 2005). In this last respect, since the leave benefits are relatively low and because of the way they are calculated (40% of the basic salary for maximum 10 months), it is easily understood that if leaving the professional sphere means losing 60% of a salary, the sacrifice may as well be on the lower salary, generally the wife's (Taga, 2007). In Ireland as well, the absence of a juridical status to the taking of parental leave probably contributes to reproducing gender inequalities (Drew and Daverth, 2007). And what about third-world countries that do not have the means to have a true policy in those matters and where each must find his own resources ?

### *Taking into account the meso-social level*

Beyond the societal frame and its economic, political, juridical and cultural components, there is a role played by intermediary mediation instances such as the organization and the family. The organization, understood here as the place where paid work is found, is a mediatory space between the State and individuals, through its functioning logic, its regulation and its organizational structures more or less favourable to taking into account the work/family articulation issue (Fusulier, Giraldo and Laloy, 2008). This is particularly true for men. The working environment is one of the factors influencing paternal commitment (Dulac, 1998 ; Hass, Allard and Hwang, 2002). More specifically, the wish for working men to invest more in their family life is still lacking recognition and legitimacy (Levine and Pittinsky, 1997). Of course, as Høgaard says, the setting up of legal leaves linked to paternity, accessible to or aimed at men, favours the recognition of the « working father », although the image of the « hard working male » still governs the work sphere (Høgaard, 1997). It is thus difficult for fathers to use these leaves. In contemporary organizations there is still a type of management that takes for granted that family responsibilities are a personal business, outside the enterprise, or even « concerning women » (Tremblay, 2004). Thus, « when work-family conciliation measures exist in organizations, apparently mostly women participate ; men sometimes would like to participate, but are afraid of a certain more or less open disapproval from their work environment » (Tremblay, 2005, 169). In a particular study on the point of view of managers in a large enterprise, B. Fusulier, D. Laloy and E. Sanchez (2007) note that male and female managers consider taking parental leave more legitimate for workers or employees than for managers, whether men or women. This analysis supports the hypothesis of a correlation between the social structure of the enterprise and the symbolic space of legitimacy of using leave linked to parenthood. However, it is difficult to separate the organizational mediation from a more significant gender effect (see for example Drew and Daverth, 2007).

It is easier to identify mediation through conjugal or family dynamics, by reference to the analysis proposed by K. Wall, S. Aboim and S. Marinho (2007). Using the family interactions typology of J. Kellerhals *et al.* (2004), they study the links between family

functioning and investment in paternity. From a qualitative research carried out in Portugal, they support the idea of existing privileged associations between certain family types and the way men living in a couple with children invest their father roles and identities. Confirming the works of Kellerhals, they show that there is no equal distribution of family types in the various social environments. This can be seen in parallel with the economic constraints that weigh more or less strongly on families and can more or less directly affect the possibility of seeing equality ideals expressed in the behaviours. In this sense, two observations are particularly significant : first, where there are true possibilities of externalizing the heaviest domestic chores, which goes hand in hand with economic capital, the tensions between family and professional lives are weak. Second, many at home fathers have less favourable professional perspectives than their companion (unemployment, unstable job, lower salary...).

Research carried out by H. Trelu for France (2007) and L. Merla for Belgium (2007) also corroborate this statement concerning fathers who withdraw from the professional sphere. These researchers work on neighbouring populations : men benefitting from the parental education allocation (APE – *Allocation parentale d'éducation*) for the first, and at home fathers for the second. Both observe that the choice of becoming an at home father is often due to a « simple » economic logic (a better professional career and income for their wife). But they also mainly show that the fact for fathers to take an atypical position (meaning against the usual attribution of the productive work for men and reproductive work for women) poses relationship problems and identity questions linked to the dominant models of masculinity and femininity.

### ***Conclusion***

Finally, the « rubik'scubic » approach that we have outlined underlines the fact that the way a man will place himself as a father and will invest paternity or, inversely, the way a women will place herself as a mother and will invest maternity, are largely determined by the situation they are given concretely and symbolically in the gender division of paid and domestic work, and thus by the place taken by the other sex in this gender division of work. The investment in maternity by women will be all the more strong if men are in a dominant position in the production system. The investment in paternity by men will be all the more limited if they dominate the professional sphere. In this sense, it is not surprising that it is through a « gender neutralization » vision of parental leave that countries such as Sweden and Norway (see Bjonberg, 2002 ; Brandth and Kvande, 2006 ; Chronholm, 2007) were able to bring men to take the part of leave devoted to them. In fact it was a question of reducing the pressure of professional environments on fathers and on conjugal negotiations through a « take it or leave it » logic that is sufficiently attractive at the financial and social protection levels. These analyses remind us, if it were necessary, that the principle of freedom of choice (each following his wishes) is a social trap with obvious gender inequality reproductive effects.

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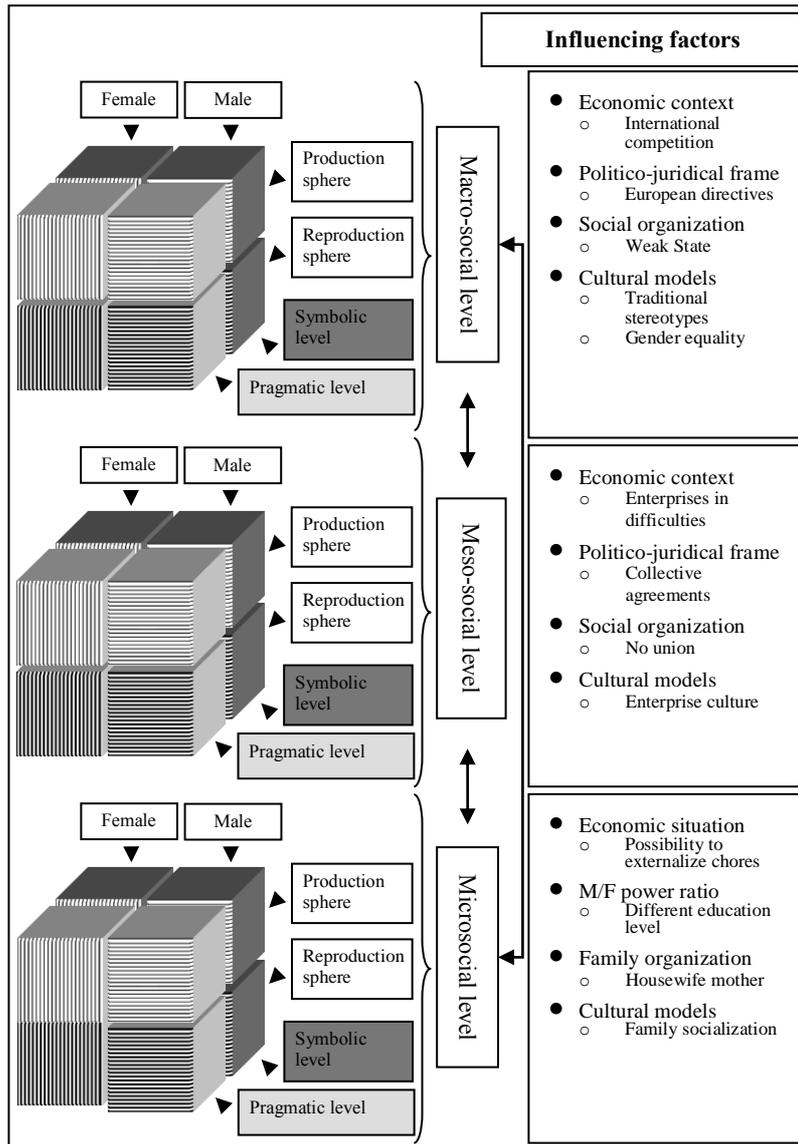


Figure 1. Diagram of parenthood based on A.-M. Devreux' works