



## Existential Field 4:

# Local Politics – Programmes and Best Practice Models

## Working Report - Summary (April 2010)



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## WORKING REPORTS

Funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme and co-ordinated by Technical University Dortmund, FAMILYPLATFORM gathers a consortium of 12 organisations working together to articulate key questions about the family for the *European Social Science and Humanities Research Agenda 2012-2013*.

There are four key stages to the project. The first is to chart and review the major trends of comparative family research in the EU in 8 'Existential Fields' (EF). The second is to critically review existing research on the family, and the third is to build on our understanding of existing issues affecting families and predict future conditions and challenges facing them. The final stage is to bring the results and findings of the previous three stages together, and propose key scientific research questions about families to be tackled with future EU research funding.

This *Working Report* has been produced for the first stage of the project, and is part of a series of reports:

- EF1. Family Structures & Family Forms**
- EF2. Family Developmental Processes**
- EF3. Major Trends of State Family Policies in Europe**
- EF4a. Family and Living Environment**
- EF4b. Local Politics – Programmes and Best Practice Models**
- EF5. Patterns and Trends of Family Management in the European Union**
- EF6. Social Care and Social Services**
- EF7. Social Inequality and Diversity of Families**
- EF8. Media, Communication and Information Technologies in the European Family**

Both full versions and summaries of the *Working Reports* are available to download from the FAMILYPLATFORM website, where stakeholders are invited to comment on the reports and have a voice in the project.

## LOCAL POLITICS – PROGRAMMES AND BEST PRACTICE MODELS

### *Summary*

In considering *Family and Living Environments (Existential Field 4)*, special and relevant attention has to be given to family policies at a local level. The local level has acquired increasing importance in qualifying the well-being of families, and in providing services for families' primary needs. In part 3 of the present work on *Family and Living Environments*, attention is focused on specific review on the state of the art of research on local family policies, and in particular on programs and good practices in different regional areas and in various countries.

The research was conducted primarily on the internet using European databases and search engines (key words used: local family policy, local welfare, local politics, subsidiarity, and local welfare). The following databases have also been analysed: Eurostat's regional statistic database, OECD *Family Database*, *The Family Policy Database of the European Observatory on Family Policies*<sup>1</sup>, the Council of Europe *Family Policy Database*, The Committee of the Regions' website, and the European Alliance for Families' Database and website. Useful documents and good practice were only found on these last two websites.

In order for support actions to be targeted at the specific needs of the local community - tackling problems in a more "rounded and responsive way" - a recent study developed by the Committee of the Regions pointed out the following requirements:

- Devolved power: local institutions have to be responsible for their own policies;
- Local strategies: local institutions have to develop their own strategies;
- Building partnership among all the local stakeholders;
- Consideration of a wider context than just the local one;
- Strengthen, collaborate, and avoid competition;
- Clearly define the area involved in the local project;
- Respect the expertise of people involved in the project.

In our research, we did not find comparative studies on local family policies, but we did find two different and interesting comparative studies on local welfare systems.

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<sup>1</sup> The Observatory is no longer active.

Moving forward from these conclusions, Mingione & Oberti observed that local systems must be evaluated in terms of a varied mix of institutional and individual actors where diversity and complexity play an increasingly important role in the development of active policies, based on partnership implementation and on shared responsibility between providers and recipients. From this standpoint, local welfare systems are conceived as dynamic processes, in which the specific local, social and cultural context gives rise to both diversified mixes of actors underlying the strategies for implementing social policies, and to diverse profiles of needy or assisted populations. At this level of analysis, the main difficulty is to go beyond mere description and find parameters of interpretation (Mingione & Oberti, 2003).

This is also the reason why we talk about good practice models when discussing local family policies. Definitions of good practice are quite controversial, though we follow the European Alliance for Family's definition, according to which good practices are "successful initiatives supporting families".

These kinds of initiatives can be schematised in 8 macro-areas, according to the European Alliance for Families database; the macro-areas are as follows:

1. Financial Assistance
2. Leave Arrangements
3. Childcare
4. Labelling and Audit Schemes
5. Family-Friendly Workplaces
6. Parenting Support
7. Active Fatherhood
8. Help for Children and Young Adults
9. Active Ageing

In the Families Alliance's database of good practice there is no distinction between national and local family policies, and no division among the policies brought on by the Institutions (State, Regions, Cities) and those implemented by private actors (e.g. work-family policies realised in business community, company welfare or audit and labelling processes).

We have tried to make a short-list of local policies among the one presented in the European Alliance for Families Database and we have had an in-depth look at some different good practices in local family policies across Europe.

In particular, we have analysed the politics of:

- Municipality of Parma – *Gency for the Family* (Italy);
- The German Alliance for Families (Germany);
- The *Community Schools* in the Netherlands;
- The *Egalité des temps* project in Rennes (France).

The common characteristic of these projects is the local level, though differences can be found in:

- relationships between the national and the local level (more or less autonomy in decision-making and funding resources);
- the kind of political approach – whether explicitly targeted at the family, or not;
- reproducibility.

As a starting point, the methodological discussion takes into consideration the extreme poverty of comparative data and the absence of systematic analysis. Therefore, the quantitative evaluation is extremely complex, as we cannot dispose of numerical structural indicators. In any case, we have to be aware that comparison among different territories and different local policies is hardly possible, anyway. The qualitative evaluation seems more productive, as it is more oriented in detecting the complex and interactive mechanisms of local networks. By using this methodology we are able to find the actors that determine local policy's efficacy: who the stakeholders are, which institutions are involved, and rules that lead to success and efficacy.

Moreover, the research leads to the conclusion that a methodology to evaluate and to define good practices is also necessary, as working on good practice models without enhancing their portability and the possibility of their diffusion can end up of being of little significance. The collection of good practices needs, therefore, to become more systematic to allow comparisons and to permit an evaluation of the results achieved.

A research agenda on local family policies would be therefore of great interest, developing methodologies and instruments for comparison and evaluation, building a sort of family mainstreaming in local family policies.

Finally, the concept of “Family Mainstreaming” deserves some specific attention and definition: it means - in the international approach at least - that the family becomes even more central as a criterion of good work in politics and administration.



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