



TIMES IN THE CITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

This leaflet summarises the main findings of comparative research undertaken in five European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands) which was published in the Journal BEST No. 1/1999. The aims of the research were to highlight the reasons for and extent of urban time policies in Europe during recent years, as well as to identify and analyse innovative cases involving the synchronisation of various time policies (working hours, school hours, shopping hours, etc.) at local level.

Changes in urban time policies are triggered by:

- changes in working time (round the clock work);
- the growth of the service economy;
- the extension of new information technology;
- urban congestion;
- changes in gender relations (increasing activity rate for women);
- changes in public services; and
- the individualisation of lifestyles.

The issues at stake are both time and space related and deal with:

- the opening hours of municipal offices and public services;
- the opening hours of school and childcare facilities;
- working-time policies;
- solving traffic congestion; and
- the revitalisation of inner cities.

The implementation and the success of the initiatives undertaken rely on:

- the participation of citizens and organisations (such as local authorities) in a dual bottom-up/top-down process;
- new patterns of regulation based on social dialogue at local level;
- the agreement and commitment to integrate multiple actors and institutions into cross-departmental partnerships;
- the setting up of ad hoc 'concertation' structures (Time Offices in Italy); and
- the use of specific data-collecting instruments.

The outcomes:

- modernisation of public administration service delivery (one-stop agencies);
- extension of opening hours of services;
- creation of 'common' times;
- coordination of opening hours of various public/private services; and
- development of local democracy.



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There is no doubt that time has become one of the most important issues of modern, everyday life. Despite tendencies towards a reduction of working time and the increase of ‘leisure’ time, citizens – women and men – have the constant feeling of having less and less ‘time’, of being under permanent ‘stress’. Michael Ende’s fictional work ‘Momo’, with the ‘grey gentlemen’ stealing time, seems to have become reality. We are growing more and more aware of the losses in quality of life that we suffer in traffic jams, in waiting in queues, and in standing outside closed shops, libraries and administrations. But we are also becoming aware of an opposing force: that citizens are standing up against ‘time theft’, and for ‘time sovereignty’ and ‘time welfare’. The Italian ‘tempi della città’ model is the basis for the ‘times of the city’ concept which is a recent expression of the newly emerging desire for self-determination in the field of time. What use being surrounded by riches and commodities, if we are not able to make proper use of them because we have no time? The ‘times of the city’ approach does not promise a new paradise – but it does promise a democratic and solidarist approach towards cultivating and controlling, towards ‘humanising’ the everyday-life time structures in the urban environment, by adapting them to the needs and desires of the inhabitants. This promise – and the first steps to implement it – is what this report is about.

Changes which trigger urban time planning

Italy is the first country in which efforts have been observed to introduce a consistent time policy as a widespread practice. In contrast, other Member States of the European Union are only just beginning (France, the Netherlands, and, more so, Germany) or have not yet started (Finland). Nevertheless, the study shows that time has become a major topic in urban reflection, discourse, planning and action in all the countries discussed here. The contents of this new policy focus on time issues. Moreover, a new form of policy goes alongside urban time policies: time policies are increasingly important from the point of view of the citizens’ quality of life and are regarded as a democratic and cross-sectional transversal process. This is why such policies require new forms of participation: e.g. citizens’ forums, model experiments, surveys within the community and interdisciplinary cooperation between the various branches of the local administration.

Modena, the friendly city

In *Modena*, within a forum known as the friendly city, women shopkeepers agreed among themselves a rota of late evening opening hours for grocery shops in the various districts. In 1994, a mobility pact was also agreed and signed by no less than 30 social representatives (from the taxi-drivers’ association to housewives’ federations, the chamber of commerce and three trade unions), tackling the issue of urban schedules in the light of all conceivable transport and traffic problems.

The reasons explaining the growing interest in time issues and time policies in Europe are multifold.

- General economic development has been shifting from the industrial to the service society. A huge process of technological change is under way. Both have temporal and spatial impacts. Organisation of time plays a crucial role in the service economy; service production temporally coincides – *uno actu* – with service consumption; new information and communication technologies tend to reduce distances and speed up time perceptions.
- Most European countries show a high rate of unemployment. This situation has an immediate impact upon working-time policies.
- Globalisation is necessitating the enhancement of economies’ competitiveness, and has thus triggered, together with a working-time reduction, an avalanche of working-time flexibilisation.
- Working-time flexibilisation goes alongside the emergence of new forms of labour, which mainly entail discontinuous and precarious jobs.
- Urban development, urban sprawl, disurbanisation, and air pollution due to increasing individualised car transport, create a need for new solutions.
- The gender relations change, with a growing number of women participating in the labour market, increasingly challenges (though does not yet overcome) the traditional division of labour in households, working life, and society.
- Individualisation and pluralisation of lifestyles, with an increasing number of singles, divorcees, single parents, etc., are continuously diminishing the ‘problem-solving capacity’ of traditional subsidiary networks (like family, neighbourhoods, etc.).
- Simultaneously, public services provided by the state on a local level are changing their roles. The impact of the fiscal crisis and the need for modernisation and restructuring of public administrations are paramount. New efforts can be observed to achieve new quality standards and citizen-orientation of the performance of the public sector; frequently, these processes are accompanied by new forms of local participation and cooperation.

Trends in the regulation of time schedules

In all five countries we discovered time policies in areas that concern the everyday life of citizens. In general, there is a trend towards both deregulation and decentralisation. As the regulation of working hours tends to be transferred to the firm level, state regulation shifts from national to municipal and/or regional level – in the cases of school hours (Italy, Finland, France in an experimental way), and of childcare facilities and shop opening (Finland and

Italy). Decentralisation of control of the opening hours of services raises the problem of the level at which the coordination between different hours' systems can be achieved. All national reports mention time conflicts that result from a lack of synchronisation between interdependent schedules. In particular, policies are missing which establish linkages between working time and other schedules – such as the hours of school, childcare, and private and public services.

One of the rare attempts to promote action at a national level is the Dutch Commission for the Schedule of the Day. The 'times of the city' approach places this kind of coordination at a local level. Which is why the study has focused on this level.

Commission for the Schedule of the Day

Set up in 1997 by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, this Commission is trying to find solutions for time-space synchronisation problems. It is especially interested in two-income households with children, one-parent families and single person households, because these groups often experience time-space synchronisation problems.

Two pilot projects have been carried out in the area of *Utrecht* in the frame of this Commission. Both try to help task combiners to solve their time and space problems through the introduction of flexible opening hours in childcare facilities.

Case studies

The national reports mainly concentrated on innovative urban policies. Most of these try to better synchronise the different time schedules and make them compatible with the everyday life of citizens. Twenty-three cities and one area (a province in South Holland) were analysed in the national reports. As some areas undertook more than one project, the total number of projects studied came to 33.

The origin and field of application of the projects

Some of the projects consist of the local implementation of a national policy (Finland, France and the Netherlands). Other projects, however, stem from local initiatives (mainly in Italy and Germany). In the first category, the existence of a national programme and of financial support generally has been an incentive for local actors to commit themselves to this kind of project.

Some projects have, as their field of application, a spatial dimension (the project concerns the city or an area of it). Others are service based (school hours or childcare facilities, public services, transportation, etc.). Yet others concern a certain target group within the population (e.g. working mothers in Germany or Italy, two-income households in the Netherlands). In Italy there is a 'times of the city' methodology – a holistic and systemic approach that allows for implementation in different urban fields of application.

The 6+6 model in Finland

The 6+6 model in Finland is an example of a national programme implemented at the local level. This model involves the lengthening of the operating/opening hours from 8 to 12 hours a day through the implementation of two shifts of 6 hours. The aims are increased efficiency in the employees' work, the enhancement of the well-being of the employees, and work-sharing. Launched and financed by the government, this programme has been trialled both in private firms and in some municipalities. In the town of *Kemi*, for instance, the experiment was carried out in the public services for domestic work (services for elderly people living in their own flats or families needing temporary help in cleaning, shopping, preparing food, etc.). The evaluation of the experiment reported a positive influence on the ability to cope and the capacity for work of the 14 employees involved in the experiment. The results were so positive that the town extended the experiment to 250 employees.

Areas and issues at stake

Seven areas of action are shaping the contents – the subject matter – of the projects. Three of them are more developed than the others.

- **Municipal administration and public services.** This concerns the rescheduling of opening hours in particular. They can cover all municipal offices – like in *Rome* – or one kind of service – like the Sunday opening of public libraries in *Amsterdam*. Another approach lies in the decentralisation of services in city quarters (*Hamburg, Lille*), or the implementation of one-stop agencies (*Bremen*). A last issue is the provision of person-oriented services – like the home services in Finland and France. In most cases, the last two approaches are linked together; they generally coincide with the use of new information and communication technology (distant access). The aims of these kinds of policies are: the improvement of quality and efficiency of public services; the implementation of equal opportunity policies; and to respond to the challenge of privatisation via an increase in the productivity of public services.
- **School and childcare facilities.** Ten cases concern the coordination of the opening hours of school and childcare facilities. This is the most important field of urban time planning – besides working-time policies and rescheduling public service hours. The crucial issue here is the need to reconcile gainful work with family tasks. Parents try hard to manage their time/space 'puzzles', caused by the flexibilisation of labour and increasing female employment (Germany, the Netherlands). Generally the change in school hours goes alongside the effort to add other functions – like care, sport, catering, and culture – to the 'educative' function of the school. This implicitly leads to an increase in children's autonomy. In other cases, projects have multifold aims. In Italy, for example, school-oriented policies simultaneously try: (i) to avoid

traffic congestion via the desynchronisation of opening hours in the same quarter; (ii) to improve the living conditions of families; and (iii) to integrate school or childcare facilities into the neighbourhood and thus rebuild the social bond (opening up of school yards or dining halls to the neighbourhood, like in *Bolzano, Bremen, St Denis*).

- **Working-time policies.** Working time is an issue affecting nearly all the cases. There is a correlation between the priority given to working-time reduction or working-time reorganisation and the main issues at stake. Working-time reduction aims mainly at job creation (Germany, France, Finland) or at the improvement of working and living conditions of the employees (Finland, the Netherlands). In contrast, working-time reorganisation aims mainly at the improvement of the efficiency and accessibility of the services (Finland, Italy), or at the implementation of equal opportunity principles (*Rennes* in France).

Other policies are time/space related – like those that aim at facilitating or adapting mobility. They may concern a particular category (children, old persons, working mothers, etc.) or try to solve problems of traffic congestion. A time/space-related factor may also be found where the issue is the revitalisation of urban areas (Italy).

Improved opening hours in Rome

Since 1995, the *Rome* municipality has undertaken a process intended to change the working-time schedules and opening hours in the public administration. Involving the municipal services, the time office, the trade unions and the university, this process aims to improve the quality and efficiency of services. The outcome has been the implementation of opening hours until 6 p.m. for several services, an afternoon opening time for all services on Thursdays, etc.

Flexible school hours in Bolzano

Although raised by the issue of early morning traffic conditions, this project has also tried to help families improve the first moments their members share during the early morning, with particular regard to the way children and women experience the early morning hours. The project resulted in two pilot projects in 1995/1996 which consisted of the broadening of school entry hours (from 7.45/8.15 a.m. to 7.45/9 a.m.) and the extension of afternoon school activity (flexibility in exit hours from the former 2.15/2.30 p.m. or 6 p.m. to the possibility of leaving between 3.45 and 4 p.m.).

The ‘Zeiten der Stadt’ project in Hamburg

This project aimed at the modification of the opening hours of services in the Barmbek-Uhlenhorst area of *Hamburg* (120,000 inhabitants) in order to improve the everyday life of working mothers with children. Supported by the Equal Opportunity Authority, the project resulted in changes to consultation hours of doctors, in improved accessibility of public services and childcare facilities, and in the extension of opening hours of other services like banks.

Working-time reduction in Yzeure

In this small French town, the shift from a 40-hour regime to a 35-hour working week for municipal employees has resulted in job creation and in a policy to provide new services (and new opening hours). The signature in 1981 of a Solidarity Contract with the government has helped the mayor to hire unemployed people and to respond to the citizens’ demands for new services: childcare facilities; extension of opening hours of administrative offices; creation of cultural spaces; services for elderly people, like meals at home, and services for household maintenance, etc.

Actors and ‘stakeholders’

The nature of the actors who are at the origin of a project or who are involved in its implementation is often the same, but their combination – or mutual contextualisation – is different.

- **Actors who trigger the projects.** The projects are initiated either by the municipalities or by one or several services or even by just one alderman – like in Finland, France, and the Netherlands. Italy and, perhaps less so, Germany see a larger diversity of actors at the origin of the projects. The Italian report assesses that unions, together with women (as members of unions as well as through their presence in local governments), often bring problems on to the agenda of municipalities and local governments.
- **Actors involved in the process of implementation of the projects.** Italy and Germany are both characterised by a diversity of actors who are involved, directly or indirectly, in the process of implementation of projects. Among them are actors from the field of the project, representatives of economic and social organisations, citizens’ associations, etc. In the other three countries, the number of actors involved is restricted, and is sometimes limited to a ‘face to face’ between the mayor and the unions (France).

Piazza Redi in Pesaro

This pilot project, begun in 1995, is a good example of the diversity of actors involved in the process of implementation of a ‘Times of the city’ project. Since the beginning of the 1990s, shopkeepers and inhabitants of the *Piazza Redi* have been asking the municipal council for the renewal and social revitalisation of the area. The project is still being carried out and has involved many actors: the alderwoman, the time office, the *Piazza Redi* association (citizens, shopkeepers), private businesses, state-funded firms, the consumers’ council, the trade unions, external university experts, etc.

The Process of implementation

Urban time policies are transversal. They have interrelated dimensions at different levels of society and have impacts on different categories of actors. The process of their implementation indicates the degree to which those integrated and interrelated



dimensions are taken into account. Three patterns have been distinguished:

- the model of internal negotiation characterised by a classical social dialogue (France and, to a lesser extent, Finland);
- the model of internal negotiation or cooperation which includes different services of the municipal administration – whether directly affected by the project or not (this kind of transversal process is typical of the Italian approach and is developing in the German cases);
- the model of internal negotiation or cooperation partly including external actors (Italy, and also developing in Germany).

The process of implementation depends on the scope of the cooperation. It can rely upon internal workshops, expert meetings, or public hearings (Finland, Germany). In Italy, the process of implementation tends to include different municipal services and actors in order to take into account the anticipated side effects of the projects. This gives rise to specific institutions and ways of bargaining. Time Offices have been set up in several cities; they organise the concertation and deliberation inside the municipal administration. Negotiations range from bilateral (social partners) and tripartite (including the municipality) tables of cooperative design to quadrangular tables of negotiation (including civil society and citizens). Several projects are based on data surveys and research in order to assess the socio-economic characteristics and spatial/temporal structures of the field of action. In Italy, this gave rise to an original methodology based on the concept of the ‘Chronotope’. This recalls (if differently applied) the methodology developed by the time geographers in Sweden: ‘urban places can be interpreted as chronotope, which means physical areas characterised by use patterns of different populations. These areas are, on the other side, knots of multi-scale relationship networks’.

The time bureau in Bremen-Vegesack

The first German time office, based on the Italian model, started up in 1997 and is an example of cooperation between the university and the municipality. Its aims are threefold: to acquire systematic information about time schedules of shops and public and private services; to encourage citizens to express their time needs; to try to take a moderating role with respect to both demand and supply sides. The process of finding solutions to problems is a participatory one based on negotiating round tables.

The results of the projects

The report focuses on the process rather than on mere ‘results’ because most of the projects are still in the process of implementation. As far as results are concerned, four categories have been distinguished.

- In eight cities the projects have not yet shown concrete results.
- In 12 cities, the projects provided practical results, but are still continuing or are in a process of extension.
- In two cases, practical results have been achieved and the process was not continued.
- In one case the project failed.

In some cases that have not yet produced concrete results, we observe process dynamics. They have two characteristics: they tend to integrate the different time/space dimensions of the issue at stake; and they display an intention to associate the actors who are directly or indirectly affected by the implementation of the project and its possible impacts. This kind of process is rather extended in Italy and Germany; it is likely to develop in certain cities in France and the Netherlands. As most of the Dutch initiatives have been undertaken in the frame of the national Commission for the Schedule of the Day, some lessons have been drawn from the experiments as to how to build processes of integration of the various actors into action plans. In Italy and Germany, a process of information, diffusion and exchange about ‘Times of the city’ policies is at work through associations or exhibitions.

Lessons to be drawn from the case studies

1. The bulk of the cases studied are based on the idea of reconciling living and working conditions. This demand has frequently been stressed by women and their associations; in order to be implemented, these projects need the participation of citizens. The cases also show that other actors have to be involved, among them those who are in responsible positions at the different levels of local government.
2. This seems to prove that, even if the process stems from the experience and needs of the citizens and is based on a local democracy dynamic, it needs ‘official’ support. A purely ‘bottom-up’ process is bound to fail as is a purely ‘top-down’ one. The evaluation of the obstacles to the implementation of a ‘Times of the city’ policy clearly states this observation.
3. An obstacle to change and modernisation with regard to citizens’ quality of life is the dominating internal perspective of service suppliers. They still have mainly segmented interests, and a functional rather than transversal perspective on their institution and its ‘societal’ role. Also, where employees are involved, a dominance of internal collective bargaining orientation can often be observed. Other obstacles are: the absence of mutual knowledge; the inability of actors to ‘aggregate’ their interests; a culture of distrust and non-communication among local actors; the long time that is needed to change time habits, etc.



4. Some urban time policies are a mere process of adaptation to external changes; others aim to set up and implement their own social or cultural objectives. Most of the cases belong to the first category. They have either been boosted by an internal administrative logic (France), or have resulted from an aim to adapt to the changes in working-time reorganisation, labour-market conditions and cultural evolutions – this is the case with the changing role of women in the labour market (Finland, the Netherlands). However, some cases belong to the second category – mainly in Italy and, perhaps less so, in Germany, and in some cities like *Amsterdam* and *St Denis*. In these cases, we observed time schedule modifications that were conceived with a view to authentic social, cultural or political objectives and/or new relations between time-givers or decision-makers on the one side and the citizens on the other. In the latter cases, we could detect, behind the mere extension of opening hours, other issues of a more cultural and social nature which concerned the ‘social bond’ – not only on a spatial basis, but also on a temporal one (temporal communities?).

Projects with sociocultural aims

In *Helsinki*, some childcare facilities have introduced a round the clock regime of work in order to adapt to the flexibilisation of working-time hours.

In comparison, we may cite the Sunday opening of public libraries in *Amsterdam*. Initiated in 1993 in the Public Library of Amsterdam and extended to two other units in 1996 and 1998, the experiment resulted in the implementation of opening hours on Sundays (October to March) from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The aim is to make the inner city more lively and attractive, and to increase accessibility for working people.

5. This leads us to reconsider the relationship between collective and individual times, and between public and private times. The ‘Times of the city’ approach originally mainly aimed at giving individuals mastery over their time structures. Nowadays it is also committed to building up areas and spaces of ‘common times’ (like the citizens’ day in *Cremona* and *Bremen-Vegesack*). But this process would eventually link the process of individualisation with collective frameworks and regulations. The ‘Times of the city’ concept tends to prove that these collective regulations should be built on a new relationship between the different territorial levels, giving strong importance to the social dialogue at the local level.

6. In short, urban time policies represent a new political concept based on the following hallmarks.

- There is a new concept of the city: the city is no longer regarded as a ‘closed space’, but rather as a knot within a network of regional relationships

and flows dealing with issues like sustainability, mixed use, rights of citizenship, participation and local democracy.

- This new concept of the city is no longer a male- and technology-dominated one, but seems to express a specifically feminine time culture.
- The ‘times of the city’ approach expresses the need for a new paradigm of the local ‘community’ – a paradigm that takes into account the complex and sometimes contradictory character of the coexistence of a plurality and heterogeneity of everyday lives and times.
- These new policies need to be based upon agreement in order to integrate complex actors and institutions. They have to initiate transversal cross-departmental, public-private partnerships. This kind of policy requires the involvement of those whose quality of everyday life is at stake.

7. Europe, here too, can be considered a ‘learning process’. The ‘times of the city’ issue has the potential to develop new European networks of best practice exchange and cooperation. Does the transformation of the welfare state, which is on the political agenda of all European societies, trigger the emergence of new forms of social cohesion and governance, particularly based on a new relationship between time and space? Or does it lead to increasing social, cultural, and economic discrepancies? Behind these questions lies the issue of the ‘European identity’. This should not be based merely on a common market and a common currency – it should also imply the vision of a socioculturally emancipatory globalisation. The current ‘Times of the city’ networking is one step in this direction.

Integrating life time and city time in *St Denis*

Contacts with Italian cities involved in ‘Times of the city’ policies have raised the need for the municipal administration of *St Denis* to integrate the time dimension into several local projects concerning childcare facilities, the transportation system, and the opening hours and accessibility of public administrations and cultural venues (like the theatre). The most significant point in *St Denis* is a commitment to integrate life time and city time, to avoid the sole conception of time as an instrument (a tool which helps to solve time/space problems) by looking at its cultural dimension (‘memory time’ in relation to the history of the city).

Towards a new regulation of time – recommendations

As no one situation is completely like another, there is no simple ‘transfer’ of solutions from one place to another. One has to think in terms of procedures.



A first recommendation has to do with the actors involved in the process. Dialogue should not be opened only with the social partners but also with other stakeholders (i.e. citizens, clients, patients, customers) outside the workplace. A more cohesive relationship between ‘social dialogue’ and ‘civil dialogue’ is needed.

The second recommendation is to combine bottom-up and top-down policies through a new type of institutional and political ‘mix’ which encourages and incorporates stimuli from the ‘civil’ sphere and supports them via the administrative mechanism of the municipal authority. The research cases provide such examples as: civil society forums for evaluating and initiating projects; neighbourhood pilot projects; surveys and polls involving citizens.

A third recommendation is to link the process with the results. Not only should citizens feel they are an active element of change and innovation, but they should also see the results of their involvement and receive feedback.

As this is the first European report on ‘times of the city’, some recommendations concerning the European policy level might be drawn from it. More attention and support should be given at EU level to the development of urban time policies, which, as we have seen above, strongly contribute to cohesion, cooperation and more generally to the building of social links.

Frequently the temporal experience of everyday life is affected by powerful economic and political actors who control urban rhythms and time structures (working-time regimes, opening hours, public transport times, etc.). These actors tend to ‘externalise’, both to the general public and to society, their costs and structural problems: they thus transform private economic cost into social – or societal – cost. However, as in the field of ecology

and sustainable development, modern civil society no longer regards this type of ‘externalisation’ as legitimate. Ways and means are sought to ‘re-internalise’ such costs to the actors who ‘caused’ them. Urban time policies contribute to these efforts of re-internalisation. They deal with these external effects on citizens’ everyday life in that they foster public discourse and civil negotiation on these topics. They thus contribute to the objective of achieving a sustainable everyday life – an objective gaining ground in Europe and worth being further promoted.

Urban time policies require new forms of involvement of citizens and other parties of the civil society (NGOs etc.) who in the past did not take part in decision-making. This consideration necessarily leads to a concept of ‘local social dialogue’, which does not only include employers and employees, but also includes other stakeholders in the territory. This type of stakeholder inclusion is more and more referred to, on a European level, as ‘societal’ or ‘civil dialogue’. The relationship between social and civil dialogue is not easy to determine. Nevertheless, the social partners should be invited to ‘open’ the social dialogue, on the local level, to other stakeholders. This new type of civil dialogue should be encouraged.

Europe plays an important role in the field of urban time policies. Without international and interregional contacts, best practice exchanges, and policy transfers, these policies would not have spread as far as they actually have. Urban time policies are a highly significant component of both ‘Europe of the regions’ and ‘Europe as a learning process’. To a substantial extent they play the role of an alternative to a European Union merely conceived as a bureaucratic entity or as a common market or a common currency – Europe in this case would instead be a Europe of citizens, of civil society, of lifeworlds. This element of local time policies should be encouraged and further developed.

This leaflet was written by Jean-Yves Boulin of the Université Paris Dauphine and CNRS, and Ulrich Mückenberger of the Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik, Hamburg.

Times in the City and Quality of Life is a consolidation of five national reports:

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- Germany by **Ulrich Mückenberger**, from the Eurexter school Hamburg and Law Department of the Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik Hamburg;
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An electronic copy of these national reports can be requested from Dimitrios Politis at the European Foundation for Working and Living Conditions (contact details on p. 8).



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