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A geography of gender relations

Role patterns in the context of different regional industrial development

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of Henk Meert

ABSTRACT

Feminist geographers state that gender relations produce spatial structures and that in turn, these structures help to maintain these relations. In order to explore this idea, this paper considers the household role pattern of women in two different economic regions with different histories of industrial activity: the textile region in Ghent and the coal basin in Limburg, Belgium. The paper emphasises the influence of these regional economic developments on the time budget of women and on the effect of their activities on their use and experience of space. It pays particular attention to the crucial role played by the social infrastructure available at different spatial levels. A comparison of both regions discloses a remarkable and lingering difference in women's role pattern and, by extension, the male role pattern.

Regional geography, power relations, time-space paths, feminist geography, Ghent, Limburg

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INTRODUCTION

According to MC DOWELL (1993, pp. 164 – 165), comparative research linking global processes such as capitalism and industrialisation, and local geographical variation, offers a promising way to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the uneven geography of gender relations. This paper contributes to this effort by looking at differences in the household role patterns of women and men in two Belgian regions. A consideration of the role pattern as a historical construct, situated in a specific economic and geographical context, largely explains regional differences in women's lives.

With the quasi-natural acceptance of the male 'breadwinner' position, household maintenance is regarded as a female task. Despite the fact that women may employ a moral or relational rationality instead of a pure economic rationality in order to take care of the family (see e.g. DUNCAN, 2005; DUNCAN and STRELL, 2004), working women have always to combine their production duties with their reproductive role. This is why women face specific problems in planning their daily activities.

There is an overwhelming literature dealing with the interrelations and tensions between women's productive tasks and their reproductive activities within the household context. TIVERS (1988) for instance found that the out-of-home activities of women with children are particularly dominated by their housekeeping tasks. KWAN (2000) stresses that space-time requirements of women's out-of-home activities strongly affect their employment status and commuting distances. She also found that women who are part-time employed encounter more fixed activities in their daily lives than full-time employed women and full-time employed men. This kind of research makes a strong appeal to time-budget research;

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if space is dealt with, it is mostly considered as a contextual dimension in order to frame gendered role patterns. Space is rarely considered to be a potential explanatory factor influencing and even steering these specific social relations[1]. In this paper, we will assess whether space, besides time, also plays a crucial role in understanding the daily gender patterns related to productive and reproductive duties (and if so, to what extent and how). Thus, the paper focuses on the socio-historical context in which the interrelations between space, industrial development and embedded gender relations are to be situated. The importance of such an approach has also been stressed by DUNCAN (2000, pp. 116-20). We want specifically to answer the question of whether and to what extent a thorough analysis and understanding of the socio-historical production and reproduction of space within the context of regional industrial development and of all embedded power relations (with a clear focus on gender) contributes to our understanding of gender role patterns. This latter question is seldom dealt with in the literature. FORTUIJN and KARSTEN (1989) for instance assessed regional differentiations regarding activity patterns of women and time-budget constraints of paid work in North-Holland, while FORSBERG (1998) performed similar research in Sweden. Although FORSBERG paid particular attention to the importance and continued effect of local traditions, a thorough historical approach is lacking. Indeed, similar research unpacking the socio-historical dimensions of interregional differences is seldom undertaken. To our knowledge, the only example is SACKMANN and HAÜSSERMAN (1994, see also SACKMANN, 2000), who considered both rural and industrial regions in Germany and explored how traditional social arrangements and their embedded gender relations (such as for instance the regulation of inheritance within the context of farming

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enterprises and related family formations) were altered by macroeconomic and macro-social developments. In this paper, we also explore the regional and historical context of understandings of the way gender roles are linked to industrial development and vice versa. However, if space is considered as an explanatory factor, complex problems of scale appear. In contrast to SACKMANN and HAÜSSERMAN (1994), we also will pay attention both to space production at the regional scale and to the infrastructure available at neighbourhood level and its dynamic through time. In so doing, we will be able to understand the geography of gender relations from a more comprehensive perspective. While their approach emphasises change, we will unveil resilient gender relations associated with regional and related local spatial arrangements.

Our empirical work concerns two Belgian industrial regions. Although Belgium is a small country, its economic space shows clear historical divisions (VANDERMOTTEN, 1990). We chose to work in two regions with different types of dominant industrial activity, namely the Ghent textile region and the Limburg coal-mining basin. The history and geography of both regions seem at first sight to be very well documented, but from a feminist perspective, it becomes clear that most of the literature covers only a part of this history and geography, and that women's lives are hardly mentioned. This article therefore not only fills a knowledge gap about female textile workers and miners' wives, but also analyses the consequences of the economic and social organisation of these regions for the functions of their female inhabitants, their personal pathways and the household role patterns of women and men.

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The first section of the paper will describe the concept of time-spending upon which the research was based, combining the time constraints of Hägerstrand with feminist approaches to the division of labour within households. In the next section the essential features of the regions are described and explained; although the empirical work took place in a Belgian context, it could be argued that the same kinds of region can be found elsewhere (see for instance MASSEY and MCDOWELL, 1994) substantially enlarging the scope of this research. The main part of the paper deals with the qualitative research performed in the study areas and reveals some of the complex links between history, space and gender, illustrated by quotations.

DIVISONS OF TIME AND SPACE-TIME CONSTRAINTS

In order to analyse the role played by place, the work of the Swedish geographer TORSTEN HÄGERSTRAND (1970), the 'father' of time-space geography, is of particular interest. He offers a powerful analytical framework to assess such questions. As early as 1970, he developed the concept of *space-time constraints,* often used to analyse the role played by place in daily activity patterns. HÄGERSTRAND'S work focuses on constraints in what he calls the 'living domain', the public and semi-public social space people use, (or cannot use because of constraints), during their lifetimes. In his view, spatial planning may diminish these constraints (HÄGERSTRAND, 1970). His work pays less attention to constraints in domestic and working situations, and by neglecting these, he overlooks the gender specificity of constraints (KARSTEN, 1992, p.28; ROSE, 1993a; ROSE, 1993b; KWAN, 2000, pp. 147). Different economic structures shape unique gendered spaces - those spaces create

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specific female constraints and this has an impact on the creation of a female identity (MASSEY and MCDOWELL, 1994, see also BONDI, 1990).

When, where and how women experience constraints in their daily lives, in this gendered space, while performing their roles, becomes clear by looking at the daily activities which reflect women's way of life. Activities can have different objectives, and these can be used to order divisions of time. This idea refers to the notion of time-budget research (see e.g. RYDENSTAM, 1996; RYDENTSTAM and WADESKOG, 1998). KARSTEN (1992) distinguishes three categories of time-spending or daily activities*: caring time*, reflecting the domestic situation; *working time*, the working situation; and the remaining time dimension, which we will call *leisure*, encompassing true leisure (not productive hobbies), productive leisure (e.g. volunteer work to improve one's employability) and reproductive leisure (e.g. knitting, gardening).

KARSTEN (1992, p.28) points out that all these activities often encounter specific space-time constraints; she links these constraints with the household and working situation, whereas Hägerstrand seeks constraints that limit life paths more generally. ROSE (1993c, p. 20-25) elaborates on the gender specificity of those "living-situation" constraints. Lack of infrastructure in the neighbourhood, combined with poor mobility, constrains women's ability to perform household tasks, and the absence of a nursery in the neighbourhood, or the presence of a strong 'caring woman mentality' will hamper a woman's ability to engage in paid work. Often these constraints are related to poor neighbourhoods or weak regional infrastructure, combined with transport poverty on the part of women, all of which expose

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the spatial aspect of gender role constraints (see MEERT *et al,* 2003, pp. 42-44). By linking the three ways of spending time described by KARSTEN with ROSE'S gender specific 'living-situation constraints' and expanding this to the living domain considered by HÄGERSTRAND, we combine space and time in a way that stresses the scales at work (table 1).

Table 1: Spending time: what, how and where

Insert table 1

BACK TO THE ROOTS: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE REGIONS

Despite the global character of capitalism in western society, its everyday translation is tied to particular time periods and is also spatially bound. Contrasts in socio-economic space are deeply influenced by the historical-spatial processes by which they were produced (MASSEY, 1979).

Belgium was the first continental European country to experience the industrial revolution (VAN HAMME, 1993; VANDERMOTTEN, 2000). In terms of Belgium's industrial history, most attention has focused on the development of the coal and steel industry in the Walloon industrial axis during the second Kondratiev. However, the first Kondratiev, frequently considered to have been restricted to England, was quite significant for Ghent, where textile manufacture was concentrated in the early 1800s. In contrast, the Limburg mining basin was developed only after WWI, because of the late discovery of deep, but relatively accessible, coal seams, and ended abruptly in 1992. Both industrial activities produced a characteristic physical and socio-geographical landscape with its own logic of women's position in society.

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The Ghent textile region at the beginning of industrial capitalism

The industrial revolution originated in Great Britain, and made its first impression on the Continent in Belgium. Here, it benefited from the combination of a strong urban merchant and craft tradition, from proximity to Britain, and from the influences of French and Dutch capitalism (VANDERMOTTEN, 2000, p. 130).

In 1799 Lieven Bauwens' smuggling of the Spinning Jenny into Belgium enabled profitable capitalist textile production to be developed in the city of Ghent for the first time. This kind of industry lent itself to the employment of young children and women as sources of cheap labour, and by keeping men's wages below subsistence level, employers effectively coerced wives and children into the workplace. By the mid to late-19th century, many women where involved in paid labour (HILDEN, 1999, p.56; SCHOLLIERS, 1995). In response to the declining health and vitality of these workers, a law banning labour for those under the age of 14 was passed in 1895, a time at which the textile industry labour force was two-thirds female. Given the long working day in the textile factories, it was nearly impossible for these women to take care of their households alone. Husbands and neighbours were often involved in looking after the children or performing other household tasks. This was contradictory to the prevailing bourgeois ideal, which dictated that women should stay at home and take care of their husbands and children, and consequently, working women faced considerable moral pressures. Moreover, female workers were doubly subordinated: by their employer at the workplace and by their husbands at home (DE WEERDT, 1980, p.47). Until the 20th century, Ghent working class households

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experienced very poor living conditions, and the burden placed on women was particularly heavy. In fact, the social reproduction of the working class was actually endangered by the harsh exploitation of women and children, which could be only temporarily allayed by permanent immigration of new labourers from the countryside.

Socialist thinkers supported both male and female workers' interests; believing that capitalism prevented the development of women's role in society, they envisioned a new socialist society in which the working class would be completely free.

The workers argued for their rights, and in 1866 a law permitting workers to organise themselves into trade unions was enacted (DE WILDE, 1997). The socialist trade unions developed quickly in Ghent, and they were the first to accept women. In fact, Ghent was a perfect breeding ground for socialist ideas, and female trade union representatives encouraged these notions amongst female textile labours (DE WEERDT, 1980). The unions fought for an improvement in working conditions, and together with a growing awareness among the bourgeoisie that harsh exploitation was undermining the available labour force, these efforts resulted in the first pieces of social legislation, aimed at protecting women and children from dangerous working conditions. As a consequence of this long social struggle, a combination of paid work and domestic labour became more achievable after WWI. However, women did not cease working, because wages for male workers were still low.

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The planned origin of a 'capitalist patriarchal mining community'

There is a significant contrast between the early urban development of the textile industry in Ghent and the expansion of the mining industry in the province of Limburg. Coal was discovered in Limburg in 1901 and after long preparatory work, interrupted by WWI, mining was developed in the 1920s. This new activity introduced a totally new social system in a previously rural society. Farmers became miners and were integrated into the capitalist production system. Since the region had a relatively low population density, male commuters and immigrants from the Brabant province were also attracted to the mines (SWYNGEDOUW, 1994). Language differences and increasing competition for labour from the Walloon, German and Dutch mining companies, compelled employers to search for new miners in the west of Belgium, and also in Eastern and Southern Europe. For Limburg women, the shift in the local economy from subsistence agriculture to mining meant the loss of their role in the productive sphere, and confinement to domestic work. Cities like Ghent and industrial regions like the Walloon coal basin were cautionary examples of the potential for strikes and other industrial action to undermine production, and forewarned by this knowledge, the mining companies created a strong 'capitalist patriarchal mining community' (DE RIJCK and VAN MEULDER, 2000). The capitalist division of production and reproduction in the mining region was emphasised by assigning economic production to men and social reproduction to women. Paying living wages to husbands and sons meant that wives and daughters could stay at home and convert their available time into a higher standard of living (RUBENS, 1953, pp.243-245). This distinction provided a strong foundation for the patriarchal structure of society, with the church playing an important role

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in setting up and maintaining the system. Unlike other mining regions, in Limburg industry and the church went hand in hand until the late 20th century. Rerum Novarum, the papal encyclical, recognising the class structure of industrial society and workers' rights, enabled the local church to set up a Catholic workers movement in opposition to socialism. The mining companies and the church collaborated in the provision of a network of social services that covered all aspects of social life; the provision of housing, education, health and cultural activities was not only motivated by the fear of socialism, but also by the pragmatic recognition that without this material and social infrastructure, it would have been very difficult to attract the necessary labour force to the mines (KESTELOOT and JANSEN-VERBEKE, 1998, pp.2-3). The mining industry, as the economic driver in the region, and the church, as its moral and cultural counterpart, agreed about the place of women in society: a good wife should stay at home. Women were associated with the "three K's": Keuken, Kinderen en Kerk (kitchen, children and church).

Regarding the production sphere, both regions displayed a high degree of specialisation (figure 1).

Figure 1: Total industrial employment in Limburg and Ghent (1846-2001)

Insert figure 1

Source: National Office for Social Security, 1846-2001

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The start of the mining activities in Limburg is more abrupt. Mining did not generate steel manufacturing and only in the 1970s did Fordist investments in car manufacturing (Ford), electronics (e.g. including Philips) and some textile investment change the industrial landscape. In Ghent, industrial employment grew from the onset of the Industrial Revolution, stagnated during the interwar period and has since been in slow decline. A partial shift to manufacturing (e.g. Volvo) appeared after WWII.

There is a striking contrast in female employment between the two regions, generated by the dominant activity sector. In the Ghent textile region, 35% of the potential female labour force is in work (compared to 18% in Limburg). This percentage of female labour corresponds with almost 1/3 of the total employment in Ghent (and approximately 1/6 in the mining region). Figure 2 reveals a striking contrast in female manual labour work between the two regions in the early 1960s, the period during which both sectors start their decline (7 % in the mining region in relation to 16% in the textile region).

Figure 2: The share of manual workers in the potential female labour force

Insert figure 2

Available data do not permit measurement the degree of (non)-employment of miners' wives and textile women respectively. However, table 2 shows that in 1955, there is a contrast. Both in textiles and mining, the share of non-manual work is very low (between 4 and 9%), with men always better represented. Nevertheless, women are almost absent in mining, whereas they represent a stable majority of workers in the textile sector.

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Table 2: Employment by sex and skill in textile and mining, in Limburg and Ghent, 1955

Insert table 2

Source: National Census, 1961

Concerning the reproductive sphere, we also see a clear difference in household structure. In the textile region 33 % of households are childless, compared with 18.5% in the mining region (Census, 1961). Large families (with more than three children) are rather rare in the textile region (7.5 %), but comprised one in every five families in the mining region, even in 1961. These data raise questions about the consequences of different types of industrial development and historical differences in organising employment, production and reproduction of the labour force, and furthermore, the influence of the specifics of this organisation on the maintenance of gender relations and on women's everyday lives.

FIELDWORK

The existing literature focuses mainly on men as decision-makers, economic actors, and in short, the key figures in society. This situation is changing slowly, but the present lack of gender-biased data and written material can only be filled by fieldwork. Such fieldwork was carried out for this paper in both regions, with in-depth interviews about the history of women's everyday lives (LUYTEN and STUYCK, 2001; STUYCK and LUYTEN, 2003). We asked women to talk about their lives from the end of WWII until the end of their own or their husband's working life. This time-span reflects a compromise between

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comparability, relevance and feasibility: some historical facts would require a longer time period, such as the substitution of immigrants for Belgians in the most difficult underground mine work that started before the War, and the mechanisation and computerisation of the textile industry that reduced the labour requirement and changed the nature of work. However, other factors favour a more recent time period since the further back we reach into history, the more difficult it is to obtain reliable information. Concerning comparability, the following factors were kept constant in both regions: all the women belonged to the working class (for the mining region: their husbands were subsurface workers), were of Belgian origin, and had nuclear families. As for geographical demarcation, the city of Ghent was chosen for the textile women, and the miners' wives came from a "cité" in Genk (a cité is a working class housing estate built by the mining company in an arrangement similar to a garden city), and a neighbourhood in Houthalen called Meulenberg. Those two cases give a complete picture of the miners' communities. In Meulenberg a miner's family is only bound to the industry by income, but since in a cité the mining company also provides some housing, a family is tied to the employer for both these resources. Both types of neighbourhood occur throughout the region, but for practical purposes such as contacts and data–collection, only these two were selected. Thirty women in total (the target group plus key persons gave in-depth interviews, with an interview lasting on average 3 hours. This process yielded 90 hours of oral history, and gave a good overview of the time-spending and spatial paths of the women concerned.

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TIME-SPACE PATHS AND THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST

We analysed the daily activities of the households during the period covered by the interviews, i.e. after WWII. As we have argued above, the three different ways of spending time are linked in their time-space relationship. First, there follows a discussion of the ways of spending time, using the threefold division discussed earlier. Secondly, we focus on related spatial behaviour, for both men and women. The division between the public and private spheres is relevant for this analysis; the origins of this division are the middle-class ideologies of the 19th century, in which men and women were regarded as having very different natures. Men belonged to public life, having the economic function of production, whereas women had to create a warm home, where their husbands would find peace after a hard day's work, and where their children would be raised as future labourers. BONDI (1998), however, states clearly that those spheres cannot be separated from each other; it is a daily challenge for women to combine activities in both spheres, hampered by a spatial separation of facilities (PELEMAN, 1998, p. 40). Finally, we visualize the different ways of spending time and related spatial behaviour.

Textile women: between work and care

The regional economy with its long history of capitalist power structure, weighed heavily on the workers' households. Their ways of spending time were dominated by productive activity. As discussed above, this duty was obligatory for both men and women. In line with the tradition established in the 19th century, children also contributed as far as compulsory school attendance allowed (up to age 14 in 1919 and 18 in 1983). Working in

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the textile sector was a self-evident choice because of the strong presence of the industry in the region, and its accessibility for women. Romaine, a textile woman who lives in the centre of the city, told us about the near-inevitability of working in the textile industry. She started to work in 1950, at the age of 16:

> *'When I walked home coming from school with my results (that was on my 16th), I went past a textile factory. There was a placard saying that they were looking for girls to work there. I went inside with my sister and we offered ourselves for a post. We could begin the following Monday. So I did that job for the rest of my life (Romaine).'*

Even after WWII, men's wages were not high enough to maintain the improving standards of living, and this wage level was the decisive reason why many women continued to work in the textile industry even after their marriage, preventing the development of the classical patriarchal household pattern. Husband and wife ran the household together. Men spent a reasonable amount of caring time, nearly comparable to women, in the household, in the context of extra pressure on family life because of shift work. Time spent in the household was therefore disjointed, with tasks more equally divided; the actual organisation of productive time has repercussions for reproductive time, and for other factors such as household size. The following quote relates the nature of work with the number of children. Both Jeannine and her husband worked in the same textile factory, and could not have a second child because of the pressure of work:

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> ‘*Because of the very busy days, we were frightened of having a second child. It was impossible although I love children with all my heart. With my grandchildren and great-grandchildren I can recover the time lost (Jeannine).’*

The textile families attached less value to caring-time than did the miners' families. In the case of working women, it has never been easy to manage children and housekeeping, but the shift system creates extra difficulty. Labour time and caring time overlap: day nurseries are not open when the woman should leave for the early shift (4 am). Solutions to such problems require creativity; a possible solution would be to readjust productive and reproductive time at the household level. For example, the working household members could try to work different shifts, with the woman always working in the morning, and the man in the evening or at night. However, this ‘improvement’ would be to the detriment of leisure time spent together. Textile worker Rosa adapted her whole working situation, caring time and leisure time for the arrival of a third child:

> ‘*Our third son wasn't really planned. Before his birth we worked different shifts, but this third child made the whole situation too difficult. I decided then to work during the weekend (twelve hours a day) and my husband worked during the week. So I managed the household on weekdays and my husband took care of it during the weekends. Such a situation isn't advisable, is it? We never saw each other (Rosa).’*

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Help from people outside the household was another solution for time management problems (and was also a solution employed by pre-war textile households). The household often called on the help of parents, uncles and aunts to watch the children for a few hours, the easiest situation being when a parent or another member of the family lived with them. These household members could not only look after the children, but they could also manage some of the housekeeping. The social network of the female textile worker is often activated to prioritise the economic situation:

> '*When our daughter was very small, we took her to a childminder, and when she went to school, she could stay there for a time after school hours. The only problem occurred on school holidays. My brother in-law has also children and she could stay with them for a few days (Jeannine).'*

Leisure time is clearly the weakest time dimension, depending heavily on the constraints and choices in the two other time dimensions, and it varies for both men and women during their lifetimes; when the children are young, leisure time is very limited. Besides this, women's shift work affects their social contacts during leisure time.

Miners' wives: between care and reproductive leisure

Although the wife, the children, the household and the neighbourhood played an important role in a miner's household, every aspect of daily life was linked to the mine (DE RIJCK and VAN MEULDER, 2000, pp.341-351). The mining companies, for example, promoted large

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families, since all sons were potential colliers. Maria, who grew up in a very large family, managed to escape the tradition:

> *'We had our first child eleven months after our marriage. In those times this was normal. We have only four children, but we were an exception in the coal-mining area; most of the families we know had eight or nine children (Maria).'*

The company provided housing in the cités, which were controlled by the mining police. The mine had a shop, and a school and it organised a flourishing (male) corporate life in every cité. In short, social services, norms and values were controlled by the mining company (SEGERS, 1997, p.34). Moreover, virtually all men earned their livelihoods in the mine, leading to a situation in which the whole regional economic structure was entirely related to the pit, in which the work itself was an almost exclusively male domain. This situation affected the role of women in the region and the way they spent their time. While men could sell their labour force to the mine owners, unpaid work in the home was the only, and time-consuming, option for women. If households were thrifty, the miner's wage was in theory sufficient to support his household. However, since miners were paid according to the amount of coal they dug, only the strong and hard-working were well paid, and even their working lives could be curtailed by silicosis and other illnesses. Equally, some colliers spent their wages in local pubs. Suzanne said she was lucky to have a good husband who regularly gave her housekeeping money, while other women in her neighbourhood had to fight for every franc (the Belgian currency at that time):

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> *'When the miners received their wages, many women went to the pit to collect them. Otherwise their husbands would spend all their money in the pubs. People call those women "café-vrouwen" (pub-wives) (Suzanne).'*

In terms of performing paid work, the constraints women experienced were multifarious. Engineers' wives, for instance, were contractually obliged to remain housewives in order that their husbands would be available to the pit at any time, day or night, given that the collieries operated round the clock. This type of measure was unnecessary for manual workers however, given that their salary was too little to pay for household services provided by the (informal) market. In other words, time and financial constraints imposed by the mining companies confined women to caring and reproductive activities (DE RIJCK and VAN MEULDER, 2000). Besides these constraints, there were very few employment opportunities for women in this mining-dominated region.

The combination of the hard, dirty, manual colliery labour, and a tradition of large families, resulted in enormous domestic burdens for miners' wives. Therefore, the reproductive or caring tasks took centre stage in their lives. Underground work was filthy, the mine provided no protective clothing, and colliery supervisors threatened fines if the miners' clothes were not clean at the start of each week. Families restricted their spending on household items, and certainly during the first years of their marriage, wives had to wash the pit clothes by hand. Every woman we interviewed confirmed Elsa's words – Elsa married a miner in 1951 and complained about the tough household chores:

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> *'Everybody has to work, I always tell my children, but the most beautiful years, the first years of your marriage, don't let them slip away but enjoy them intensely, because as far as I remember I was always working those days. (…) So many times I have cried while I was washing the miners' clothes (Elsa).'*

Men's shift work increased women's domestic work: meals had to be prepared at all times of the day. No matter whether Simonne's husband had a morning, night or day shift, she had to provide him with a packed lunch, and a hot meal had to be ready when he came home:

> *'I did have to cook twice a day. For the children when they came home from school and for my husband when he came back from the mine. He took always sandwiches to work, which I always had to prepare for him (Simonne).'*

A miner's wife was proud that she prepared a decent fresh meal for her husband and children every day. This household role was considered more important in the mining region than in the textile region, which meant that the miners' wives spent more time cooking.

The necessary caring time was clearly longer in Limburg in comparison with Ghent. Because of Limburg's rigidly patriarchal household structure, men did not help in the household, so their wives had to give up all their time for their husbands and children. Not

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only was spare time scarce for a miner's wife, but leisure activities for women hardly existed at all. The *Katholieke Arbeiders Vrouwenbeweging* (K.A.V., Catholic Workers' Women's Movement) was the only well-developed association for women. Although the women considered the K.A.V. as a welcome way to express themselves and to widen their horizons, the association was fully embedded in the Catholic, highly hierarchical and patriarchal miners' community. It was managed by men, and the level of independence experienced through it was strictly limited according to local values and norms. The strong opposition of P.J. Broeckx, the founder of the association, to the voting rights of women and the stereotypical courses provided for housewives are only a few of the many examples of male domination (WIJERS, 1990, pp.57-59).

Caring time and leisure time were strongly related for miners' wives. Paula, for instance hesitated over the question about activities in her spare time, and concluded that even here, leisure activities were bounded by her household tasks:

> *'I did some needlework in my spare time. Even if I had visitors I still could go on knitting. Every five minutes I didn't spend doing something useful was wasted time (Paula).'*

Textile women: in the labyrinth of the city

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The economic situation is the main determinant of textile women's paths through space. This group of women, as discussed above, does not share the gendered distinction between public and private space. Public space is frequently and efficiently used. Activities coupled to production enable the frequent use of paths via the movement to and from work. Those paths become more complex through their combination with as many reproductive tasks as possible. To and from work, women go shopping, drop off the children, or keep in touch with each other:

> *'I made an arrangement with a colleague to drive to work;, I drove one week and she the other. If it was my turn, I dropped her at home and then I went to the baker, to the butcher and to the greengrocer. That's my way to prepare everything as fresh as possible, but that didn't always succeed (Ulrika).'*

Since the caring time budget is limited, men undertake a part of the caring activities and their paths to and from work are also interwoven with the reproduction function. Jenny elaborated about the division of the tasks in her household. Her husband worked as a labourer in a car manufacture company and they had one child:

> *'One day I cleaned the kitchen, the other day the bedrooms. I wrote everything on a little piece of paper and deleted the things that were done. If my husband came home he did the rest. When our daughter was young, we had to alternate, I dropped our*

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daughter off in the morning, and my husband picked her up or we reversed this (Jenny).'

It is obvious that Hägerstrand's 'coupling constraints' play a central role in the way women and men spend their caring time and use their public and private space. Productive and reproductive space are physically separated and workers have to be at work during the periods stipulated by their employer. As a consequence, this time is not available for caring activities. This situation creates many problems, certainly when the children are too young to stay at home alone. These constraints strongly restrict the paths of the person responsible for the children. Rosa and her husband worked separate shifts; the following quotation demonstrates the restriction and constraints connected with their two children:

'At the time we worked in separate shifts, the person with the afternoon shift took the children to school. When I got the early shift and my husband the night, he went to bed for one hour, got up for the children and after taking them to school he went back to sleep. Yes, those times were hard...(Rosa).'

Clearly, both men and women try to devise space-time paths that allow them to combine as many activities as possible, within the strict constraints imposed by their working situation. However there is a gender difference in their movements through space: the women are more limited in their mobility. The man as 'head of the household' could count on the fastest means of transportation; with the introduction of the consumer society, car

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ownership became more common, but women travelled by bicycle or public transport, because the car was at the man's disposal. This situation is not hopeless for women, considering the proximity of their places of employment in an urban environment with a high concentration of amenities. The women do not feel like prisoners in the private sphere, but they experience the difference as an extra restriction on their time budget as well as their use of space. A good example of the labyrinths the women experience is the story of Jenny, who had to cross the whole city to reach a day nursery:

> *'At that time, I had to take two trams with my buggy and than I had to walk for a while. This had to be done before going to work. That took a lot of time, but if I had the afternoon shift, my work started at 13.00, so I had a bit of time. If I had the early shift, my husband took our daughter to the day nursery. He had to leave half an hour earlier, but he took her in the car. In the evening I picked her up, which meant those trams all over again! (Jenny)'*

Miner's wives in restricted space

Obviously, in contrast with the textile women, the use of space by miners' wives was not dominated by a place of employment. Subsurface mining work for women was prohibited in 1895, well before mining activities began in Limburg. As a consequence, the main economic space in the area became forbidden ground for women (VAN HAEGENDOREN, 1998, p.85). Only when the mine organised visits, could women see underground. In other words, because of capability and authority constraints women had no direct contact with

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something that had an enormous impact on their lives: the pit. Suzanne's husband explains why the mine isn't a good place for women:

> *'Women weren't allowed to work underground. It is not that they didn't have the capabilities; everyone can stand behind a machine and push a button. But it wasn't always safe for women to be there, with all those men, if you see what I mean. It was better for a woman to keep away from there (Suzanne's husband).*

The pits dominated the cités and as a consequence of the exclusion of women from mining work, the whole cité public space is under male dominance and the space-time paths of women are very much restricted.

The cités built and managed by the mining companies were an ideal instrument of control. The miner who didn't work well could not only lose his job, but he and his household could lose their home as well. Supervisors controlled the cités in order to maintain the rigid hierarchical and patriarchal norms in the community. The mining company had its own priorities and did not hesitate to hide domestic abuses as long as they didn't affect the miners' productivity. This fragment from the report of a supervisor who caught two little boys vandalising a street lamp is a perfect example.

> *'An investigation starts after the report and leads to the father. His bosses describe him as an extremely productive mine worker and ever present on Mondays… On hearing this description the decision is easily made and they give a warning to the*

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> *mother because of the bad upbringing of her children. We know this household very well. The father was a big strong man who was regularly drunk. He often beat his wife and children… but he was mentioned as very productive and ever present on Mondays….'* (KOHLBACHER, 1994, p.179).

Clearly, even the so-called female private sphere is controlled by the male society.

To carry out their caring task, women had to leave their homes, but these movements were kept to a minimum. Women bought their necessities in the cités' shops or used house-to-house services, like the greengrocer and the milkman. The short distances of their paths can be explained by the combination of low mobility, which is a capability constraint, and the lack of will and necessity to move. Elsa has lived in the same neighbourhood since 1950, but in all those years she took neither the time, nor the opportunity, to get to know her neighbourhood or the wider environment:

> *'I did all my movement by foot or by bike. My husband had a car, but I never received my driving licence. I didn't need one, were would I have driven to? I didn't have to move greater distances; I always stayed in the neighbourhood. Even in the neighbourhood they don't ask me the name of a lot of streets, because I wouldn't know them. Though I have lived here for 45 years already, I always stay at home (Elsa).'*

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Taken together, this leads to an extreme separation of men's and women's lives and to an extreme division between the male public sphere and the female private sphere. This is somewhat moderated by the existence of female networks that open up some kind of semi-public space. While mothers watch their children playing in the street, they speak with their neighbours. The gardens are connected to each other by tiny paths from the back doors**,** thus connecting the different houses, the different private spheres. Such networks create a child and female semi-public environment, and it could be argued that this causes cracks in the tightly bound male public space. Brigitte told us how she maintains her social relations with the neighbours by making herself useful at the same time:

> *'I was always happy when the weather was nice and I could hang the laundry outside. That way I could talk with the neighbour's wife (Brigitte).'*

A time and space visualisation

The three different ways of spending time are connected in space and time: time spent in one way cannot be used for other activities. The spatial dimension has the same characteristic: one cannot be in two places at the same time. Hence, we can visualize time spending in a pie chart, and the related use of space in a segment chart (figure 3). The smaller the radius of the segment, the less space is used for the activities. Husband and wife are considered as one functional unit in the household. The left side represents the active time of the woman over 24 hours, the right the active time of the man in the same period. This visualisation is only a generalised representation of reality; each textile or mining

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household deserves its own, slightly different, chart. More important than the exact surface area is the explanation of the clear differences between both regions. Some testimonies of women, triangulated with historical facts, explain the disparities when fitted into our theoretical framework.

Figure 3: A time and space visualisation

Insert figure 3

Source: Interviews

Looking at the time dimensions of the pie chart, an important difference in time management between the two household units is apparent. The circle is almost symmetrical for Ghent, since due to the working situation of the textile women, men as well as women have to manage the household. However, women still have to deal with more constraints than men, e.g. transport inequality, which is revealed in the slight difference in leisure time. Due to the lower wages, the total household working time is longer for a textile family, given that due to the economic history of the region, both partners need to go to work. This economic situation is totally different in the mining region. Here, the whole system was developed to enable a family to survive on one male wage. The miners' wives did not have to work after their marriage, instead concentrating on reproductive tasks in order to support their husband's work. Even leisure time was dominated by reproductive tasks such as such as knitting and sewing. A miner's family also spent more time in caring roles than their

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textile counterparts because of the dirty nature of mining, and their larger families. Miners spent very much less time on household tasks.

Transport time is a significant part of the pie chart, for all the different time dimensions, but there are difficulties in assigning transport time to one specific time dimension. Women frequently combine their journey to work with household activities such as shopping or dropping the children off at the day nursery, and the interviews have shown that they do this more often than their husbands. During the period analysed (1950s-70s) transport for leisure activities was kept to a minimum, but nowadays leisure increasingly takes place outside the house or neighbourhood, requiring more transport time. Textile women use their transport time as beneficially as possible by planning other activities en route. While this research has not investigated the use of the transport time in depth, considering the historical context of textile and mining households, we can conclude that women perform more caring activities (making shopping lists, planning household tasks) during their transport time than men. It is, however, equally possible that men use this time instead to prepare for work meetings, to telephone clients on and so on.

The two segment diagrams of the use of space have a totally different shape. In the textile region, women use slightly less space than men, mainly in the working sphere. The textile factories are located in close proximity to Ghent, while the textile women's partners may work elsewhere in the region. Since the 1970s, Belgian working class families have generally owned one car, which is for the most part at the man's disposal. Women's use of

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space is more limited, but as described above, the paths used are more complicated. We remark here on the inequality of mobility.

In the mining region there is an important difference between the miners' wives' use of space and that of the miners themselves. The local infrastructure was geared to the economic activity of mining: the transport system to and from work, leisure in the neighbourhood, education of children in the mining community etc.

This entire organisation led to a restricted use of space by miners' wives. Their role was to take care of the household, and these activities were mostly restricted to the home.

We can conclude that the division of time and the use of space are entirely different between men and women according to the region in which they live. A particular economic situation in a certain region leads to a specific role pattern and a specific use of space. Apart from the economic situation, the use of space and time is also dependent on the rural or urban characteristics of the region. Nevertheless, it is not by accident that a capitalist patriarchal community arose in a rural area. Jobs outside agriculture and mining were hard to find, and the narrow economic and spatial system was self-sustaining. In comparison, an urban environment is historically more complicated and the established structures change in different ways.

CONCLUSION

In attempting to understand the ways in which gender relations are formed with regard to the geographical environment, encompassing the current and historical social, economic

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and physical characteristics of two specific regions, some interesting findings have emerged. Space has both a direct and indirect impact on women's activities in society. Even in a small western country such as Belgium, location was an important factor in determining women's activities. Today, Belgian women are more mobile and there are more job opportunities, and while both of these factors have a homogenizing influence on space, neither has nullified the geographical factor. For instance, PELEMAN'S (2002) research into the impact of residential segregation on Moroccan women's participation in associations in Belgium demonstrates the present-day differences in integration between suburban inhabitants and women living in urban ethnic communities. FORSBERG (1998) has delineated the spatial variations in gender contracts in Sweden, concluding that women choose to live in 'escalator-regions' as an equality strategy and as a career strategy. This is a more optimistic view in two ways: it is possible for women to choose where they live and work, and space is seen as an assembly of opportunities instead of constraints.

Doing paid work in Ghent was not a matter of personal choice but an economic necessity for working class women, and vice versa staying at home to look after husband and children was not questioned by the miners' wives in Limburg. A consideration of space provides an indirect explanation for this difference: electoral maps show a socialist Ghent and a Catholic Limburg, population density and land occupation demonstrate the urban versus the rural context, the textile industry is clearly urban (Ghent) whereas the mid-Limburg mining economy arose mainly within a regional rural context. These contexts are obviously interlinked; Catholics dominated the rural landscape in Flanders where they pleaded a conservative vision about the household and its tasks in the rural economy.

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Although mining is not as typical a rural activity as agriculture, an exceptional collaboration between church and industry preserved the rural character of the mining region. The socialists triumphed in Ghent, fighting for the workers' rights and simultaneously releasing the grip of the church**,** a process which ran parallel to the increase in the employment of women.

Whether women do or do not go out to work is, schematically-speaking, regionally specific. Indirectly, the region as a whole is thus a steering factor for gender roles. How daily activities are performed is directly influenced by the organisation of space at the micro-level. A city has, by definition, better infrastructure in terms of shops, public transport, etc. and the textile women of Ghent make good use of this infrastructure. While they use space as efficiently as possible to perform their caring roles, the possibilities for optimal use are hampered by specific gender restrictions, such as the striking inequality in mobility. Textile women's time-space paths are more complex than those of their husbands. Once again, this shows that the public and private spheres are often interwoven; when performing caring duties both spheres are equally important for a working textile woman. The working wife has to combine her commuting time with caring time in order to cover complex paths in the urban landscape. Comparison with the Limburg miner's wives adds to the complexity of this public-private issue. The Limburg mining region, lacking heavy industry until the 20th century, has a more rural than urban nature, and the lack of urban infrastructure has resulted in a stronger focus on the home as the venue for caring activities. Add to this a patriarchal society preserved by the Catholic church and the mining industry, and it becomes clear that

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the women's place is at home, whereas men arrogate the public sphere. A miner's housewife has the whole day to accomplish her household duties, which mainly take place at home. She has neither the need, nor the opportunity to take part in public life. The miners' wives' space-time paths appear simple, but their time management is complex due to the sheer number of tasks to be performed, and to severe time constraints ('coupling constraints' in HÄGERSTRAND's words).

Given the origins of industrial production in Ghent and Limburg, the spatial organisation of productive and reproductive activities has structured the space-time paths of women and men, and the gender division between private and public space. History has proven that only a dramatic change in employment structure and economic space can overthrow the women's role pattern in each of these regions, and with it renegotiate gender role patterns. The overall geographical space is, however, more inert, and often the neighbourhood, city or even regional infrastructure has not adapted to the changing gender relations. This understanding of how and why gender relations, time-spending patterns and spatial paths develop is a first step in raising and solving gender inequality issues. Or , in FORSBERG'S (1998) words: *'describing regional gender variations helps us to appreciate how the relations between men and women vary, and that these are, therefore, socially constructed. What may at first seem natural or biologically derived, now looks less natural'*.

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Table 1: Spending time: what, how and where

WAYS OF SPENDING TIME	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES	GENDER ROLE CONSTRAINTS	PLACE	EXAMPLES
1. Caring	Unpaid domestic and nursing work	Poor mobility, lack of infrastructure (shops, …), financial restrictions	Home, Neighb. City	*(shops, kinder garden, launderette,…)*
2. Working	Paid formal & informal work	Poor mobility, no nursery, poor supply, low paid, "caring women"-mentality, physical weakness	Home Neighb. City/Region	*(office, factory, …)*
3. Leisure				
1. True	Non-productive hobbies e.g. sports, reading novels, watching TV	Poor mobility, no nursery, financial restrictions, man decides the nature of the leisure activity, lack of infrastructure	Home, Neighb. City/Region Country Abroad	*(parc, friends, club, pub, …)*
2. Re-productive	Knitting, receiving visitors, some forms of volunteer work			
3. Productive	Receptions to maintain important relations, courses or volunteer work to improve employability			

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Table 2: Employment by sex and skill in textile and mining, in Limburg and Ghent, 1955

		total abs numbers		manual %		non-manual %	
		manual	**non-manual**	**male**	**female**	**male**	**female**
Ghent (East-Flanders province)	**textile**	90778	6716	44	56	66	34
Limburg (province)	**mining**	37719	1653	99,8	0,2	95	5
	textile	752	104	45	55	52	48

Source: National Census, 1961

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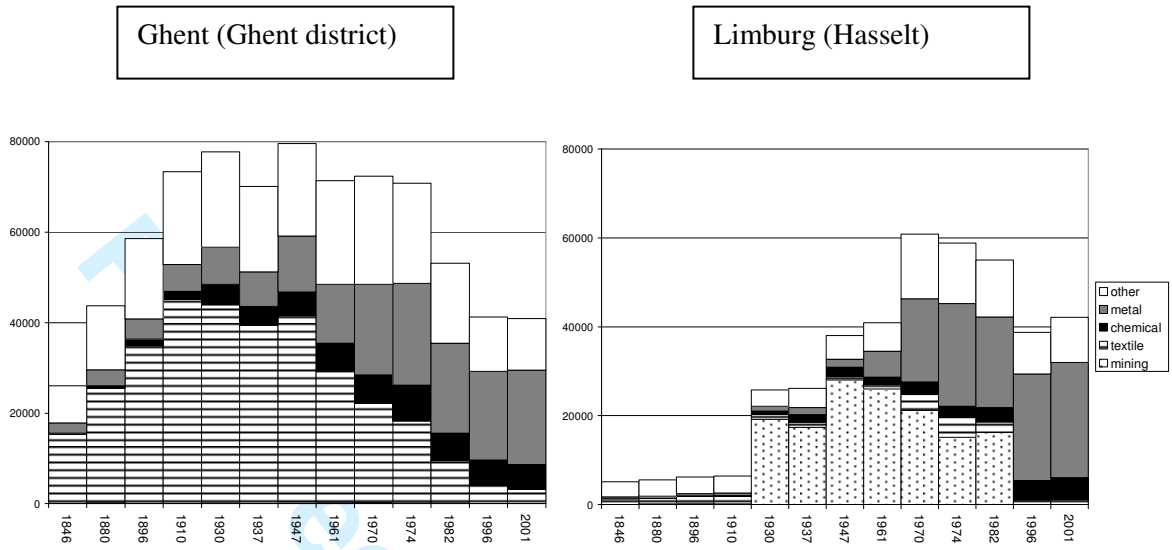
Figure 1: Total industrial employment in Limburg and Ghent (1846-2001)



Source: National Office for Social Security, 1846-2001

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Figure 2: The share of manual workers in the potential female labour force

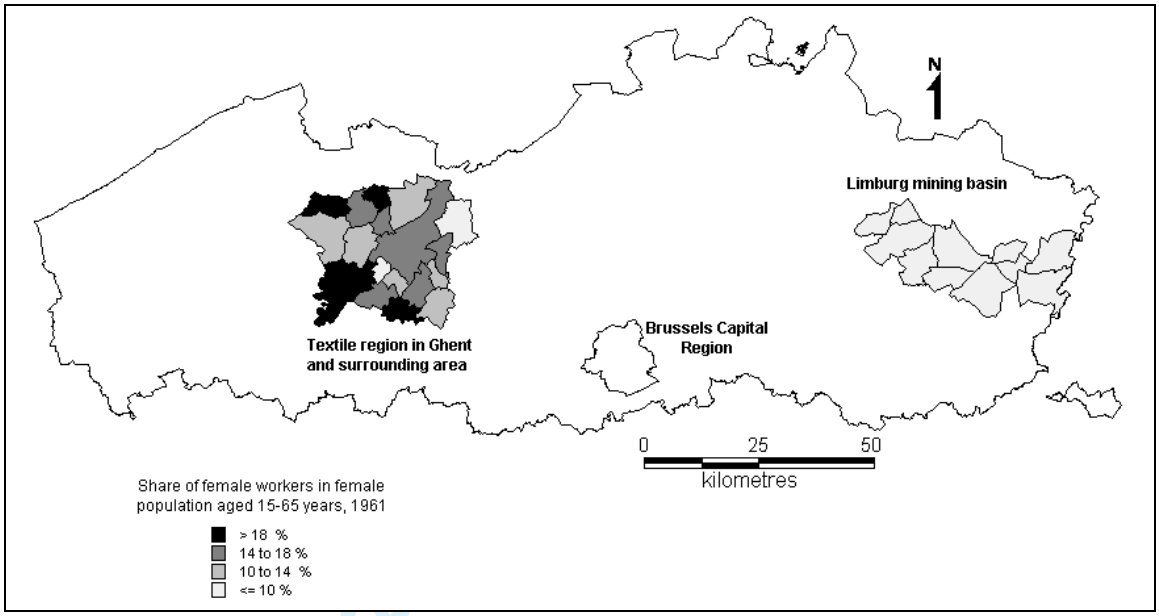

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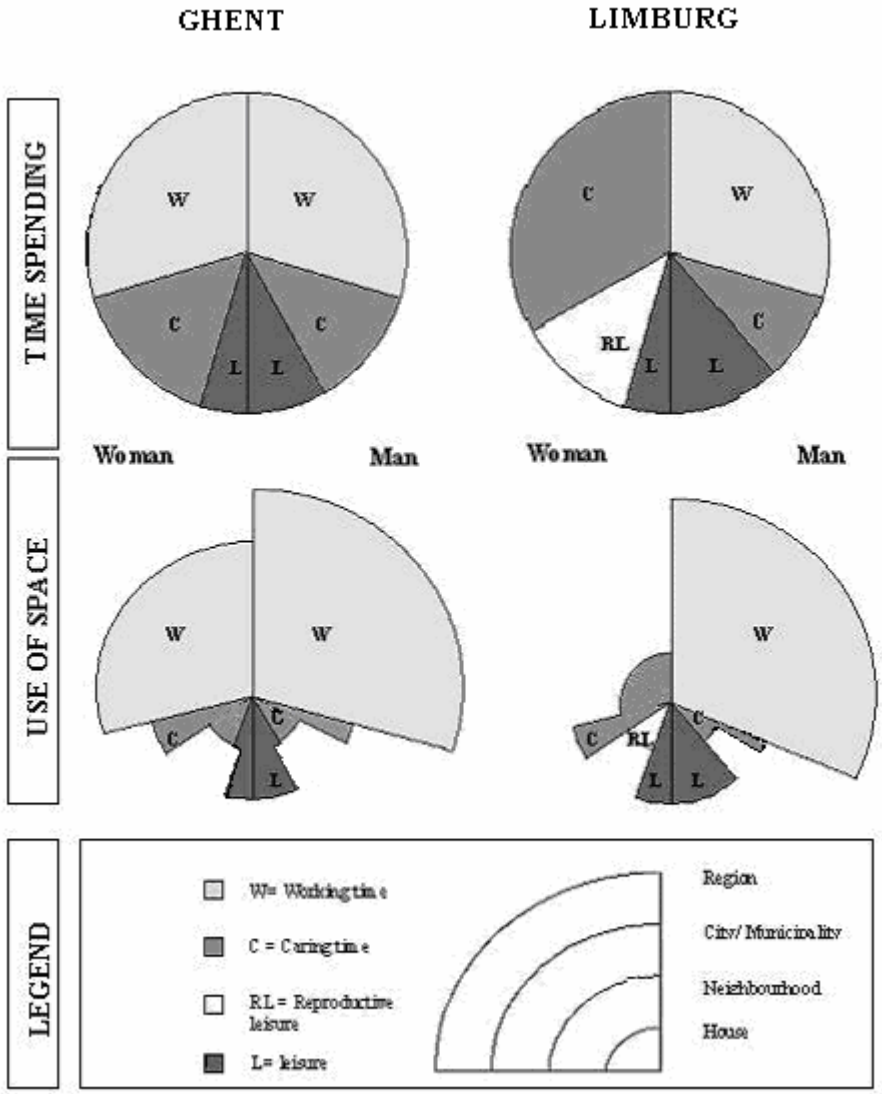
Figure 3: A time and space visualisation



Source: Interviews

NOTES

[1] A counter example could be the Urbex study where the spatial dimension of social exclusion, was explored in 22 neighbourhoods of 11 European cities and where single mothers were studied as a specific category of socially excluded households (MUSTERD et al, 2006). This enabled the research to consider gender differences and gender-specific constraints, but gender relations were left out of view.

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