



Brussels, 11 and 12 november 2013

5TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

ON PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD SERVICES

Organised by

ERSI

European Federation
for Services to Individuals



European Economic and Social Committee

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Personal and Household Services: Past, Present, Future

A Legendary Being?

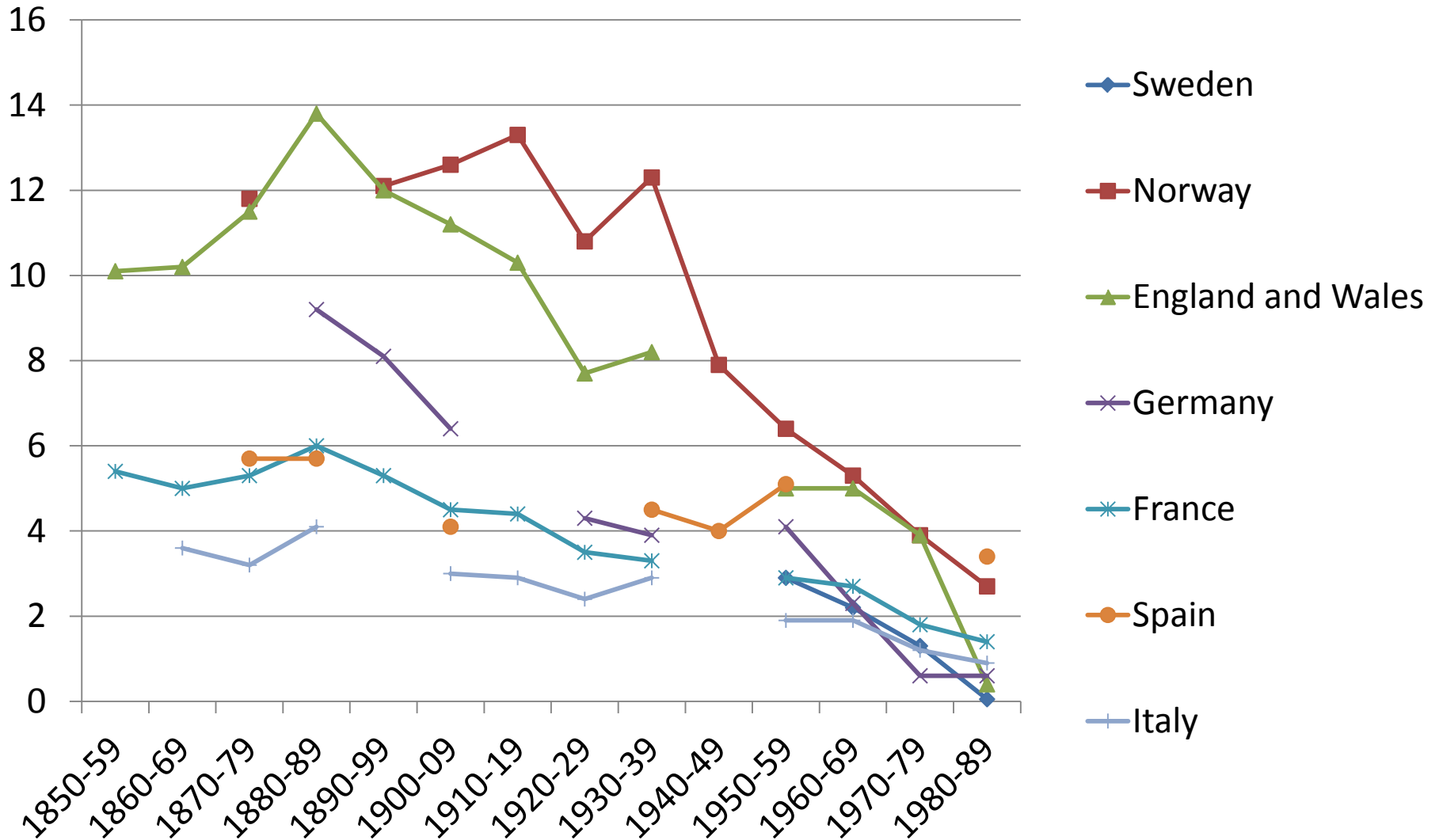
In 1907 a Belgian author, Gringoire, argued that the old servant was going to disappear thanks to electricity: she would become a 'legendary being' whose very existence, in the future, was to be questioned by some intellectual.

[Gringoire, *Hier et demain*, in «Le soir», 1 February 1907, quoted by V. Piette, *Domestiques et servantes. Des vies sous condition. Essai sur le travail domestique en Belgique au 19^e siècle*, Académie Royale de Belgique, Bruxelles 2000, p. 391]

The “lesson” of history: some questions

- For a long time, paid domestic and care work had been expected to **disappear because of modernisation**.
 - Instead, in the 1980s-1990s (and even today) it was (and is) experiencing a kind of ‘**resurgence**’.
- **Why?**
- **What** were/are the **continuities** and **discontinuities** in domestic and care work in the past and present?
- **Which** were/are the **similarities** and **differences** as for the economic, social and cultural roles of domestic and care work in various **EU countries**?

Percentage of domestic workers in the economically active population in selected European countries, 1850s-1980s



The “lesson” of history: some answers

- Preindustrial era: *life-cycle service* in Northern and Central Europe but not in Eastern and Southern Europe
- 19th century ca.: feminisation
ruralisation
stigmatisation of domestic service
- 1880-1920 ca.: “servant question”: domestic service is expected to disappear; diminution of absolute/relative number of domestic and care workers
- 1920s-1930s: revival of paid domestic work in several countries
- 1950s-1980s: diminution of domestic workers, especially live-in

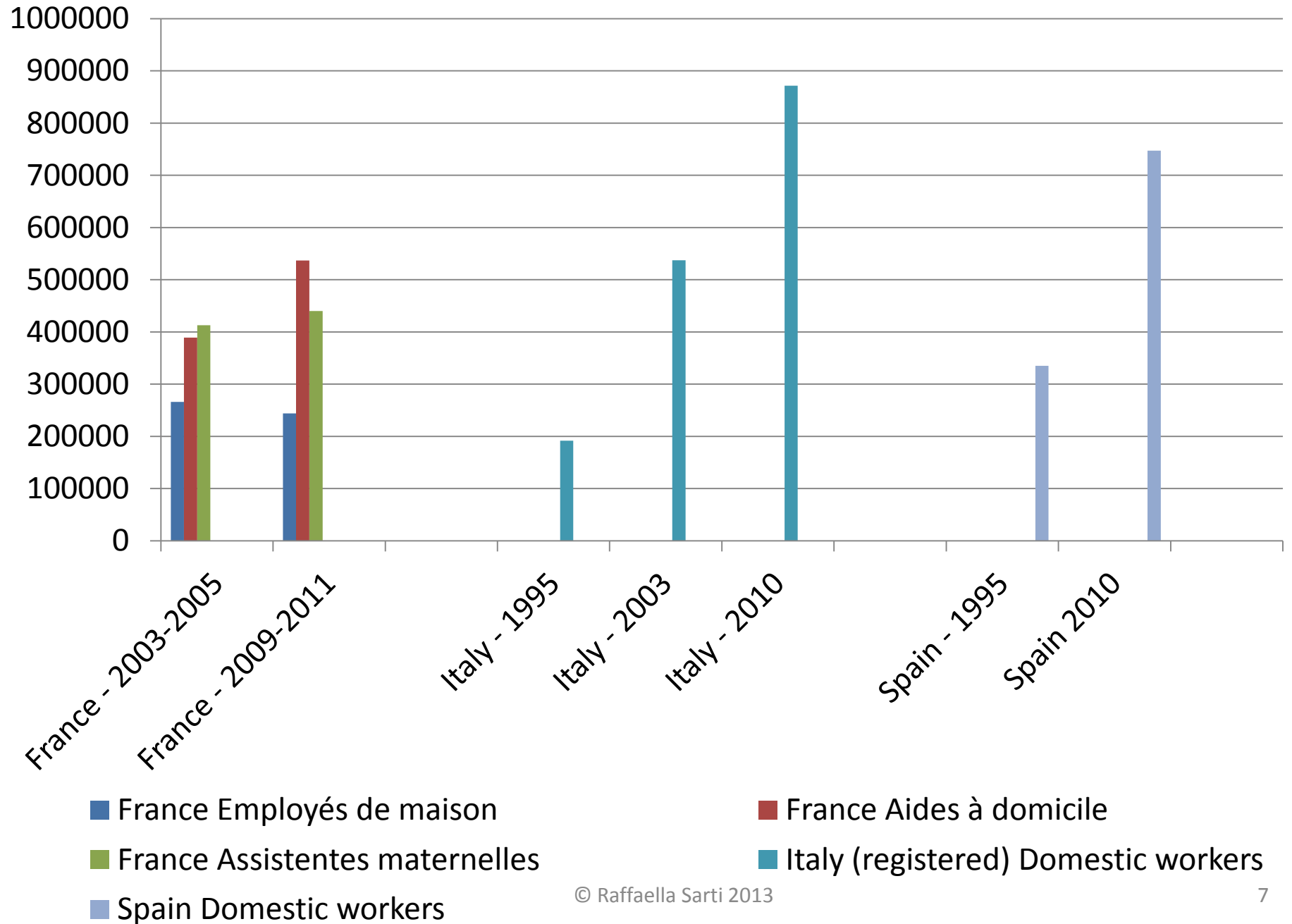
Present

1980s-today: revival of paid domestic and care work (migrant domestic workers; crucial role of welfare and migration policies)

- ⇒ Home
- as open and dynamic arena of cultural exchanges and conflicts, as well as of social confrontation
- as a place where backwards labour relationships survive and new inequalities develop



Domestic and care workers in selected countries



The reasons for this expansion

The expansion of paid domestic and care work is a consequence

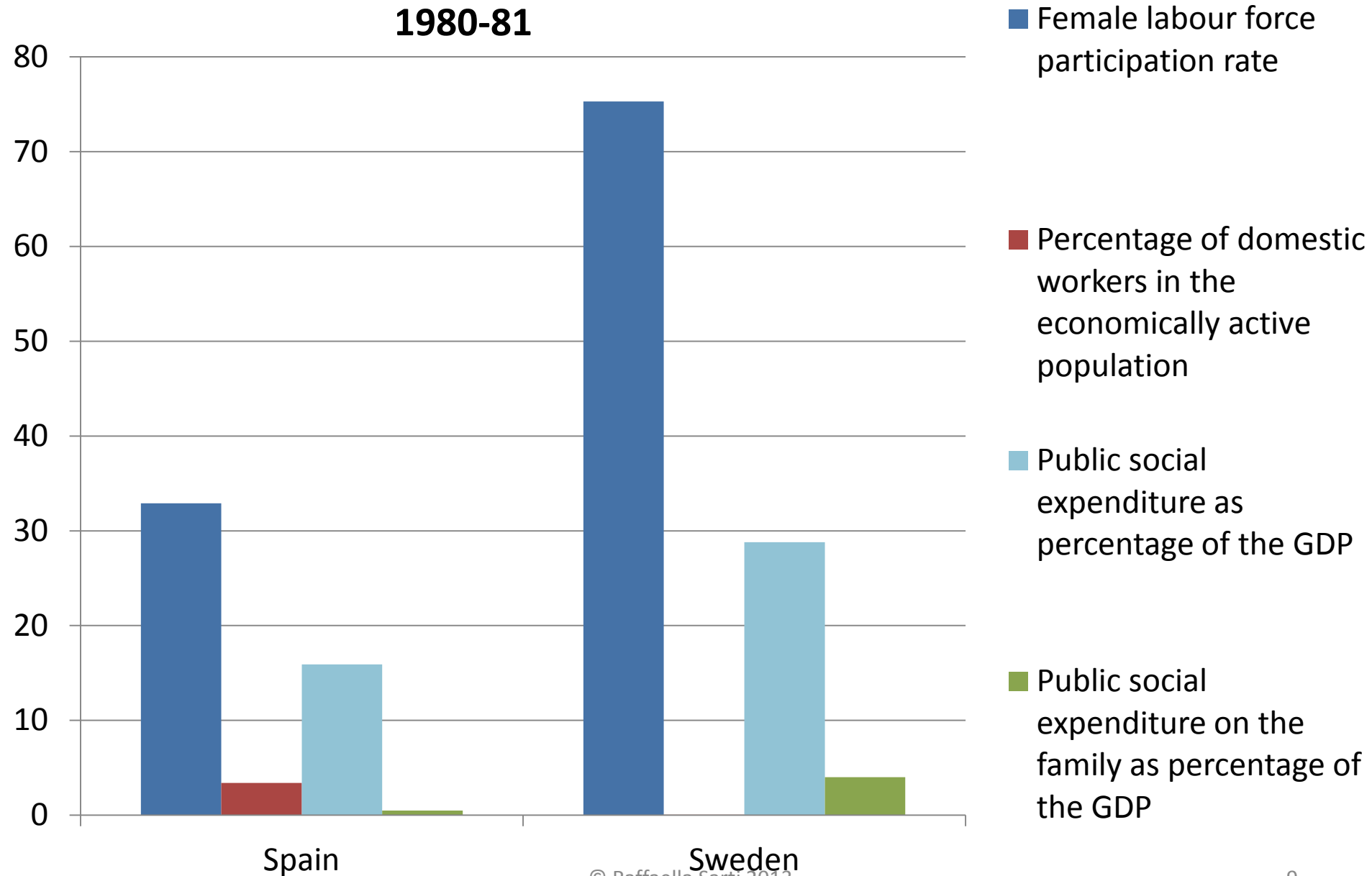
a) of demographic, social and economic changes:

- the ageing of population,
- the growing female employment,
- the growing imbalance between rich and poor/impooverished countries, etc.

b) of specific policies:

- specific migration policies (ex. Italy),
- (insufficient) gender equality policies (“re-genderisation”),
- insufficient public welfare,
- policies aiming to expand the so-called proximity services,
- and cash-for-care policies.

An interesting comparison: Spain and Sweden 1980-81



Future/1

- Domestic and care work is often undeclared
It is necessary to develop policies leading to the reduction of undeclared work, performed by both migrant and native workers
- Even declared domestic and care workers often suffer from (legal) discrimination if compared with other workers, and enjoy limited social protection

It is necessary to overcome this discrimination and to extend to domestic workers full social protection (see ILO convention n. 189)

Future/2

It is important

- to eliminate live-in domestic work
- to improve the quality of domestic workers by organising courses, particularly for babysitters and elderly carers
- to professionalize domestic work
- to give domestic workers the possibility to have a career
- to overcome the private relationship between employer/employee via professional cooperatives among domestic workers or providers of services
- to establish uniform salary scales to guarantee the same remuneration for the same task, in particular in order to stop racialisation and ethnicisation
- to reduce costs for families through public contributions to the population which most needs help and care (vouchers etc.)
- **to develop new public services for the families, to introduce new technological solutions to improve the autonomy of the elderly reducing the “do-it-yourself” welfare solutions and the recourse to private solutions**