

# Changing Families, Changing Institutions?

InFaCt Seminar

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## Cultural-Normative Frameworks Shaping the Lived Experiences of Shared Custody Arrangements in Italy and Belgium

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Based on in-depth, qualitative fieldwork with over 40 children aged between 10 and 16, and semi-structured interviews with at least one of their parents, this paper examines the role of children's cultural-normative frameworks in shaping the lived experiences of shared custody arrangements in Belgium and Italy. The data presented, as well as the creative methodological design that was put into place (Schier et al 2015), comes from an ERC Starting Grant funded research project entitled *MobileKids: Children in Multi-Local, Post-Separation Families* (supervision, Prof. Laura Merla). The problematic is to understand how the lives of children are affected by divorce, mobility and multilocality in the context of shared custody arrangements, and how children accommodate to this family situation. Moreover, this project considers children as active social actors that can, to various extents, exercise agency and influence on their own lives as well as on the lives of the people surrounding them, while being constrained by institutions (James & Prout 1997, Sirota 2002).

After presenting the main characteristics of the everyday organization of this mode of living in both countries, we examine the specific role that Italian and Belgian children, mothers and fathers play in the coordination of this multi-local living arrangement. In particular, we focus on two dimensions that show contrasting experiences in both countries: on the one hand, the roles that mothers and fathers respectively take in the organization of their children's daily lives within, and across households and, on the other hand, the relationship between space and family relations and practices.

We then try to make sense of those differences by discussing how local cultural-normative constructions of children and families may shape these practices.