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Projects, Careers and Resistances in Hotels

Nathalie Bosse[*], Christine Guégnard*[*]

The hotel industry is a sector with many unique and specific characteristics. It remains the archetype of low-wage sector, famous for the weakness of its negotiations in favour of employees, legendary for its diluted application of collective agreement or labour rules in France. However it offers a wide variety of positions and careers for young people and workers without any qualifications. A long way from explanations by the insufficient number of trained workers, or by any real lack of interest in hotel trades, there are recurring tensions affecting the sector (Viney, 2003) specific of the human resources management and the job quality (precarity, flexible working hours, low wages, physically demanding work, etc.). In addition to these pressures, there are a number of time constraints resulting from the working organization (part-time contract, non-standard hours, working at week-ends…) and employees' personal and family commitments outside the hotels. The accounts of employees' daily work reveal how is played the waltz of social times and the imperfect chords of work and family (Guégnard, 2004). Though the sector is reputedly mixed, women tend to occupy low-qualified positions, and half of them work on a part-time basis (Beauvois, 2003). The hotel industry rhythms appear as a hindrance to staff loyalty and female careers development.

These questions will be addressed with the use of qualitative data based on individual interviews of workers in Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel. These budget hotel chains (0 stars), which are owned by Accor, include more than 500 hotels throughout France, with two different types of management. Some establishments are only managed in the independent mode trough management mandate, most often given to a couple, while others are under the salaried form paid directly by the Accor group. However since 2003, salaried employment is proposed to managers and the standard structure of one hotel is now made of one manager, one assistant manager and several employees. When such an offer was made to couples in the Accor group, was the function of manager given to the man or the woman?

At the time the IREDU-CÉREQ[1] carried out this research, Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel have just launched a development project to promote gender equality supported by a programme of the European Social Fund and aiming to further the development of employees' careers and to provide female workers with the same prospects as their male colleagues (Bosse, Guégnard, 2005). Statistics always illustrate the scarcity of the women in power, responsibility and decision positions. This scarcity results at the same time from flows, stereotyped representations, history, promotion practices and organization of the world of work, unequally shared responsibilities in the family (Marry, 2004; Laufer, 2004). Women access to higher hierarchical functions appears limited as an invisible and transparent *"glass ceiling"*, so-called by the American and Anglo-Saxon authors. In order to illustrate these barriers, Québécois suggest the image of a *"sticky floor"*, other French authors propose *"the reversed pyramid"*, *"the lead sky"* (Marry, 2004) or *"the edelweiss picking"* (Meynaud, 1988).

Some women are able to secure managerial positions in the sector in spite of the fact that these companies are marked by a masculine domination (Bourdieu 1998). Two thirds of hotel employees

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and 38% of managers in Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel are women (compared to 20% of female company managers in France according to Insee). These cases incite to wonder about career ladders within hotel chains. Are the assets and the obstacles combined in the same way for men and for women? This communication will analyse a large number of testimonies from employees and managers about their jobs, their working conditions and their plans or strategies for the future facing the new management practices. First the positive and motivating aspects will be studied in the light of a mosaic of stories, seventy-seven individual interviews, playing the melodious tune of the hotel world, followed by the laments listing the tension points of real working, the time constraints entailed by their job. Then, part 2 will focus on employees' typical career path: What are the various forms of support and resistance which women are liable to encounter in the hospitality industry, in order to skating on the *'glace ceiling'*?

Seventy seven persons were interviewed between June and September 2005 in nearly fifty Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel branches throughout France. The interviewees included 37 employees (29 women and 8 men), 16 assistants (12 women and 4 men), 17 managers (8 women and 9 men), 5 male regional managers and 2 female former regional managers.
As within the sector as a whole, the workers tend to be relatively young, with an average age of 32: the youngest employee is 19 and the oldest has just turned 53. Note that there is a high number of qualified employees interviewed, especially assistants and managers: only two have no qualifications. The proportion of employees with no diploma (20%) is the same as the proportion of employees with higher education qualifications. The near totality of workers hold permanent positions.
The main limitation of this methodological approach is that statistically the population is both non-exhaustive and non-representative. The observations made by the interviewees are printed in *'italics'*.

1 – Views on working conditions

Most of the interviewees claim they enjoy working in the services job. Be they employees, managers, assistants, they all speak of a trade that requires multi-skills, the content or degree of which varies according to the specific internal organization of the hotel they work for. In some hotels, duties rang from room cleaning to welcoming guests. One interviewee comments: *'We have a lot of people who are highly versatility employees, who clean the rooms, deal with the showers and toilets, and work at reception and serve breakfast'*. In other hotels, the staff is shared between room-cleaning and reception: welcoming new guests, taking reservations, serving breakfast, cleaning the cafeteria, as well as frequently or occasionally helping the housekeepers, the list of tasks specified by receptionists is often long. Assistants are also entrusted with a number of duties inherent to their position, organizing work schedules, managing the payment of salaries, etc. And while managers tend to emphasize the importance of their managerial role, they also work at reception and carry out the same functions as their employees. One manager remarks: *'A manager often has to serve breakfast, work at reception, mop the floor, but also has to deal with the accounts and a lot of issues in human resources... So there's a wide range of things we're required to do'*.

1.1 - The melody of the job

Several employees claim that variety is one of the main attractions of working in a hotel. Some describe functioning in the sector as a good *'training school'*, and enjoy being constantly on the move, pointing out that *'there are always lots to do'* and *'if you don't like versatility, you won't enjoy working in a hotel'*. Versatility is perceived as a source of personal growth, a means of progressing, such as when it enables a housekeeper to work at reception, or when an assistant is entrusted with a range of administrative duties. Above all, it is the relational dimension of the job that tends to be emphasized, or what one worker refers to as *'contact with customers'*. The relations forge with *'regular customers'* are often perceived in gratifying terms. For example one employee declares: *'I can't help beaming when I see customers'*. Team work and the quality of management are also

identified as significantly appealing factors. Some of the employees say they have good relations with their superiors, and appreciate having a manager who know how to *'listen'*, who is *'available'*, and *'who looks after their staff*', thereby fostering *'good relations'* among employees. In such instances employees speak of a *'pleasant'* or *'family'* atmosphere that encourages *'mutual support'*.

'A different quality of life'

Nearly half of all the managers interviewed have originally been independent managers. Becoming salaried means that their personal and professional life has improved. For the most part, this has a positive impact on their working conditions. The decision to become waged within the Accor group is primarily motivated by a desire for a more balanced compromise between work and family. Independent managers and their partners live day and night in the hotel they manage, and so their private and professional life tends to merge. In fact, they are constantly on call, which results in fatigue and stress; they are often disturbed at night, cannot get away, etc. These difficulties are compounded if they have children. Some managers are keen not to raise their family in a hotel. A home beyond the confines of the hotel, or what some interviewees term a *'proper home'*, is perceived as helping to make a *'break'* from work and to regain a healthy private and social life; thus: *'My quality of life has improved... you have to make choices at some point'*.

Being salaried also means that some couples are no longer forced to work together, and thus *'enjoy a degree of autonomy'* or are *'professionally independent'*. One female manager observes: *'To start with we don't work together any more. We both have our own jobs, and we take responsibility for our own careers'*. Managers also tend to stress the many advantages of belonging to a large company, such as the greater means at their disposal, which help to improve staff management, and the provision of continuing training and career development opportunities: *'Now we really work as a group'*. As for the employees, they tend to emphasize the better working conditions, compliant with legislation, adherence to the Labour code, thirty-nine hour working week, publics holidays, bonuses, sickness and pension schemes or the Accor card. Furthermore, the work schedule provided in advance also helps them to balance their professional and personal life.

- '*Before I had no job contract, I didn't work a fixed number of hours per week or per month... Now I have a fixed and stable work schedule'*, as one female confirms.
- One housekeeper remarks: *'I'm given my work schedule at least two weeks in advance. Now it's pinned up, it's better that way. Before I didn't dare say anything… With the managers there wasn't any schedule, there was nothing. I didn't dare say anything and so... I became stressed'*.

1.2 - Ritornello and laments

The tensions felt by workers appear to be connected to several factors: the challenges of a versatile and physically demanding job, issues of job insecurity, lack of communication with the managerial hierarchy and/or within shift teams, frequent part-time work, and finally levels of pay.

'Being versatile isn't easy at all'

Versatility is not always experienced positively by employees because of the sheer range of tasks they are often required to carry out. This is liable to cause stress and fatigue, which are only amplified if one of the employees is off work. It is also sometimes perceived as devaluing. One employee considers she could be asked to do anything; another feels he is hardly presentable to welcome a guest if he is busy cleaning a bedroom, commenting: *'Being versatile at work means you become a jack of all trades'*; *'You feel dirty when you have to welcome a new guest'*. The main complaint from employees and managers alike is the amount of time spent cleaning rooms, the *'dirty work'*, viewed as physically tiring; interviewees who spend much of their time cleaning rooms often complain of back problems. Some managers consider their work is sometimes too *'practical-oriented'*, and that it is too remote from what they perceive to be a manager's real job: *'here we're just good supervisors, rather than actual managers'*.

'From the best to the worst customers'

Interviewees often raise the issue of *'difficult customers'*. Employees learn to deal more or less effectively with verbal aggression and excessive behaviour, on the part of some young customers especially, particularly at week-ends. In some hotels there are genuine security issues, especially in those located in and around large cities. While they admits they are able to contain some situations, several workers tell of the acts of violence against them or as witness and emphasize the fear they sometimes feel, especially when they are required to work alone, particularly in the evenings or at night. A female receptionist comments: *'Some days when you get to work, you don't feel very safe because in winter, it gets dark earlier, and you're on your own in the hotel... we had several assaults here last winter'*. Furthermore, working in a hotel where customers are predominantly male implies a number of specific issues for women such as *'confronting men's looks'*, and having to respond to their sometimes insistent overtures, with the more or less explicit fear of sexual assault. As female assistant remarks: *'Once I was actually afraid I was going to be forced to get involved in group sex in one of the bedrooms... '* . One female receptionist adds: *'Formule 1 is really a men's hotel. I'm all on my own in the evenings, between eight o'clock and ten o'clock. It's not easy for a woman, anyway I'm sure you get the picture...'*.

'I'd like to work full-time'

Nearly 45% of all the interviewees work part-time, especially cleaning staff (as opposed to 0% of managers and assistants). Managers agree that housekeeping is very physical and tiring: short-term contracts often help to reduce the number of rooms and to prevent employees from growing tired of difficult and repetitive tasks, and to maintain a high level of motivation. But what these contracts primarily offer is a greater degree of flexibility in the organization. While a few employees, especially mothers and students, actually chose to work part-time, the majority of part-time workers do not choose and are faced with significant financial difficulties. For instance, one woman holds two jobs, saying: *'I get up at four in the morning. I work as a cleaner three hours a day at a chemist's'*. Many employees hope eventually to secure full-time contracts or to find a job elsewhere, so that they can leave this *'mini job'*. A cleaning woman explains: *'I've been working part-time now for three years. They always tell me they can't give me a full-time contract instead. Come next September, if things still haven't changed, I'm going to start looking for another job'*.

'It's badly paid'

Two thirds of employees feel they are badly paid for the amount of work they are required to do, for having to work non-standard working hours (at week-ends, in the evenings, on public holidays, or at night) or for the possible risks in their jobs. As one cleaning woman points out: *'We're actually multi-taskers, so I was expecting to be paid more'*. Their salaries are based on the minimum wage, in 2005 around 1 000 euros per month after deductions, with an occasional night bonus that varies between 45 and 75 euros per month according to the number of hours worked. However, assistants receive a bonus for every room let, and they hold different views about their wages. One male assistant complains: *'As the manager's assistant, and considering the amount of duties I'm given, I don't think I'm paid enough'*. By contrast, a female assistant says: *'It is OK, I can't complain. It's... At the moment I get... this month I got a raise so I'll tell you exactly how much I earn... 1 450 euros before deductions, that's my fixed salary, plus 10 cents per room let per day. So per month it works out at roughly 1 400 euros after deductions'*.

In fact salaries tend to be low, especially if employees work part-time, which can put families in a precarious position. As one cleaning woman observes: *'We don't earn enough... That's why there's trouble between us, in our couple... Financially, we need a raise...'*. Furthermore, having their children looked after at unusual hours entail significant costs for these employees, especially for those living on their own. One such employee comments: *'When you're a single parent, it's fair to say... you have a lot of expenses, what with the babysitter, and school...'*.

As for managers, their wages are fixed at 2 000 euros before deductions irrespective of the size of the hotel, plus a bonus for every room let (between 30 and 35 cents) and a profit-sharing bonus based on results. The half of the managers feel they are sufficiently well paid, though they tend to emphasize

differences from one hotel to the next, as well as the fact that they are the least well paid managers within the Accor group as a whole.

- One male manager observes: '*I feel I earn a decent salary. Of course... having worked at Ibis, I can tell you salaries here are lower. It would be a good idea to balance things out a bit'*.
- One female manager comments: '*When you compare ours to other hotels within the group, we earn less. But... there are far more of us. I mean there are far more of us out there'*.

'There's not much communication'

Several employees underline the lack of contact with their hierarchy. On occasion this has an impact on team cohesion: *'There's a very poor standard of communication within the group'*. Other workers explain they sometimes have difficult and even conflict relations with their superiors. Some employees also indicate that they have very little contact with their colleagues, limited to when shifts begin and end: *'in fact here we work alone'*. This is especially true of night receptionists: *'contact here is extremely limited, we only see each other in passing'*. Some employees highlight the *'tensions'* or *'small clashes'* amongst staff, as well as *'issues of communication'*... In particular, a few assistants explain they are occasionally confronted with *'jealous'* colleagues who have seen them progress within the Accor company. Overwork and physically demanding chores have an impact on the overall atmosphere at work: *'In the summer the need for personnel wasn't well thought out. So we were overworked, which caused much tension and fatigue, and employees tended to call in sick...'*. Finally, the issue of staff turn-over is also evoked: *'People don't stay here long, especially young people. There's a lot of turn-over, lots of change in the teams'*.

1.3 – The imperfect chords of work and family

The rhythm of hotel work has an impact on employees' private, social and family spheres. Several persons explain that the job entails a number of inherent pressures, commenting: '*Sometimes you have to be prepared to make sacrifices'*; '*working in the hotel industry is a matter of choice'*. But depending on their personal situation, harmonizing and playing for time prove to be more or less difficult.

'I don't have enough time for a real life outside work'

Nearly half of the workers claim they find too difficult to play the imperfect chords of work and family. Broadly speaking, employees emphasize the complexity of pursuing a hobby or activity outside work and of socialising with their friends. The lack of time, unusual work schedules and fatigue are the most frequently identified factors. One female assistant comments: *'That's why I don't have time to do any sport or anything else outside work. First of all we don't have fixed working hours, they change every week, and rest days are never the same... And we don't exactly work conventional hours'*. Meanwhile a male receptionist explains: *'I used to be involved in clubs, whereas now... the little time I do have for rest, I make the most of it, I just stay in with my children, and that's it'*.

The flexibility required by manager positions has a negative impact on relationships and family life. This is a cause of frustration for employees' partners, and also for the employees themselves at not being able to spend more time with their family or a feeling of guilt at having to disrupt their children's sleeping patterns, etc. A female assistant describes: *'I get in late from work in the evenings. I was away every week-end and... Especially given that he works standard office hours, and has every week-end off. In fact he's often criticized me for that... It's pretty tense right now at home (...). Even my daughter asks me sometimes... she asks me not to be away for too long (...). I wake my daughter up at half past five in the morning to take her to the babysitter's. So it's really tough... And for me it's really hard to have to wake up my child, even she... because on some days, she wants to sleep in. The babysitter lives five minutes away so I'm fortunate in that respect, I've found someone who lives just five minutes down the road. When I finish work at ten in the evening, same thing, I wake her up again'*.

The testimonies given by young male managers suggest a life centred primarily around work: *'I have no personal life'*. This is presented as a matter of personal choice. Besides their desire to advance within the Accor group, these workers particularly emphasize the satisfaction and pleasure they derive

from their work. As bachelors and without children, they underline the importance of the relations with their employees, and often liken their staff team to a *'family'*. But this central role given to work is not always easy to cope with. Whereas one manager hopes his situation is only temporary, another manager reflects on the difficulty of building a stable relationship under such conditions, admits: *'Of course at the moment it's easy because I have no personal life. Now is it because of my job that I have no personal life or is it... it's the same old problem. Of course, I need to be with someone who understands that I work a 70 or 80 hour week. I haven't always been able to find someone like that so... But for the moment, I don't feel particularly penalized by that. Although on some days it gets pretty tough'*.

'It is impossible to find a nanny'

The mothers and fathers stress the difficulty of coping with work rhythms that are not compatible with family life. Of the people interviewed, 60% have children. The parents speak of the difficulty of finding a nanny late in the evening or early in the morning, as well as at week-ends and at night, or of finding an arrangement when they are away on business trips or on continuing training courses: *'It requires so much organization, it's a real headache'*. The different kinds of babysitting and child minding evoked underline the crucial role of grandparents. Some workers even move closer to the grandparents to make the life of their children that much easier, or try multiple combinations: mothers and fathers juggle with nannies, neighbours, friends, babysitters, etc. Therefore a solid family network and family support are decisive factors in helping women to remain in the hospitality sector. A female receptionist explains: *'I just can't seem to find a nanny. In the past I've been let down by several nannies. It's so difficult to find someone to look after my daughter when I'm at work. I take her to friends, and sometimes I even have to take her to work if I really can't sort anything else out. At week-ends, I take her to a friend's place in M., so I don't see her for two days, it's really tough, it's really eating up my life'*.

'When you are a woman, it is harder to balance job and family'

It is essentially female interviewees who tend to emphasize the relation, not to say the conflict, between their career and their private life. The different status of men and women on the labour market cannot be properly understood without taking account of their respective roles at home and the unequal distribution of domestic and parental duties. Several researches underscore the persistence of disparities in the management of work schedules. In couples where both partners work, men and women make similar uses of their time, except in the case of housework and parenting. There is an unequal distribution of domestic actions: women carry out nearly 60% of the full range of activities that involve the children, and nearly 70% of the chores, whereas men have more leisure time. Several women underline these differences, observing: *'I have no time for myself as a woman, I just don't'; 'When you're a woman, it's harder to reconcile your work and your family commitments than it is for a man. When you go away on a two-day training course for your job, you have to plan everything, such as meals and so forth... So that everything runs smoothly while you're away'; 'I'm the one who's in charge of the family budget. School, the children, that's me. Sometimes, it's just too much, sometimes I just get sick of it all'*.

2 – Careers and resistances

Two major factors determine the appeal of trades in the hotel industry: on the one hand, an inclination or taste for working in the service jobs, and on the other hand, easy access to jobs and good career prospects in a dynamic sector without a specific training or relevant employment experience. This is shown in the wide range of career profiles and the projects of workers in the hotels. The majority believe they have solid prospects: promotion to a higher position within the Accor group or management of one or two hotels, even though some workers see no real opportunities for advancement in their current jobs. Admittedly, hotel chains offer promotion opportunities, but these often entail a willingness to move and to be flexible. As such, a career in the hospitality is not always compatible with the commitments of family life. Beyond these difficulties, the solutions devised individually to balance family and works, as well as the strategies of negotiation within couples, often serve to weaken women's careers in the sector.

2.1 - Career prospects

Most of the people state they wish to pursue their current career within the sector, and many employees declare they are keen to advance within the Accor group: *'I'd like to stay at Formule 1 and to further my career at Formule 1'*. Managing their own hotel is one widely expressed ambition: *'I see myself becoming a manager'*. Other workers plan to move to other Accor hotels or even to other activities within the same group.

'When you work for Accor, there are always opportunities'

The budget hotel chains are marked by relatively fast promotion prospects to managerial positions. Young couples, sometimes starting out in the sector, are offered the possibility of becoming independent managers and then salaried managers. Others move from one position to the next before eventually supervising one or several hotels. The average age at which the people interviewed became managers is thirty, and the majority are proud of the success they had achieved at such an early stage in their career, such as these two female managers: *'There was this possibility at Formule 1 to apply as a couple and to manage a hotel together. I'm twenty-four, I applied with my husband. Our application was successful'*; *'I'm twenty nine, I manage two hotels. I don't think everyone gets that kind of opportunity'*. All the workers particularly appreciate the career prospects offered: *'I didn't think things would move so quickly'*, even though some emphasize the demands of the job, saying for instance: *'It requires a lot of personal commitment'* or *'You have to stand out'*. The male and female managers show a real commitment to their trade: *'It's more than a job, it's a passion'*, and work is evidently a significant aspect of their identity (Garner, Meda, 2006).

Furthermore, the various testimonies often present the standard kinds of recruitment practices used in hotels. Training is not the sole determining factor for securing a first job in the sector. It is often the hazards of the paths of applicants' personal and professional development that tend to direct individuals to the hospitality, sometimes leading them directly to managerial positions. However, qualifications and hotel trainings are also recognized as the '*signals*' by employers (Spence, 1973; Arrow, 1973) and represent a definite advantage for applicants planning a career in the sector. In fact, only one male manager and one female manager have no qualification, no diploma. Half of the managers have a higher education qualification. Furthermore, a third of managers and half of assistants have a qualification in hotel fields, as opposed to just a small minority of other employees (15%).

'I don't know how it works'

Career prospects are more obscure for some workers. The lack of any transparent criteria determining promotion often causes a degree of uncertainty about the positions which such employees can hope to secure: *'it's a little bit vague'*. While a small number of interviewees consider they are well-informed about these matters, many employees feel they lack information. For example, one female assistant comments: *'I'd like to move up the ladder. I think everybody does. But how you go about it, now that's another matter...'*. Others stay in the same position for several years and hope to gain promotion by demonstrating their abilities and by remaining patient. One female versatile employee says: *'I don't think it's easy but it's definitely possible... given a bit of time'*. Although they apply for promotions, some workers consider they have no prospects in view. For instance, a cleaning woman observes: *'I've asked for a promotion... perhaps not at reception but elsewhere in the hotel. I've asked the manager (who's a woman), I've asked the assistant manager, but for the moment they don't really know'*.

Furthermore, continuing training appears to be focused primarily on managers and assistants. Nonetheless, a few employees benefit from some *'on the job'* training, enabling housekeepers in particular to work at reception. In such cases, promotion is a response to a genuine interest in the job and to a need for a broader range of duties that are physically less demanding than cleaning. However, the salary and status of these workers remain the same.

In addition for these female employees, part-time work often restricts access to higher-level positions, and a switch to full-time work is their only prospect. The lack of qualifications and age are also sometimes perceived to be insurmountable barriers. One employee says: *'I don't have a baccalaureate, I can't reasonably ask for a better job than other employees'*, while a cleaning woman comments: *'The manager has suggested I work at reception, to learn. But at my age... I don't really want to any more'*. The hotel industry frequently operates as a transition sector for young workers who have yet to decide about the specific career they wish to pursue.

'Leaving everything behind and rebuilding from scratch'

Another constraint that employees speak of is the issue of geographical mobility. One male assistant observes: *'I already own a house here, my parents live in the area, I have a family. If you want to get a promotion, you have to be prepared to move to another area (...) It's not just a question of money, you also have to consider everything you build around your job. Taking a managerial position means leaving everything behind and rebuilding your life from scratch'*. In this respect, there are significant differences between the position of men and women. While several women claim they are prepared to move, there are also more women who state they are reluctant to do so because of their partner's career, their children and their established social networks: *'We'd like to be able to move, but if your husband has a stable job, and you have a family... I mean for a man it's a lot easier, they're told there's a vacancy somewhere, and he says 'OK darling pack your bags, we're moving'. A woman tends to be much more reluctant to move'*.

2.2 - Women's paths strewn with traps

There appear to be similarities in the prevailing perceptions and attitudes towards promotion expressed by men and women, with one significant exception. Women tend to speak of more constraints than men and there is a feeling that climbing the promotional ladder while maintaining a healthy family life is a greater challenge for women. Traditional cultural models of managers play also apart in shaping specific representations of the role of women within companies.

Within the Etap Hôtel and Formule 1 chains, women hold 38% of the total number of managerial jobs, whereas two thirds of employees and assistants are women. A number of previous researches (Laufer, Fouquet, 2001) have already identified several factors that lead to the exclusion of women from *'the ultimate circle'* (Meynaud, 1988): a process of exclusion operated by male managers, self-selection or self-censorship, and even resignation of some less confident or more modest women, an effect of balancing their private and professional life, a degree of geographical mobility, etc. All of these factors are illustrated in the various accounts gathered in the course of this research. The decision to pursue a career in the hospitality sector and building a home and family life require choices, as well as a high degree of organization and negotiations within couples that often tend to prejudice women's prospects.

'If you are a man in the Accor group, it is a lot easier to climb the ladder'

Despite the fact that several women hold manager positions, the hotel industry remains heavily marked by a male power culture and by established representations of masculine domination. Man remains the dominant referent in material and symbolic terms (Bourdieu 1998). The image of the manager is for a long time associated with a dominant masculine, competitive model. Isolation is perceived as a risk factor and even a cause of potential failure, and women often experience significant tensions to adapt to a male environment, as some female managers suggest: *'I really felt I wasn't welcome, I felt there was a sexist atmosphere at work and there were a lot of sexist comments'; 'Unfortunately I had to work with a first-rate sexist (...) And I can tell you I suffered'; 'The group manager I worked for really didn't like me being pregnant (...) In his view, if you work in a hotel, you should be committed 100% to your job, and just forget about being a mother'*. Age is also experienced differently by men and women; one female manager comments: *'You have to be careful because when you get to forty... you're too old or just not with it any more'*. One female versatile employee says: *'Hotel managers are all young executives... that's it. Young men, thirty or thirty-five maximum. I'm a woman and I'm forty five, almost forty six so... I asked if I wasn't a bit... I'm not that old but still'*.

As such, the selection process that determines if workers are able to *'climb the ladder'* is distinctly biased. People in high-level positions tend to promote employees that have a similar profile to theirs, and the predominance of men in managerial positions at Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel means that male applications tend to be more successful. Managers play a crucial role in promoting the employees they manage. The process involves identifying key skills, and managers tend to operate as coaches or teachers. Some employees applying for promotion speak of support, whereas others emphasize barriers to promotion. One female receptionist comments: *'I started working at reception in September 2003, in fact the entire team started at the same time. Then one employee left and was replaced by another employee called Romain. A few months later there were several vacancies for assistant jobs. Romain got offered a job. It was really hard for me. Because I felt I deserved the job, that I had the required skills and that I had been there longer than he had, and that I had trained him'*.

'Can you really be a manager and a wife and a mother all at once?'

Careers tend to be more costly for women. Although they show the same desire to work, men and women cope differently in trying to balance work and family. For employees, the mobility factor is associated with the availability factor in securing a managerial position, which entails long and intensive working hours. A commitment to their personal life tends to penalize female managers more heavily than their male counterparts. Female managers with children emphasize that their success is based on a specific triptych: a high degree of resistance and commitment, their children's health, and their partner's support (who may make a significant contribution to domestic and family chores) or a delegation at home. Whenever one of these factors is lacking, the female managers feel their career prospects are thwarted.

Negotiations within couples sometimes play a crucial part in the career paths of both men and women, especially at the moment of transition between an independent and a salaried position in cases where a couple works together as a managerial team. More often than not, the decisions involved in this process operate to the detriment of women, since they are given the assistant job, while the manager's positions go to the men. But this 'choice' may be the result of a balancing act in the careers of the two partners. Access to promotion is a complex process that involves a range of considerations pertaining to work organization as well as structural, family and personal factors. The hotel group responds well to young women's expectations by enabling them and their partner to hold salaried managerial positions. Women tend to emphasize the importance of obtaining a manager position rather than working merely as their husband's assistant. One female manager comments: *'Two years ago, we were offered a salaried position (...) we set down one condition, which was accepted, so perhaps it wasn't such a bad idea for them if we both worked as managers in two different hotels. We didn't want to even consider a salaried position that entailed having to work as manager and assistant manager, because it would have been an issue for me in my couple if I'd had to work as assistant manager, I think that's something I just wouldn't have been able to put up with. So we got round the problem, and we both managed our own hotels'*.

'I want to combine my life as a mother and as a working woman'

Once they become mothers, the redefinition of their priorities has a definite impact on women's professional life. The process of self-exclusion and the primacy given to their personal life are to be interpreted as the result of a number of constraints and tensions. But they may also be seen as the expression of a different and differed commitment to professional success. Catherine is a single mother raising her five-year old son at the time of the survey. After four years of managing a two-star hotel, she put in a request to work part-time: *'I asked if it was possible to work part-time as an executive. I was told it wasn't possible because you can't be a manager and work part-time'*. Following this refusal, she opts to move closer to her family so that her son can be looked after, but she *'downgrades'*, in her own terms, to a managerial job in a hotel with no stars.

2.3 - Dynamics of male and female paths

The various testimonies suggest a typology of professional development paths. Faced with relatively unattractive and even restricting job propositions, some employees are tempted to leave the profession,

while others feel that their current position is a dead-end. Other workers are able to climb the promotional ladder leading to the holy grail of their chosen profession. Three main types of professional development emerge from the various accounts used in this research: static, reactive and strategic paths.

The first 'static' type essentially concerns women. Without any basic training or qualifications in a traditionally female profession (such as secretarial, health care, or social works), women in this category hold low qualified jobs for long periods of time over a number of years. There is very little change to their professional status, because of an unfavourable professional, institutional or personal context. Their primary motivation is their wage and their present hotels offer no opportunities for further professional development. One housekeeper mentions: *'I went to school but I didn't really achieve much. I started out as a cleaner... Then I moved to France and worked in restaurants. I wasn't a waitress, I dealt with the laundry, I did the washing-up, the ironing, cleaning, that kind of thing (...) Then I worked as a temporary employee and after that I found a job as a cashier in a shop, which I did for eight years. And after eight years of working as a cashier, I moved. And I came here because my husband got a job transfer. That's when I found my current job as a housekeeper. I've been working here since 1998 (...) I don't have any prospects. I just take every day as it comes'*.

Another set of workers – twenty or so women and ten or so men – describe a 'reactive' career path. They stumbled into the hotel industry by chance, without any basic or conventional training. They enjoy working in the service jobs and are highly motivated. These employees seek to climb the promotional ladder and to be entrusted with more responsibilities.

- One female receptionist comments: '*I did a BEP* [second degree of vocational diploma] *to become a secretary, and after that I studied for a vocational baccalaureate in secretarial work. I passed, and then I completed a BTS* [last degree of vocational diploma] *to train as an assistant manager... So I've achieved the required standard... And then I studied for one year at the University of B. And that's when I started working at Formule 1 because... I was looking for some extra income (...). At first I cleaned the rooms. Then I heard the hotel was looking for someone to work at reception in the afternoons so I took the job (...). At first it was just a way of making some extra money before deciding what I really wanted to do with my life. But I ended up liking the job so I stayed on (...). Because I also saw there was a good chance of getting promoted'*.
- A male assistant explains: '*I did a baccalaureate specialising in management. Then I went off to do a BTS in computer science, which I narrowly failed. And then... I immediately found a job in an IT firm. Basically the job involved designing websites, which I did for a while, but it didn't last that long, because the company went bankrupt. After that it was a bit of a struggle for two years, I did temp work and I was unemployed for a while. Then I got a job at Formule 1 in V. And after a year working there I got a promotion (...). I did a course to train as a manager (...). At first, I didn't really have a career plan, I worked at reception. And little by little I can see there are lots of opportunities'*.

Finally, the third 'strategic' type of pathway is illustrated in the stories of a dozen women and six men. Attracted by the hotel industry, these workers had built their initial training and path around specific choices and well-defined objectives. Highly determined and motivated, and generally young, they are highly committed to their jobs and are prepared to move or had already done so.

- A male assistant manager declares: '*I did a BTS in hotel studies... specialising in management, marketing and accommodation... After I finished my BTS, my first job was working as a receptionist. After that I integrated Accor, because it has an excellent reputation in Europe and throughout the world... for me that was the main objective (...). I was hungry for success, I really liked my job... I don't just want to work as a receptionist... I've climbed the ladder (...). I want to manage a hotel on day... and after that I want to become a regional manager'*.
- Meanwhile a female assistant explains: '*I studied at the hotel vocational school in Grenoble. I got a BEP-CAP* [first and second degrees of vocational diploma] *and after that I studied for a professional baccalaureate specialising in catering, which I also passed. After that, I was offered a job in Grenoble in a Mercure hotel as head waiter but I turned it down because I'd already*

decided to move to London. There I managed a bar in a French brasserie for two years. Then I stopped to have my first child. And in 2001, I moved back to France. So I didn't work for two years, in fact I looked after my daughter for three years. I started working again in 2003, in a Formule 1 hotel. I started out as a housekeeper, for six or seven months. Then I got a job at reception. I've been working as an assistant since September last year. I'm aiming to become assistant manager to go on a training course to become a manager (...). I was quite prepared to start off again at the bottom of the ladder, but it's tough when you haven't worked for three years. You have to get back into the swing of things, you have to start all over again. So I agreed to start out at the bottom of the ladder, to work as a housekeeper, that wasn't a problem but... if there'd been no opportunities for climbing the ladder, I would have looked for a job elsewhere'.

There are two other strategies used in women's career paths and discourses, which are presented as personal 'choices'. The first strategy involves a full commitment to developing their career, with the clearly defined ambition of prioritising career advancement and promotion. One female manager with two children says: *'I think anything is possible once you put your mind to it. Organizing my time really isn't a problem. And I don't really feel an urgent need to be with my family. It all depends on what people are looking for. I'm not particularly focused on family life... I love my family, and I love my job as well. I enjoy my freedom'*. One female assistant with a child adds: *'My aim is to become a manager one day and my husband knows that so... he knows that if we have to move, we'll move. It'll be tough, but we'll do it all the same. It'll be tough at first to get things sorted out... what with school, my husband's job of course and everything else. He'll have to find a new job. What matters to us is our future, we know that, and we know that at some point, if I want to further my career, I just have to be prepared to move. We've talked about it a lot and he's prepared to follow me'*.

The second strategy is based on a self-imposed limitation of career development to prioritise family life, though without sacrificing work, as one female manager with a young son suggests: *'It's not one of my professional ambitions. But my family life is so much more important to me... in fact I'm still able to enjoy my job (...). When you realise you want to be a mother and you want to balance that with having a job, you just have to be prepared to put your career second'*. In the same way, one female versatile employee observes: *'I must say now... ever since I've had my baby... when I see the kinds of pressures that my colleague Paul, the assistant, has to put with, I just can't imagine... having pressures like that. What with my son and everything, it's just not possible. My job at the hotel can't come before my family, it's simply out of the question'*.

Concluding remarks

The hotel industry is a sector where finding a job is easy, even without any relevant qualifications or experiences. Sometimes what triggers the vocation is a student job, a transition job, or a career conversion. For other workers, entering the sector may be the outcome of an eventful or tortuous career history. But the motivations of workers may also be related to clearly defined choices, and may be part of a process ranging from initial training to a job in the hospitality. Broadly speaking, the employees say they enjoy working in 'relational' jobs, despite some recurring tensions, including difficult working conditions, imposed part-time work and low wage. Nonetheless, these pressures tend to be attenuated by the benefits of working for a chain as opposed to a traditional hotel, especially in view of labour legislation, the 39-hour working week, the two-day weekly rest or fixed work schedules...

Career prospects are another important factor in this respect. Formule 1 and Etap Hôtel are characterized by relatively fast access to managerial positions, even if employees do not have the typical profile for becoming a manager. Qualifications and training expertise are still used as ranking criteria and standards of social identification, which are '*signals*' for employers, although by themselves they are no longer sufficient. A worker must be prepared to demonstrate his potential and his skills, to acquire the specific culture of the hotel industry and of the Accor group, and to accept placing the demands of their chosen career before their personal life. Together these three factors determine success and the varying speed of promotion. The conflict between work and family is in

fact a recurrent feature of the accounts provided by women working in the hotels. Access to a manager position is a complex process conditioned by work organization and a range of structural and individual factors, including time management and family commitments. Because such jobs tend to coincide with a moment in life where home and family are in the process of being established, the pressures of availability, the culture of long working hours and the demands of geographical mobility all tend to work to the detriment of female workers. In this respect, there are significant differences given by the young women working in the hotels who are determined to going to the top of the pyramid and to skating on the *'glass ceiling'*, though not at any cost.

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