

5. WORK, LEISURE, TIME ALLOCATION

JUDIT MONOSTORI

5.1. Introduction

This study undertakes to analyse the results of a few international surveys, with the aim of comparing the countries of Europe in terms of the role of work and of leisure in the lives of their populations. We explore the preferred balance between these two activities and the ways in which those preferences vary across the different social groups. We should note here that the attitudes under analysis are highly dependent on culture and personal values, the precise characterization of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

The models used to analyse the relationship between work and leisure rely on three different principles:

- The *spillover model* states that the nature of a person's work experiences, working conditions and job satisfaction will affect their attitudes and life beyond the domain of work. Those who are satisfied with their jobs and working conditions are predicted to be better at managing their leisure time, and to feel more fulfilled in their non-work lives.
- The *compensation model* holds that there are compensatory mechanisms operating between the world of work and the non-work domain. Specifically, those who are dissatisfied with their working lives are thought to be more likely to prefer activities outside the domain of work than are those who are happy with their work and who have well-paid jobs and good working conditions (Wilensky 1960).
- According to the *segmentation model*, there is no tie-in between the work domain and the non-work domain. The preferences of individuals are believed to be independently shaped in the two domains (Dubin 1958, 1973).

Studies that have tested the validity of these three models have reached conflicting conclusions. In their investigation of people's satisfaction with work and life in general, Tait's research group found evidence supporting the spillover model (Tait, Padgett and Baldwin 1989), while other studies have argued for the compensation or the segmentation models (Rain, Lane and Steiner 1991; Kelly and Kelly 1994).

The inconsistent results have prompted some researchers to study the relationship between the work domain and the non-work domain among individual social groups, rather than at the level of society as a whole (Champoux 1978; Kabanoff 1980; Shaffer 1987). Another development is the rise in the prominence of studies that seek to break the phenomenon down into distinct aspects: instrumental, cognitive and affective (Elizur 1991).

A further line of research is the direction of influence between work and non-work relations. Kohn, Kirchmeyer and Cohen, for instance, all describe how a person's experiences in the non-work domain can affect their labour market behaviour – i.e. what position they can secure, how successful they are in aligning the job with their preferences and how much independence they can attain (Kohn 1990; Kirchmeyer 1992; Cohen 1997a, b).

Besides the relationship between work and leisure, it is also worth looking at the importance of the work and the non-work domains in people's lives. Previous research into this has unequivocally indicated that, over the past few decades, the non-work domain – specifically leisure activities – has gained in importance in society and in the lives of individuals (Eurostat 2004).

The roles of work and leisure, however, may be assessed from a number of different perspectives, and the analyses of the various dimensions may not lead to congruent results. One possible approach is to look at the amount of time allocated to work and the amount of time left for leisure among different social groups and in various countries. Another approach may focus on the importance of one or the other type of activity for the members of a society. As a third dimension, we could also measure the intensity of work activities versus that of leisure activities.

5.2. Time allocation

According to the results of an international time-use survey covering 15 European countries, people have between 4 and 6 hours of leisure time in an average day. Among the countries participating in the survey, Lithuania has the shortest leisure hours (4 hours 13 minutes or 4:13 hours – the convention that will be used throughout) and Norway has the longest (5 hours 46 minutes). Apart from Norway, the other countries with relatively long leisure times are Finland, Belgium and Germany. At the other end of the scale, we find Latvia and Bulgaria in the company of Lithuania.

The amount of time left for leisure is the time not taken up by other activities – most importantly by work. Factors such as the employment rate, the statutory working week, the probability of overtime, the availability of part-time employment and the time spent on housework all contribute to the variation in leisure hours. The structure of time allocation for the entire population of a country is also affected by the age composition of that population. Societies with a higher proportion of older people tend to have comparatively long leisure hours, since only a fraction of older cohorts are employed.

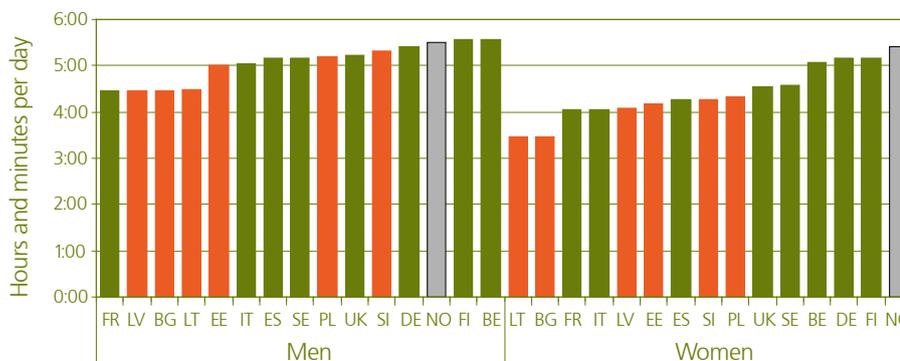
An average day's leisure time ranges from 4 hours 44 minutes to 5 hours 58 minutes for men, and from 3 hours 45 minutes to 5 hours 40 minutes for women (Figure 5.1).

The – at times substantial – difference between men and women is also a consequence of the employment rate (which is typically lower among women than among men) and of the higher probability of part-time work among women, while in most countries women spend substantially more time doing housework than do men. It is for this last reason that women have less free time than men in each of the countries, although the size of the gap varies. The greatest difference between men and women is to be observed in the countries of Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Bulgaria, Poland and Estonia) and Southern Europe (Slovenia, Italy and Spain). Women in those countries have approximately 1 hour less leisure time than do men. The smallest gap between the sexes is observed in Norway and Germany.

In any given society, the amount of time allocated to housework is determined by the living standards and the gender roles in that society and in its various subgroups. In countries where households can afford to buy some of the housework as services, there will be more time for activities in the non-work domain. As for the differences between men and women, these are essentially determined by the often centuries-old models of gender roles. In Southern Europe, for instance, housework is traditionally the responsibility of women, and men are less involved in domestic chores; while in the countries of Northern Europe, for instance, housework is far more evenly distributed between the sexes.

Figure 5.1: Average daily leisure time of the 20–74-year-old population, by gender and country

Source: author's calculations based on the data at <https://www.testh2.scb.se/tus/tus>.



The cross-country variation in the relationship between, on the one hand, paid work, housework and leisure time, and, on the other hand, the employment rate helps to reveal the structural causes and the lifestyle differences underlying the availability of leisure time. The relationships do not always point in the same direction (Figure 5.2). Lithuanian men, for instance, have one of the lowest employment rates of the 15 countries under analysis. Those who are employed, however, work such long hours that the average leisure time available to the whole of the male population is rather short. Also, as a result of the low life expectancy that is characteristic of the Baltic states, the longer leisure time typical of older cohorts cannot boost the average leisure hours for the total 20–74-year-old population. We have a different pattern in Belgium: while Belgian men have a similarly low employment rate, as distinct from Lithuania it is coupled with the longest average leisure hours. A third type of pattern is to be observed in Norway, where a high level of employment goes hand in hand with long leisure time.

The hours allocated to leisure activities by women show a far more varied picture than for men. One reason is the discrepancy in employment rates, the working week and the time spent on housework. Italian, Bulgarian and French women tend to have low levels of employment, but they do not have a lot of time for leisure activities because so much of their home time is dedicated to housework. Domestic chores take up an especially large number of hours in the lives of Italian and Bulgarian women. Women living in the Scandinavian countries, by contrast, have a lot of leisure time,

even though their employment rate is the highest in Europe. This apparent contradiction is explained by a number of factors: first, a large proportion of Scandinavian women work part time (e.g. 44% of working women in Norway and 41% in Sweden are in part-time employment); second, they devote little time to housework; and third, Northern Europe enjoys a high life expectancy.



Figure 5.2: Average daily time spent on housework and paid work among the population aged 20–74, and employment rates among the population aged 15–64, by gender and country

Source: author's calculations based on the data at www.testh2.scb.se/tus/tus; <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>.

5.3. Preferences: leisure time versus work

The time available for leisure activities is governed not simply by whether or not an individual works, but rather by the length of time spent at the workplace. The number of hours spent at the workplace is a function of both obligations and preferences. Some people work long hours to secure a higher income or a better chance of promotion, while for others working overtime is a basic job requirement. Some choose to work part time so that they can spend more time with their families, while others are forced to give up full-time work. It is, in any case, a fact that the leisure time available is not purely a matter of preference. It is therefore worth exploring the role of leisure among different social groups and in different societies. This issue involves not only the length of time available for leisure activities but also the content of leisure time. Some people may prefer to make intensive use of a shorter leisure period, while others may want to extend their leisure hours as much as possible. Our survey questions cannot identify these attitude differences; they simply reveal how important leisure time is for different people.

Attitudes towards the importance of work call for similarly complex interpretations. In some countries (and among some social groups within them), the importance of work stems from its unavailability. That is, a shortage of jobs and a low employment rate increase the value of work. In other countries (or among other groups), positive attitudes towards work are rooted in people's work ethos, cultural or religious traditions.

Among the 27 European countries that participated in the fourth and fifth waves of the World Values Survey (WVS), we find just five – the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland and Sweden – where, according to our indicator, leisure time is more highly valued than work. Work proved to be more important in every other country. The countries with the highest preference for work among their populations are Malta, France, Italy, Austria and Latvia. Work tends to receive a lot of support in the countries that joined the EU after 2004: the highest levels of support within this group are to be found in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and (as was mentioned above) Latvia. Countries also show considerable variation with respect to the distance between the importance of work and the importance of leisure. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are good examples of the pattern where high leisure importance is coupled with low support for work. In Romania, the Czech Republic, Portugal and the three Baltic states, by contrast, work is valued far more highly than leisure time (Figure 5.3).

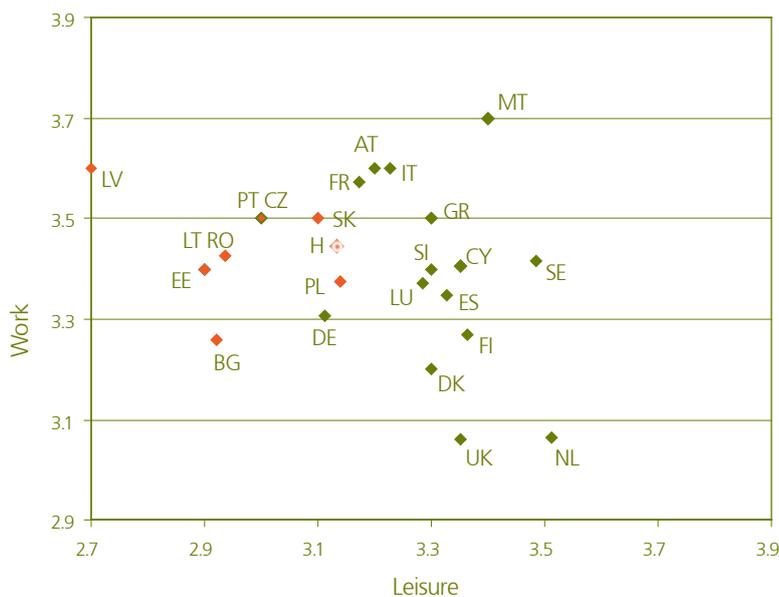
Figure 5.3: Attitudes towards leisure time and work among the population aged 18 or over, by country

Source: author's calculations; BG, CY, DE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, UK: WVS, wave 5 (2005–07); AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, GR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SK: WVS, wave 4 (1999–2004).

Note: The survey questions on the importance of leisure time and work were as follows: "For each of the following indicate how important it is in your life. Would you say it is

- 1 = not at all important;
- 2 = not very important;
- 3 = rather important;
- 4 = very important."

The countries are characterized by an indicator showing the average of the response scores. Each response was given a score of between 1 and 4, where the answer "not at all important" received a score of 1, and the answer "very important" received a score of 4.



As was also revealed by the above analysis, people attach different degrees of importance to different areas of life or to their success in these areas. To what extent these different areas are contrasted with each other, however, varies from individual to individual and from country to country. Some people consider work and leisure equally important, while others attach little importance to either, and others still prefer one over the other. The following paragraphs explore people's preferences when they are given a choice between work and leisure. As part of the WVS, the respondents in the various countries were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement that "Work should always come first even if it means less free time."

The countries where people are the most likely to agree strongly with this statement are the former socialist countries. In Romania, for instance, 40% of the adult population agree strongly, and the same goes for approximately 30% of Hungarians, Bulgarians and Slovaks. The populations of the Netherlands and Great Britain are the least likely to agree strongly with this statement: less than 5% of respondents in either country. When contrasted with leisure, work also receives little support in the Scandinavian countries (Sweden and Finland), in Ireland and in some of the Southern European countries (such as Malta, Portugal and Spain) (Figure 5.4).

The contrast between the responses given in the new and the old EU member states is likely to be related to the divergent experiences of their populations with regard to unemployment – and thus job security. Whereas the new member states have known unemployment for only about 20 years, the labour markets of the old member states have experienced it for much longer. Many people in the new member states still remember the times when unemployment was unknown, and when everyone had a secure job. For them, it may be more difficult to adjust to the insecurity of the present era than it is for their peers in the old EU countries, who are accustomed to the existence of unemployment in the labour market (though the extent of it clearly varies).

We should also note that long-term unemployment is more prevalent in the former socialist countries, and these also tend to have exceptionally high levels of inactivity among the working-age population. Certain social groups (those with little education and “older” workers) have a very poor chance of rejoining the labour market once they have left it (for whatever reason). They will no doubt value work more highly than leisure, since many of them have no choice but to be absent from the labour market.

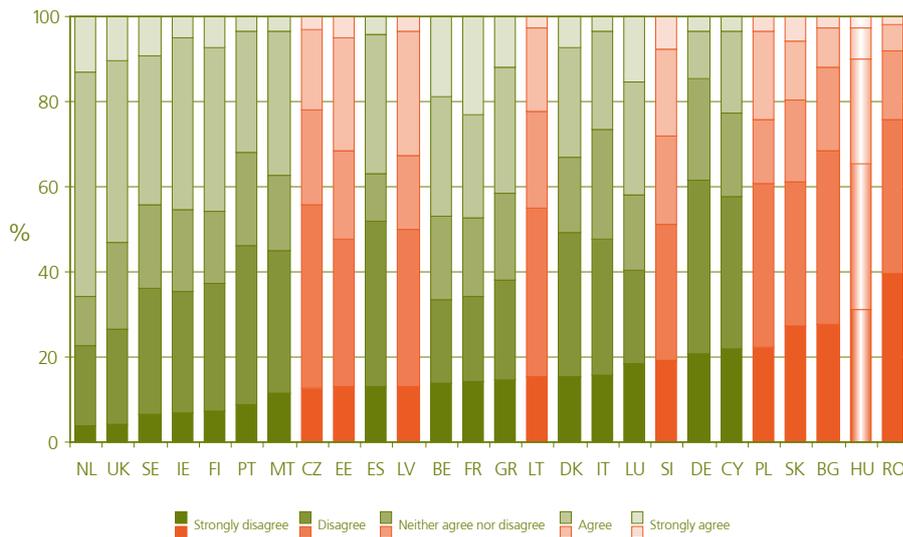


Figure 5.4: Level of preference for work over leisure among the population aged 18 or over, by country

Source: author’s calculations; BG, CY, DE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, UK: WVVS, wave 5 (2005–07); AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, GR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SK: WVVS, wave 4 (1999–2004).

Note: The survey question was as follows: “Please specify for each of the following statements how strongly you agree or disagree with it! Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree?” “Work should always come first even if it means less free time.”

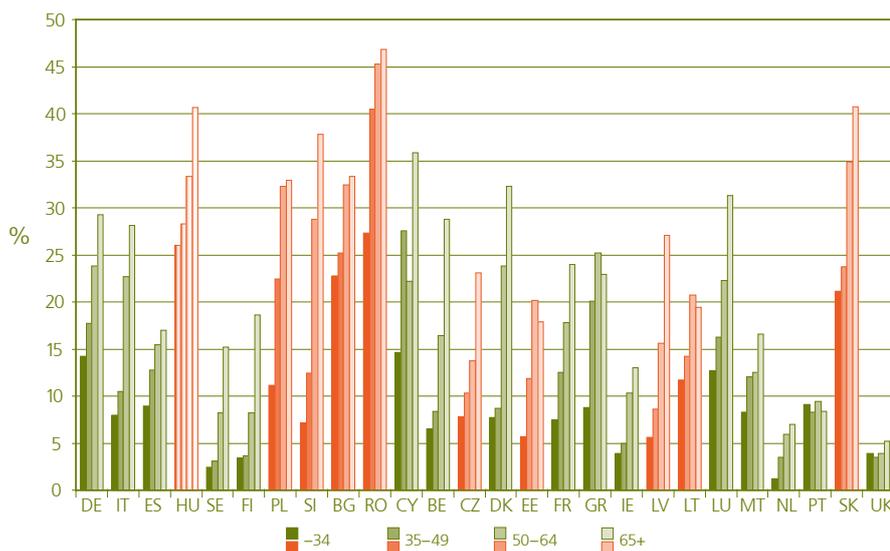
There are no major differences between men and women in terms of the responses given to this question, although in most of the countries men show slightly stronger support for the statement.

As we move from younger to older age groups, people's preference for work over leisure tends to increase, although (relying as we are on just one cross-sectional data set) it cannot be established whether this is the result of the different experiences and value systems of the earlier generations in the sample, or if the preference for work over leisure naturally comes with older age. The different age groups show the least divergence in Great Britain, the Netherlands and Portugal. In these countries, every age group is relatively unlikely to agree strongly with the statement that work should always come first. Substantial cohort differences are found in Slovenia, for instance, where 7% of people under 35, 12% of people aged 35–49, 29% of people aged 50–64 and 38% of those aged over 64 express strong agreement (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Percentage of people strongly agreeing with the statement that work should always come first (the population aged 18 or over), by country

Source: author's calculations; BG, CY, DE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, UK: WVS, wave 5 (2005–07); AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, GR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SK: WVS, wave 4 (1999–2004).

Note: See the note to Figure 5.4 for the question.



Differences in people's attitudes towards work also surface in the way they react to the question of how they would feel if less importance were to be placed on work in their lives. People in the former socialist countries are far more likely to express a negative reaction than are people in the old EU member states. Among the old member states participating in the survey, the Finnish and the German respondents had the strongest negative feelings about the importance of work being reduced in their lives (Figure 5.6).

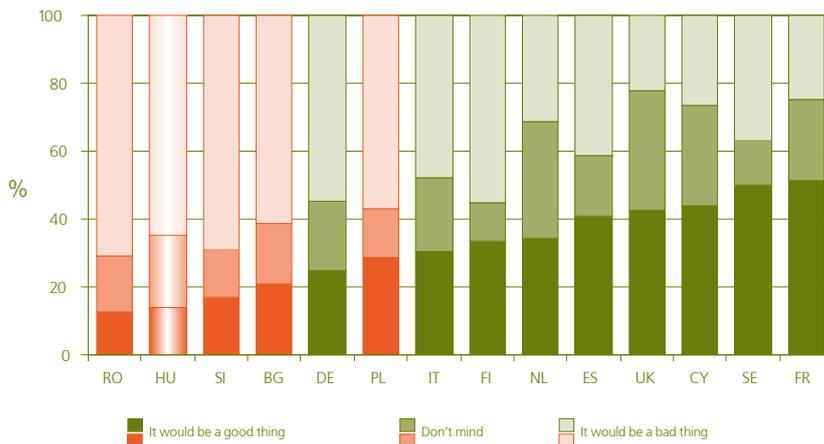


Figure 5.6: The effect of a decrease in the importance of work on people's lives (the working population aged 18 or over), by country

Source: author's calculations based on WVS, wave 5 (2005) data.

Work has a number of distinct functions in people's lives. One of the most important of these is undoubtedly the labour income, which goes to ensure the well-being of an individual and their household. Even so, people attach varying levels of importance to a better-paid job as a goal to attain in their lives. The populations of the new member states not only place a lot of importance on work, but are also more willing to work more in return for a higher income (Figure 5.7).

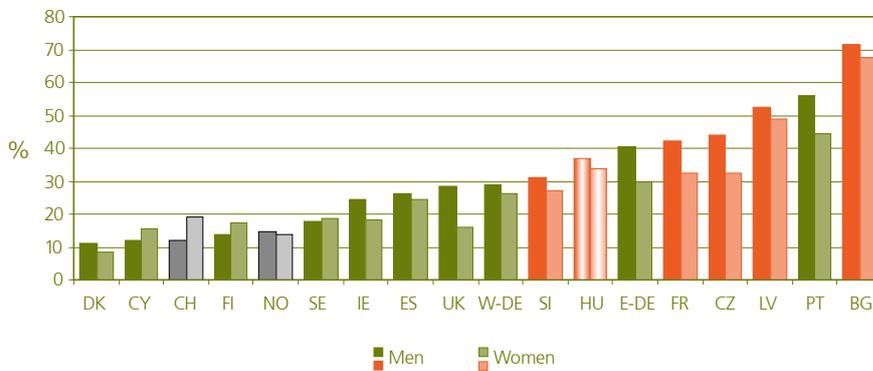


Figure 5.7: Percentage of people willing to work more in return for a higher income (the active population in paid employment aged 18 or over), by country

Source: author's calculations based on the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) (2005) data.

What is the connection between job satisfaction and leisure time preference? The following paragraphs discuss the effects of leisure time preference on job satisfaction, comparing those who are satisfied with the leisure time available to them, those who desire more, and those who desire less than the available leisure time. The indicator characterizing the different groups of workers can take a value of between 1 and 5. A value of 1 is assigned to those who would be content with less than their available leisure time, and a score of 5 is given to those who desire substantially more time for leisure than they have at present. The groups are characterized by their group means (Figure 5.8).

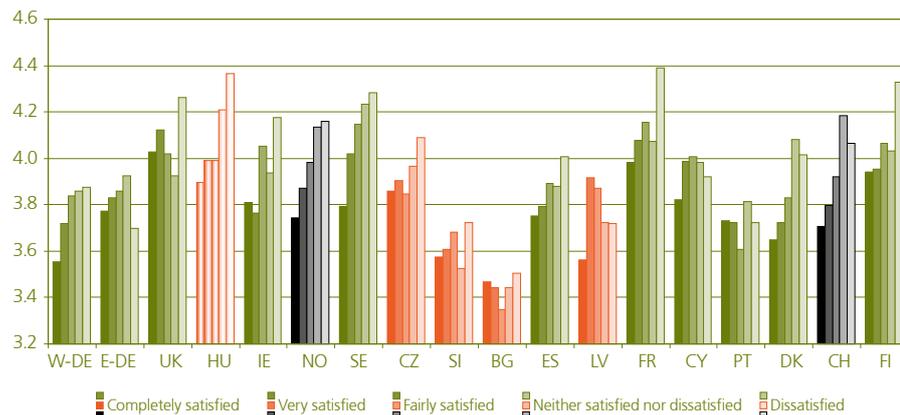
The first conclusion we can draw from the data is that the relationship between job satisfaction and leisure time preference varies from country to country. This indicates that no single model that seeks to analyse the association between job satisfaction and available leisure time can successfully cover all the countries of Europe. We do find a good fit, however, between individual regions and one or another model.

Our results reveal that in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Cyprus and Portugal, for instance, there is a relatively weak relationship between the desired length of leisure time and the level of job satisfaction. In other regions, such as Scandinavia, several Western European countries (e.g. Switzerland and France) and among the former socialist countries (e.g. Hungary), we find more variation as a function of job satisfaction (see Figure 5.8).

On the whole, respondents who are dissatisfied with their jobs are typically more likely to prefer more leisure time and, vice versa, the lowest desire for more than the available leisure time is to be found among those who are satisfied with their jobs (see Figure 5.8). These results can be taken as evidence for the compensation model.

Figure 5.8: Leisure time preferences as a function of job satisfaction, by country

Source: author's calculations based on ISSP (2005) data.



5.4. The role of money in European people's lives

People's preferences with regard to work and leisure time are strongly related to the income position of the individual and the household, to their attitudes towards money and to their spending habits. The analysis of these factors is a highly complex task, and we shall limit our discussion here to attitudes towards money and wealth.

According to the results of the Eurobarometer survey of 2008, across the whole of Europe money is regarded as one of the five most important elements needed for a happy life. There is substantial variation between the countries, however: there is a clear boundary between the former socialist countries and the older EU member states. In the majority of the former socialist countries, a large share of the population

say that money is indispensable for a happy life. The countries that show the highest regard for money are Romania and Bulgaria, but Lithuania, Slovakia and Latvia are not far behind. These are followed by the remaining former socialist countries, though some of the Southern European states (e.g. Portugal and Spain) are also characterized by fairly high values (Figure 5.9).

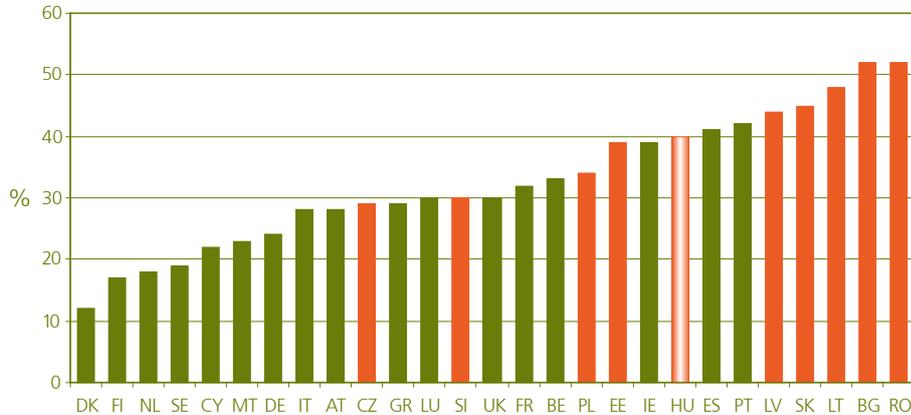


Figure 5.9: What do people need to be happy? The percentage of those citing money as one of their choices, by country

Source: author's calculations based on Eurobarometer (2008) data.

There is a complex set of considerations underlying people's attitudes towards money. For relatively poor countries or social groups, money may be needed simply to secure a basic standard of living; for others, it is a means by which they can realize their recreation plans; still others try to make more and more money in the hope of building security for themselves or for the next generation. Another factor that may influence attitudes towards money is that those who have none or only a little will tend to value it more, while those who have attained a higher standard of living will value it less.

Money may also embody wealth and consumption. People's opinions as to the importance of money in this connection were one of the issues included in the fifth wave of the WVS. As indicated by the results of that survey, the Romanian, Hungarian and Polish respondents were those most likely to feel that they had something in common with someone for whom it is important to be rich, to have a lot of money and expensive things. This attitude is the least characteristic of the French, the Finnish and the Swedish (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: To what extent is this person like you? – It is important for this person to be rich, to have a lot of money and expensive things. Distribution of responses by country

Source: author's calculations based on WVS, wave 5 (2005) data.

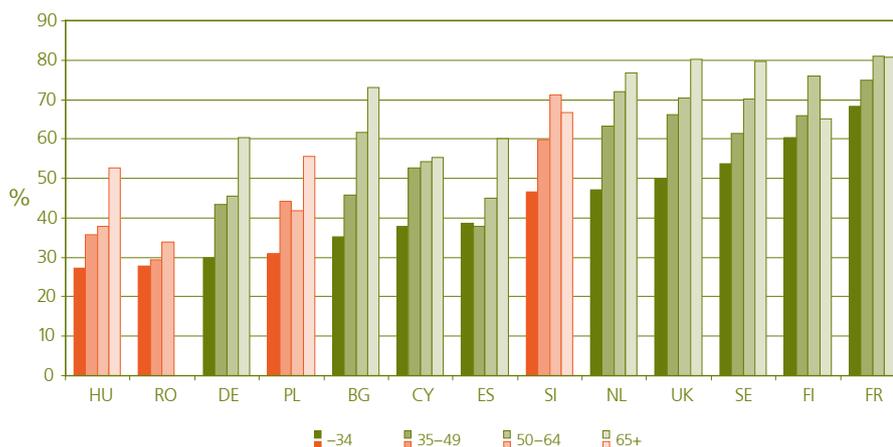


Cross-country differences appear to be closely related to living standards and level of general well-being. The more affluent a country and the lower the probability of its citizens having to scrape a living, the less importance its population attaches to money and the less likely it is to identify with someone rich who possesses expensive things.

There are clear differences in this respect between the various age groups, and these differences surface in pretty well every country that participated in the survey. The least significant age-related variation is to be observed among the French, and the most significant among the Bulgarians. As a general trend, people under 34 are most likely to feel they have something in common with the character described to them, and people aged 65 or over are the least likely to find a resemblance (Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.11: Percentage of people unlike the person for whom it is important to be rich, to have a lot of money and expensive things – by age group and country

Source: author's calculations based on WVS, wave 5 (2005) data.



5.5. Conclusion

This study has explored how much leisure time people have in the various countries of the European Union, what their attitudes are towards work and towards leisure time, which of these two they prefer, what money means to them, and what sacrifices they are prepared to make in an effort to earn a higher income.

Our results provide evidence that the answers to these questions are, to some extent, related to the employment rate in any given country, and to its cultural traditions and values. It is also clear that the countries do not have homogeneous populations – i.e. there is substantial variation across the genders and age groups within a country.

We have identified a fairly clear boundary between the old and the new EU member states with respect to most of the issues analysed here. In the new member states – especially in the two that joined the EU in 2007, namely Bulgaria and Romania – work has a more important role and it is valued more highly than in the old member states (though the latter group, too, appears to be heterogeneous). People in the countries of Southern Europe, for instance, attach more importance to work, relatively speaking. The attitudes observed in the new member states may be explained, to some extent, by their low levels of employment; but it is also likely to be the case that, with their lower level of welfare, any activity that brings income into the household (namely work) gains in prominence. This hypothesis is also supported by our finding that, in the new member states, money appears as a major element of a happy life, while in the old member states it seems to be a somewhat less central factor. Our results are congruent with research outcomes that view the post-socialist countries as having a more materialistic disposition than the old member states, in which a post-materialistic value system is said to prevail (Fedor 2005).

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