Volunteers’ Perspectives On Work And Leisure

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The theoretical framework and the purpose of the contribution

The relations between volunteering and activities such as work or leisure have been subject to research studies that have taken different directions. Firstly, several authors have approached the subject from a definitional point of view. For instance, Stebbins (1996) sees volunteering as leisure while economists consider it as an unpaid work (Freeman, 1997). Pearce (1993) writes that it is both leisure and work. Secondly, some authors have studied how work conditions and practices could influence the propensity of people for volunteering (Musick and Wilson, 1997).

Though our contribution comes within these theoretical frameworks, it looks at the relations between volunteering, work and leisure from a different angle. Indeed, our objective is to examine how volunteers see work and leisure.

Research in psychology has investigated subjective dispositions to volunteer, either in terms of personality traits, values or norms. For instance, Amato (1990) associated planned helping behavior with the norm of social responsibility. Several authors stress that volunteers have an inclination to extroversion which leads them to seek interaction with other people and some empirical investigations have shown the importance of relational motives for volunteering. From an empirical research based on their Volunteer Functions Inventory which includes six types of motivations, Clary et al (1996) find that volunteers report a higher level of motivations relating to values, enhancement, social and understanding functions while non-volunteers have a higher level of career motivation.

We hypothesize that the individual dispositions which enhance the inclination to give time also lead volunteers to have a different way of looking at work and leisure than non-volunteers. Using the above mentioned examples, if social responsibility is conducive to volunteering, it is likely that such a disposition induces volunteers to value the social utility of work at a higher level than non-volunteers. In the same vein, if volunteers prize social interaction, we can expect that they give more importance to the relational aspects of work or leisure.

Our contribution is aimed to test this hypothesis by examining the attributes of work and leisure which are more appreciated by volunteers than by non-volunteers. Because the results may be sensitive to the area of volunteering, we carry out the study successively at an aggregated level and at a disaggregated one. Furthermore, we have to consider that the perspectives that volunteers have on work and leisure may differ according to their sociodemographic characteristics. So, in addition to an examination of the whole population, our research considers several sub-samples differentiated by gender, age and employment status.

Methodology

For the purpose of our research, we use the European Value Survey, and especially the fourth wave (2008). In this survey, several questions deal with the attitudes and feelings of individuals towards work and leisure. Respondents are asked about the attributes of these activities that they value more particularly. This survey allows us to know the individuals who do volunteering but it gives no information concerning the amount of time which is dedicated to volunteer work. Therefore, our paper considers only the relation between the decision to volunteer and the perspectives on work and leisure but it cannot study the possible relation between these perspectives and the volume of volunteering.

Our research is in progress and for the moment we cannot report exhaustive results but those that we have obtained appear to be interesting. For instance, volunteers are more inclined than non-volunteers to consider that the use of initiative and the utility for society are important attributes of a job. On the other hand, they rate less high the “good pay” aspect. Vis-à-vis leisure activities, volunteers give more importance to the relational aspect.

Dealing with several European countries, our research intends to better understand the ways in which volunteering is associated with particular views on work and leisure, two major types of activity in our contemporary societies.
References