

Leisure Time in Modern Societies: A New Source of Boredom and Stress?

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Abstract The increase in leisure time over the last century is well documented. We know much less, however, about the quality of the use of leisure time. Quite divergent predictions exist in this regard: Some authors have argued that the new, extensive free time will lead to new forms of time pressure and stress; others have foreseen an expansion of boredom. This is the first paper that systematically investigates the quality of leisure time in 36 countries around the world. It uses the 2007 ISSP-survey “*Leisure Time and Sport*”. We investigate stress and boredom during leisure time by making use of four general theories about international and intercultural differences. The theories relate to the level of socio-economic development, religious-cultural systems, types of welfare states, and to the emergence of specific “time regimes”. In addition, we control for the effect of relevant individual level variables. At the macro level, significant differences emerge concerning the level of development, the dominant religion, and the extent of welfare benefits. The most interesting finding, however, was that a typology of leisure time regimes is the most suited to explain the considerable differences between the 36 countries compared. Implications of this finding for time policy and further research are discussed in the concluding section.

Keywords Leisure time · Boredom · Time stress · International comparative research

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1 Introduction

Changes in the experience and use of time have been among the most spectacular trends in modern times. One is the continuous and significant reduction of working hours and the increase of leisure time. In early capitalism, a working day of 10–12 h, 6 days a week was not uncommon for industrial workers (Thompson 1967). Today, working hours are limited to 8 h per day, with five working days in most Western countries (Castells 1996, 438). However, there has been another secular trend in the opposite direction: An acceleration of time was brought forward by scientific-technological inventions in the areas of communication, transportation, and industrial production (Nowotny 1989; Toffler 1970; Mackenzie and Waldo 1981; Schor 1993; Sennett 1998; Rosa 2005; Seidel and Verwiebe 2006). The consequence is a curtailment of action events such as time for eating, sleeping, and communication, and an increasing “time consciousness” when conducting such actions (Garhammer 1999, 2002). With Robinson and Godbey (1997) we thus ask: How is this newly won time used? What is the quality of leisure time today?

Several authors have argued that *time stress* will become a pervasive characteristic of modern societies. In his book *The Harried Leisure Class*, economist Staffan Linder (1970) was one of the first to propose this argument. In underdeveloped societies, individuals have low incomes and may also have different (or fewer) expectations; hence, they live in “time affluence”. In advanced societies, individuals have high incomes and many different ways of spending their time. In addition, consumption itself takes a lot of time in service societies (Gershuny 2000). The consequence is that individuals in advanced societies may feel time pressure to fulfill as many needs and wishes as possible (see also Zahn 1960; Schulze 1992; Gross 1994; Opaschowski 1997: 228ff.). Stress is understood here—based on the definition of Selye (1976)—as a subjective experience or feeling which arises in situations of burden. It is often connected with the feeling that it will be difficult to cope with a certain task in a given time.

On the other hand, some authors have argued that many individuals will be affected by boredom as a consequence of the increasing length and “democratization” of leisure time (De Grazia 1964; Dumazedier 1974; Kuhn 1976; Bellebaum 1990:91ff.; Opaschowski 1997:212ff.; Decher 2000). Boredom is predicted to become particularly pronounced on weekends. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1978), for example, found a subtle increase in boredom among large segments of the middle class in Germany. Even individuals who are highly active in work and leisure time may be affected by boredom in phases of enforced waiting or idleness (Klapp 1986:11). Ragheb and Merydith (2001) identified four sources of boredom in everyday life: Lack of meaningful involvement, lack of mental involvement, slowness of time, and lack of physical involvement. Research has shown that time filled with exciting activities is experienced as being shorter than the same period filled with boring activities or experiences (Pöppel 1983; Heuwinkel 2004). Like stress, boredom is a negative experience or feeling; it arises out of monotonic activities or of the lack of stimulation and challenges. We certainly do not assume that the increased leisure time has only negative effects. Yet, for some groups this might have been the case.

This paper attempts to reconcile these divergent interpretations by referring to classic theories as a starting point. We consequently add the effects of cultural factors and political institutions in line with Weberian arguments. Our empirical analyses are based on survey data from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) of 2007 devoted to the topic “*Leisure Time and Sport*”; the data set includes 36 countries and about 52,000 individuals. We describe first how many people feel stressed and bored during their leisure time. Second, we investigate how these experiences are influenced by characteristics of the

individuals and their social context. Consequently, we show that there exist specific societal “leisure time regimes” which each provide particular, favorable and unfavorable social contexts for stress and boredom. The analyses also show the limitations of one-factor explanations and theories that focus on rather linear changes and support a Weberian approach considering interaction effects between different factors which lead to the emergence of particular types of leisure time use in different regions and cultural areas of the world.

2 Theories and Hypotheses About the Social Meaning and Relevance of Leisure Time

2.1 Social Differentiation and Systems Theory

Social differentiation was central for classical sociological authors, such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim, and for classical economists, such as Adam Smith. The central thesis is that social change and human development occur through a continuous process of specialization and differentiation of societal activities and spheres. In traditional societies, there is no sharp distinction between the spheres of work and non-work. In modern societies, a sharp separation between the areas of work and non-work, indicated most clearly by the separation between households and work places has emerged (Bergmann 1989). Within the latter, everybody has to focus on only one kind of activity or work at a certain time. In this way, the single tasks can be carried out more efficiently. Through rising productivity and the exchange of goods and services on the market, society as a whole is a beneficiary of the increasing division of labor. Further, a standardized, nation-wide time calculation was required not only by the emerging large railway networks and the needs of long-distance traders, but also by growing cities and large central states (Zerubavel 1982; Elias 1984). In advanced societies, the general pace of time is faster than in less developed ones (Levine 1998). Thus, the exact measurement of time and the strict observation of time schedules becomes part of an all-encompassing societal constraint (Elias 1984) and individuals become “slaves of time measurement” (Bell 1975: 358ff.).

The differentiation of societal spheres has direct implications for the subjective experience of time. It implies that a specific unit of time should be used exclusively for different activities. *Time becomes scarce*: The potentially unlimited time is substituted by limited and discrete periods of time (Luhmann 1984: 427). If it is not possible to concentrate on only one activity within a certain unit of time, several activities will be carried out simultaneously, leading to time stress (Hungerford and Floro 2004). Some sociologists and economists have argued that in advanced societies, an *economization of social relations* takes place which may lead to an increasing time pressure in leisure (Schwartz 1993: 180–182). Today, individuals have more money to spend on things which are not essential for life, such as costly electronic and sports equipment. These activities are connected with extensive time efforts; they have real costs and produce “the economics of bad neighbors” (Hirsch 1976), because “time spent being sociable is time taken away from consumption” (Schwartz 1993:181). Also, classical sociological writers have established a connection between the increased pace of life and the peculiarities of societies in which money becomes the basic means of exchange. For both for Marx and Simmel, money was a medium that revolutionized the time—space aspect of social relations. Simmel (1992) argued that in modern societies all activities connected with money are sped up because money fulfills its function only through circulation (Garhammer 2002:232).

We might also expect to find boredom both in industrializing and in advanced countries. In the former, an extended infrastructure for leisure time activities might not yet exist and many people may lack sufficient incomes to spend it on leisure time activities. Also working time is still often long due to the fact that many people have two jobs in order to afford a decent standard of living. In advanced, affluent societies, individuals without challenging hobbies might have problems filling their extensive free time with interesting activities (Layard 2005a, b). Out of these considerations, the following hypothesis is deduced:

Hypothesis 1 In advanced societies, time becomes more and more scarce and experiences of time stress will spread everywhere throughout society. Boredom, however, can be found in both industrializing and advanced societies.¹

2.2 Cultural and Religious Background of Societies

The trajectories of modern societies and the differences between them are also related to *culture and religion*. Here, we draw upon the writings of Weber (1984) on the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. For Weber, the Protestant ethic was a central element in the development of capitalism in Europe and the United States. Its essence was that work and acquisition of possessions were legitimated in a religious way, while pure consumption and enjoyment were devalued or even condemned. Individuals were able to prove that they deserved to become part of those elected for eternal salvation, of the “aristocracy of the saints in the world,” only by living in a serious and systematic way and avoiding idleness (Weber 1984:123). Waste of time was “the first and in principle most serious of all sins” (Weber 1984:167). Given that life time is limited, loss of time through “foul talk” or luxury and unnecessary relaxation, are condemnable from this ethical point of view. In the following statement, quoted by Weber (1984:40), the famous American entrepreneur, politician and writer Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) has anticipated the modern economic concept of “*opportunity costs*”: “Keep in mind that time is money; he who could acquire ten shillings by his work and goes strolling half of the day, or he who lazes around in his room, cannot, even if he spends only six pence for this pleasure, calculate only this, he has in addition five shillings spent or better discarded.” The United States, in cultural terms strongly influenced by protestant doctrines, might have been and still may be a paradigmatic case; for Robinson and Godbey (1997:31) American culture in general is a “rushed culture”. From these considerations, we deduce the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2a Protestants and individuals living in countries influenced strongly by Protestantism will use leisure time also for purposes of work and career. As a consequence, they will experience more stress in leisure time.² At the same time, however, they should be less bored.

¹ We are aware that the less developed countries included in our study (Latin American and East Asian countries) do not represent pre-industrial, but industrializing societies. In such societies, some of the pre-industrial patterns of living might persist while forced industrialization and the delayed introduction of the welfare state may be connected with long hours of work and time stress among employed people and persons in lower classes (Gershuny 2000:32ff.).

² When testing the validity of Weber’s thesis, we need to consider that the capitalist mode of production has developed into a “steel-hard container” which constrains almost every economic actor in our contemporary world.

The twentieth century has also seen the rise of states that have never been influenced in a significant way by ascetic Protestant doctrines. However, in the case of Japan, the south-east Asian “Tiger states” and China, it has been argued that other religious systems and doctrines have played an analogous role. Particularly, Confucianism is considered to have furthered the economic success of these countries (Franke et al. 1991; Chang 1998; Barro and McCleary 2003; Zinzius 2004). Elements of Confucian ethics that are relevant in this regard include diligence, discipline, adherence to order and status hierarchies, and an eagerness for knowledge and education. A specific kind of “Protestant” work and life ethic seems to be present in Japan as well. In connection with their spectacular economic success since World War II, the Japanese have been characterized as “working bees” (Linhart 1988). The phenomenon of “death through overwork” (*karoshi*) is probably known nowhere else. More recent studies find that Japan was also strongly influenced by general trends such as an increasing commercialization of leisure, state support of recreation activities, the emergence of an elderly “leisure class”, and the increasing importance of the values of personal fulfillment and development. Yet, “even if people today are less inclined to live like bees, devoting their whole life to work”, Japan can still be regarded as a workplace-centered society (Fukutake 1989:148) and “workplace behavior did not signal a move away from work toward a more leisurely style” (Manzenreiter and Ben-Ari 2004:490).

There are, however, significant differences in the basic values of Christian religions, particularly ascetic Protestantism, on the one side and Confucianism and other Asian religions on the other side (see Weber 1988; Willi 1966; Mensching 1989; Figl 2003). First, the latter religions are more collectivistic than western religions. Loyalty toward the family, one’s own community and social class as well as toward the state is more important than individual success. Leaders have to be respected, but they must themselves follow ethical rules. The most important point for our purposes is the difference in the meaning and the use of time. In the East, it is alien to think of time as a resource which has to be used well. The main intent of an individual is to wait for the best moment to do something; if it does not come, he or she will abandon that activity (Willi 1966:330). This attitude is related to a fundamental difference in world outlook. Asian thinking does not conceive of human history as linear progress as the western, Judeo-Christian tradition does, but as a cyclical succession of stages, implying a recurrence of earlier phases in a modified form. This is particularly true of Buddhism, which has had (through Shintoism) a considerable direct and indirect impact on Japan. To the Buddhist way of thinking, time is not a social convention but a power that creates everything but also destroys everything. For Shintoism, practiced by 85 % of the Japanese (Fischer Weltalmanach 2008:259), life in harmony with one’s natural and social environment is essential. The consequence of all this for East Asian philosophy of life is that human action unfolds only in the present moment and thinking about and planning for the future is less important than in the West (Kather 2000). We can deduce the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b Given the lower level of individualism and the more widespread sense of social responsibility in East Asia, individuals will feel less stress in leisure time. Boredom, however, could be more frequent because leisure time tends to be seen as a residual category of life.

2.3 Political Institutions and the Welfare State

The development of the welfare state with its comprehensive sick and old age insurance, provisions for the unemployed and disabled, and transfer payments to families with

children and to the poor has been one of the most significant changes in the twentieth century. The aim of the welfare state is to provide security and assistance to people who are not cared for by traditional institutions of social support, such as family, kinship or village. Thus, the welfare state redistributes in a horizontal way from the employed to the non-employed and supports specific social groups with particular institutional arrangements. The welfare state, however, redistributes also vertically by progressive taxing of the rich and financial support for the poor. Given these intentions and measures, it is evident that welfare state regimes must be closely related to time regimes: The reduction of working time was one of the first elements of welfare state legislation, the protection of workers from the insecurity of the labor market, and finally, the creation and expansion of public services supports private households and parents in their tasks and needs. In welfare states, many individual obligations are taken over by public institutions; in this way, they will relieve persons from time-demanding obligations and reduce time stress (Leira 2002; Korpi 2000; Gershuny and Sullivan 2003; Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Manow 2008). On the other hand, this release from many obligations can also contribute to boredom in the case of social groups with a lot of free time.

There will be, however, significant differences between welfare states. Here, the well-known distinction between three types of welfare states is relevant, introduced by Esping-Andersen (1990); see also Pierson 2007; Manow 2008). The comprehensive, *social-democratic welfare state*, as developed in Scandinavia, is based on the principles of individualism and equality; its aim is to enable all members of society to participate fully in economic, social and political life. In this model, welfare state services and benefits are considered a right of every person in a corresponding situation. The *corporatist welfare state*, developed mainly in Germany, but dominant also in other continental European states (Austria, France etc.), is focusing its efforts on collective units; in this way, it also supports traditional family models (with the man as breadwinner) and patterns of stratification. The *liberal model of the welfare state*, exemplified mainly by the United States (with Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom as cases,) is a residual model since it presupposes the market as the main mechanism of distribution and allows welfare institutions and governmental financial support only in case of individual need and poverty. In addition to these three relatively clearly-defined models, several other, but less concise circumscribed types of welfare state regimes have been distinguished. They include a Southern European model, similar in its structure to the corporatist model, but less comprehensive. In the developing countries, welfare support is much weaker, not least because large segments of the working population do not have legally recognized employment contracts. At the same time, however, also a highly developed country like Japan has only a rudimentary welfare state in European terms.

Rice et al. (2006) (see also Goodin et al. 2005) conducted a pioneering study of the relation between welfare state regime and time problems in five countries by calculating the amount of spare time (subtracting the time needed for three forms of “necessary” activities—paid labor, household work, and personal care work—from the 168 h of a week) and the amount of “discretionary time”, time in which people had really autonomy about its use.³ They found that spare time was the longest in Germany (35.7 h/week), intermediate in the USA and the shortest in France, Sweden and Australia (about 30 h).

³ The calculation of “discretionary time” was the same as that of spare time. However, instead of considering the actual time spent, a “necessary” amount of time was defined. In the case of work, “necessary” time was considered the amount of work which would be necessary for a household to stay above the poverty line.

However, discretionary time was the longest in Sweden with Germany and the USA in the middle, and Australia and France at the end. They estimated the effects of welfare state intervention on discretionary time and found that this effect was strongest in Sweden. Further, differences exist between countries in terms of how couples coordinate work hours, leisure time, and child care (Carriero et al. 2009). We, therefore, can assume that the welfare state has a significant effect on leisure time and that differences occur between different welfare state regimes (see also Leira 2002).

Considering these aspects, we pose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3a Feelings of time scarcity and stress in leisure time will be less frequent in countries with strong welfare states, particularly in those with a social-democratic or corporatist welfare state. The comprehensive protection provided by welfare states, however, may also produce feelings of boredom.

A major shift in the political landscape during the last decades was the breakdown of the *communist system of Eastern Europe*. The transition from state-socialism to capitalist market economies was complex, involving both an economic and political transition (Offe 1994). State socialism was characterized by high employment levels of both sexes, supported by the comprehensive provision of family-supporting benefits and facilities. But the pace of work was quite unhurried, enabling the employees to handle private affairs during working times. At the same time, however, there were inadequate provisions of many consumer goods, and traditional gender role expectations often constrained women to care alone for household and family affairs. This represented a heavy burden for many women (Szalai et al. 1972). The transition to capitalist market societies has produced new time problems in these countries in two regards. First, for workers and employees, it has increased the pressure to work hard in the sphere of employment, especially for men (Pirainen 1994:101), while women's employment decreased. Second, many child-care facilities were closed down and low incomes and pensions now require many people to take on second jobs. For women in Prague, the Czech capital, it has been shown that they feel that time has been accelerated after the transition; experiences of time pressure have become more common and an economization of social relations took place (Miechtner 2008). We must be aware, however, that there might exist significant differences within the former East European state socialist societies (Haller 1990): Levels of development (higher in the more western than in the eastern countries), degree of admitted private enterprises (highest in former Yugoslavia and Hungary) and in religious terms (Catholic in the western, Orthodox in the eastern countries). Some of these countries have been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for centuries and still today have some similar institutional forms as Austria. Furthermore, Szelewa and Polakowski (2008) found different models of childcare provisions within the new East European EU-member states. Out of these considerations, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3b People in East European, post-communist societies will feel stressed in their leisure time more frequently—particularly in the less developed countries (including Russia).

2.4 The Emergence of a Limited Number of “Time Regimes”

The aforementioned factors might not exhibit a linear relationship to the level of stress and boredom and significant differences may be observable between groups of countries with similar socio-cultural backgrounds. We can come to grips with such a constellation by

applying the Weberian approach to comparative analysis (Weber 1973). Its essence is that we should not look for general laws of long-term societal development, aside from a few basic quantitative and biosocial indicators, such as increase of material affluence, population growth, or increase in longevity. Rather, we should take into consideration that the different aspects discussed in the foregoing sections (dominant religion, type of welfare state) interact closely with each other and produce patterns of leisure time behavior and experiences. A common (or similar) language and geographical propinquity may foster the diffusion of such patterns. It is also evident that there exists a close connection between dominant religion and welfare state type (Manow 2008). Thus, we will investigate if there exist typical “time regimes”, common to groups of countries with similar historical, cultural and political backgrounds. Efforts in this direction have already been made in several sociological and anthropological studies (Gell 1992; Lamprecht and Stamm 1994; Levine 1998; Garhammer 1999). Out of this consideration, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4 A limited number of country groups with particular “time regimes” exist, in which individuals have similar experiences of leisure time stress and boredom.

2.5 The Influence of Individual Characteristics

Our discussion of the individual level is also based on Weberian sociology, denoted as *Wirklichkeitswissenschaft* (science of social reality), which contains three basic assumptions about human behavior. First, it is an outcome of interests and values; the task of sociology is to show for given societies and historical periods which interests and values are guiding behavior (Weber 1973; Lepsius 1988; Haller 2003:485–621). Second, we have to consider the situation or context of social attitudes and actions (see also Popper 1994; Farr 1985). Third, personal identity is crucial for understanding the emergence of leisure time stress and boredom; it implies that individual interests and patterns of thinking and behavior have to be interpreted considering the self-image, central values, and life aims of an individual (Thoits 1991; Haller 2003: 560ff.; Haller and Müller 2008). On the basis of these considerations, we discuss how socio-demographic characteristics might be connected with stress and boredom in leisure.

2.5.1 Gender

Many studies have shown that values, interests and hobbies of women are broader than those of men, while men more often focus on a few specific areas (Pinker 2008). Holding constant all other gender-related differences, we expect that women are less afflicted by boredom than men and, perhaps, more by leisure time stress. We need to distinguish, however, between women looking after the home and those in paid work. Studies have shown that the daily working time of women looking after a home is long and some of them are under considerable time stress (Pross 1975:75ff.; Schor 1993:83ff.). In addition, many women have a “double role” as housekeepers or mothers and paid employees (Hochschild and Machung 1993), and it is evident that they have less spare time than their non-employed counterparts (see e.g. Rice et al. 2006, Wallace and Young 2010). Thus, we expect that time stress will be more prevalent among employed women and particularly among those with children (see Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Bonke and Gerstoft 2007). This effect, however, should be weaker in societies with

expanded welfare and childcare services. At the same time, employed women should be less affected by boredom.

2.5.2 *Age*

Time problems are the most frequent among the middle aged between about 25 and 54 years of age (Flaherty 1999). In this group, obligations concerning work, career, and family coincide and reduce the time available for leisure. Among youth, other problems might be relevant since studies have shown that boredom is a recurring problem among this group (Bellebaum 1990:124; Sundberg et al. 1991). We thus expect that young people will be affected particularly by boredom. Among older people, retirement is most significant, as it implies an abrupt expansion of the available free time. Thus, retired people should be least affected by leisure time stress. However, problems of boredom might arise for two reasons. First, because of the loss of a well-structured working day and the inability to fill the day with meaningful and challenging activities, especially for less well educated individuals (Opaschowski 1997:164ff.). Second, the danger of becoming socially isolated exists in case of a loss of mobility or the death of a partner (Opaschowski 1997:199ff).

2.5.3 *Education*

Higher education not only provides knowledge, but also broadens individual horizons by providing a basis for many different forms of social and cultural activities. Thus, higher educated people develop interests in more varied leisure time activities (see Lamprecht and Stamm 1994; Opaschowski 1997; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Garhammer 1999; Gershuny 2000). We expect, therefore, that educated individuals will experience boredom less frequently, but more often suffer from leisure time stress.

2.5.4 *Employment Participation and Working Time*

These two variables are among the main determinants of the availability and use of time (Garhammer 1999:30; Gershuny 2000:147). We can expect, in general, that problems of time stress are more prevalent among people with long working hours. Unemployed people, by contrast, will be affected by problems of boredom since they suffer from “constrained free time” (Opaschowski 1997:44).

2.5.5 *Occupational Position*

Traditionally, the higher status groups had much more leisure time (Veblen 1994). In present-day societies, however, people working in higher-status occupations often work longer than the standardized 38–40 h per week, take their work home, and often work during weekends. Jonathan Gershuny (2000) has shown that a considerable convergence between status groups has taken place in recent times in this regard. Nevertheless, the occupational position may still be related to problems of leisure time stress and boredom. Generally, individuals in higher-status occupations should be affected more by stress but less by boredom in leisure time. Time stress can be common also for self-employed individuals. They often manage their business in close connection with their private households, the distinction between work and non-work is blurred, and businesses often have to stay open on holidays.

2.5.6 *Income*

Income, central to an economist's point of view, is also important from a sociological perspective. Individuals with higher incomes not only get more money from their work, but also have a higher "consumption capacity" (Jaques 1967:22, 181ff.; Bonke and Gerstoff 2007; Sullivan 2007, Hamermesh and Lee 2007). Yet, a high income can produce problems of its own, including decision conflicts about the division of time between work and leisure, or between leisure activities. From a sociological perspective, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of income from those of education and occupational position. Yet, we can expect an additional effect from high income, leading to more time stress and less boredom.

2.5.7 *Household Composition and Family Situation*

This variable relates to the size of a family, and in particular to the presence of children in the household. The relevance of these factors follows directly from Weber and Popper's insistence on the importance of the "social situation" of a person (Weber 1973; Popper 1994). Small children living in a household make particular demands on parents' time. Thus, we expect that persons living with children in a household will experience more leisure time stress, but less boredom.

2.5.8 *Size of Community*

Modern individualistic and compartmentalized forms of life have developed mainly in the larger towns (Simmel 1903). We, therefore, expect that individuals are more hurried in leisure time in towns than in the countryside. In the country side, the pace of life is less hurried but people could be more bored.

3 Data, Methods and Variables

Our analysis is based on data from the module "*Leisure Time and Sport*", collected within the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) in 2007/08. ISSP is a collaboration of social scientists developing annual cross cultural comparable surveys on various topics. ISSP was founded in 1984 by four countries, and subsequently extended to 45 countries around the world.⁴ The ISSP-module "*Leisure Time and Sport*" was developed between 2003 and 2006,⁵ fielded in 36 countries,⁶ and includes about 52,000 respondents. This ISSP-survey is the first systematic world-wide comparative survey on the topic. It contains questions on leisure time and sport activities, the gratifications individuals get from them, and related personal items such as weight, subjective health and happiness.

The centerpiece of our analysis is a multilevel analysis using an individual's level of boredom and stress as dependent variables and various micro- and macrolevel characteristics as independent variables. Our two dependent variables are based on the questions

⁴ For detailed information see <http://www.issp.org> and Haller et al. (2009).

⁵ Members of the drafting group included Austria (convenor), France, the Philippines, Portugal, South Africa and Venezuela.

⁶ Denmark and Netherlands are not contained in the first official merged data file but were added by the authors. Portugal also fielded the module, but did not include all variables and is thus excluded. A first, comprehensive analysis of the English data set has been presented by Bailey and Park (2009).

about the experience of leisure time as stressful or as boring. Independent variables are, first, individual socio-demographic characteristics and attitudinal and behavioral variables and, second, survey-based and external macro-social characteristics of the countries included. The main descriptive statistics of individual level and country level variables are reported in Tables A1 and A2; additional statistics can be found in the supplemental material.

3.1 Dependent Variables

The following questions were used to measure leisure time stress and boredom: “*In your free time, how often do you ... feel bored/feel rushed*” (Answer categories: *very often, often, sometimes, seldom, and never*).

3.2 Individual Level Dependent Variables

The following socio-demographic characteristics are considered: Gender; age groups (15–24, 25–54, 55–64, 65 and older); education (years in school); religious denomination (none, Protestant, Catholic, East Asian religions, other); hours worked weekly (0, less than 40, 40, 41–50, more than 51); participation in the labour force resp. occupational positions manager, unskilled worker, self-employed, unemployed, and housewife; the household income (standardized by national mean value division); household composition (single, two or more adults, with children); and the type of community (urban, rural). Thus, in many instances we used categorical variables to capture non-linear effects.

We also include a set of *individual level variables* that are directly related to leisure time activities. The first concerns the availability of leisure facilities. ISSP asked: “*To what extent do the following conditions prevent you from doing the activities you would like to do: a lack of facilities nearby?*” The next variable, “*utilization of free time*” reflects our considerations about the effect of religion on leisure time behavior. Protestantism considers it important to spend time in a socially and ethically useful way. The questions “*People do different things during their free time. Please indicate how often you use your free time to ... establish useful contacts ... try to learn or develop skills*” (answer categories: *very often, often, sometimes, seldom, never*) were used to create the index “*utilization of free time*”. We expected that individuals who utilize their free time are more stressed and less bored. TV consumption is another variable. TV consumption occurs partly due to a lack of other interests, and replaces other activities (Meulemann and Gilles 2011). We assume that it is also related to less time stress and more boredom. Finally, we include a variable concerning the issue of not having enough of free time. Respondents were asked if they wanted to have more time for different spheres of their daily life such as paid work, housework, the family, and leisure time. We assume that individuals who wish to have more free time are more time stressed and less bored.

3.3 Independent Variables at the Macro-Social Context

The level of development is captured by GNI per capita and the strength of the welfare state by social expenditure in percent of GDP. Dominant religion (Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Religion, other) and communist past are included as categorical variables. Our classification of different leisure time regimes comprises the following dummy variables: English speaking countries, continental European countries, Scandinavian countries, East

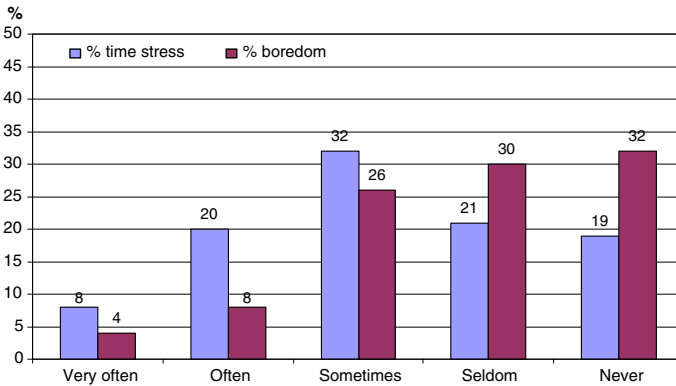


Fig. 1 Feelings of leisure time stress and boredom in 36 countries. *Source:* ISSP 2007; N = 51,951

Asian countries, Latin American countries, post communist countries, and the residual group of Cyprus, Israel, South Africa, and the Philippines.

4 Empirical Findings

4.1 Leisure Time Stress and Boredom in 36 Countries

The distribution of boredom and stress in our 36 countries (see Fig. 1) indicates that boredom and stress are both significant contemporary problems. Feeling rushed during their free time is experienced “very often” or “often” by over a quarter of the respondents. Overall, just over half feel this way at least sometimes, while only about one-fifth never experience it. Boredom occurs somewhat less often; about one tenth experiences it often or very often. Overall, roughly more than a third are affected by boredom during their leisure time.

An important issue in this regard is the relation between leisure time stress and boredom. In the pooled sample of about 52,000 respondents, stress and boredom surprisingly correlate slightly positive ($r = 0.14$). Individuals who are rushed are also more often bored and vice versa. However, as we will see in the following section, this does not apply to all countries.

Figures 2 and 3 show the percentage of respondents feeling rushed or bored for each of our countries. The countries are combined into the seven groupings mentioned before. Despite some variation within each group, this classification significantly reduces the variation when considering mean values.⁷ A one-way Anova results in an η^2 of 0.57 for stress and 0.60 for boredom. Therefore, about 60 % of the variation is explained by our classification of countries.

Less than 10 % in Switzerland, France and the Netherlands feel rushed often, but more than 40 % in countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Argentina, and the Philippines. Even larger are the international differences in feelings of boredom. Such a state is

⁷ The reader should remember that Figs. 2 and 3 are based on the percentage of respondents who feel bored or stressed very often, often or sometimes.

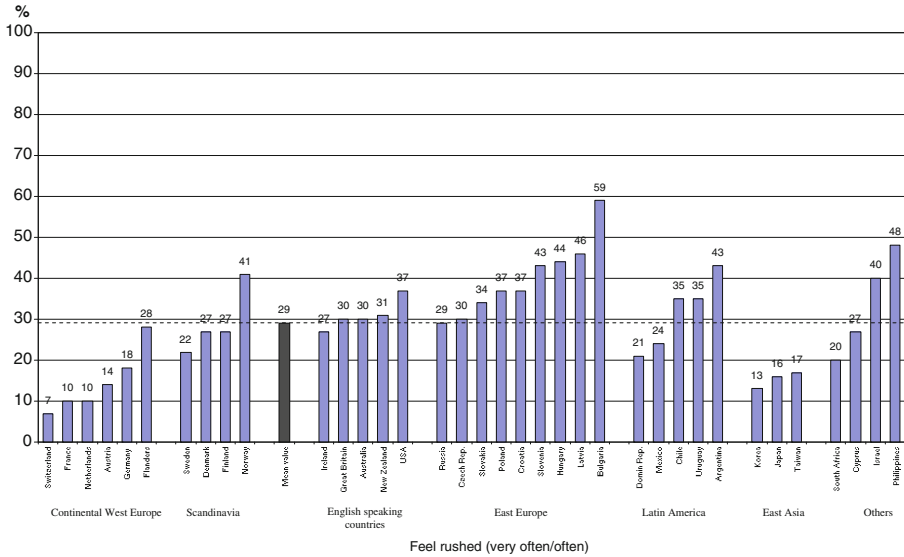


Fig. 2 Feel rushed in leisure time by groups of 36 countries. *Source:* ISSP 2007; N = 51,951

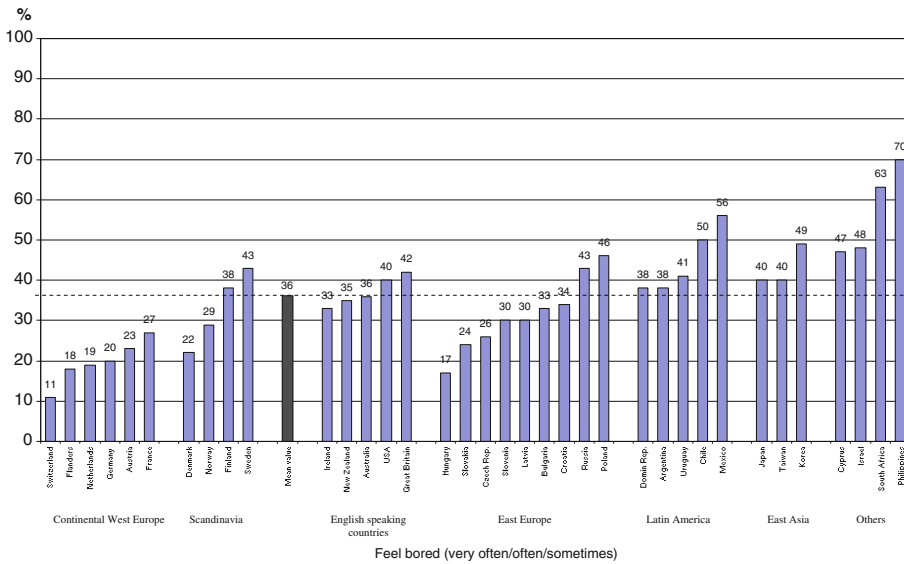


Fig. 3 Feel bored in leisure time by groups of 36 countries. *Source:* ISSP 2007; N = 51,951

experienced at least sometimes by only 11 % of the Swiss, but by 50 % and more in Mexico, South Africa, and the Philippines.

Continental west European countries such as the German- and French-speaking countries seem to fare best in overall terms: The respondents in these countries report the lowest level of feeling rushed (20 % compared to an overall 29 %), and only 20 % report feelings of being bored sometimes or frequently (overall: 36 %). The variation within this group is

small; only the Belgian province Flanders is characterized by a higher level of time stress. Flanders, however, whose population speaks Dutch, might belong in cultural terms less to the group of continental European countries but more to the Netherlands and, thus, be somewhat akin to the Nordic social-democratic welfare state model.⁸

The four Scandinavian countries have a very high level of wealth and comprehensive welfare states and it is surprising that their citizens appear more afflicted with time problems than those in continental Europe. 29 % overall often feel rushed in their leisure time, while 33 % feel at least sometimes bored. There is also considerable variation in boredom between the Scandinavian countries which is surprising given the many similarities. In terms of time stress, Norwegians stand out with a rather high level,⁹ in terms of boredom the Finns and Swedes.

The five English-speaking countries are characterized by an intermediate level in both stress and boredom. The internal ranking by and large corresponds to theoretical expectations: Catholic Ireland as a country differing in the dominant religion from all others shows the lowest levels of time stress and boredom, while the USA shows the highest level of time stress and a high level of boredom.

The post-communist countries of Europe are characterized by a significantly higher level of stress and lower level of boredom than most other countries. There exists, however, quite a large variation within this group: Time stress seems to be only moderate in the Czech Republic and Russia, but is very high in Bulgaria; boredom is much less frequent in Hungary, but above the average in Russia and Poland.

The Latin American countries are characterized by a large variation as far as time stress is concerned. However, there seems to be a north–south pattern: In the Dominican Republic and Mexico, stress is very low; in the southern Latin American countries Chile, Uruguay, and particularly Argentina, it is rather high. In these southern countries, the population is often of European descent. In terms of boredom, all Latin American countries show values above the mean.

The East Asian countries' population reports surprisingly low levels of time stress. Only 15 % of respondents feel stressed often in leisure time—a low level that is quite similar to central and Western Europe. Furthermore, there is little variation between the countries. The situation with regard to boredom is, however, different. Here, these countries show rather high values (43 % on average), again with little variation within the group.

Just a short remark about the residual group of countries: The Philippines, although geographically located in East Asia, have been considered as a member of this group because they are clearly different from Japan, Korea and Taiwan. They are predominantly Catholic and their level of socio-economic development is lower than that of these three countries.¹⁰ We can see that the Philippines and Israel stand out by very high levels of time stress, while the Philippines and South Africa stand out by having high levels of boredom.

⁸ Belgian ISSP data is limited to Flanders because the Flemish research group was not able to find a partner in the French-speaking part.

⁹ Knut Kalgraff Skjak (Bergen) provided some explanations in an email (2.7.2010) to the authors: There might be a small difference in the translation of the word “stress” in Norwegian, compared to Sweden and Denmark. He is not surprised that the feeling of being rushed is higher in Norway because “the Norwegians are known to be active in their leisure time, and so are the children (which also involves parents). And being active in leisure time also results in not feeling bored”. He also made a relevant comment on the Danish results which make sense because “a strong element in their culture is to consider themselves as a relaxed people, also with respect to stress and boredom ...”.

¹⁰ About 84 % of the Filipinos are Catholic; the GNP per head in 2005 was about 1.320 US-\$ in the Philippines, about 16.000 in Korea and Taiwan, and 38.900 in Japan (Fischer Weltalmanach 2008).

This first analysis of the frequency of leisure time stress and boredom in 36 countries suggests—similar to other studies such as Lamprecht and Stamm (1994) and Garhammer (1999)—that there are different “time regimes” in the different macro-regions or “cultural areas”. It is quite evident that, by and large, more developed countries provide better environments for leisure time than the less developed or post-communist countries (see also Otterbach 2009). Figures 2 and 3, however, present only aggregate numbers and neglect possible variations due to differences in individual characteristics of the populations. To account for such effects, we apply a multilevel regression in the following section.

4.2 A Multilevel Approach to Leisure Time Stress and Boredom

The results presented in this section are based on a hierarchical regression (Snijders and Bosker 1999). This analysis is necessary as our respondents are nested within countries and, therefore, not independent from each other. The hierarchical regression takes this fact into account and allows us to separate the effects of the context (the national embedding) and of individual characteristics and to soundly estimate their effects on individual outcomes.

We first specified the individual level part of the regression and afterwards introduced various country level factors. GNI and social expenditures, however, are correlated strongly and were introduced in separate models in order to avoid multicollinearity. The first column of Table 1 shows the entire model including micro- and macrolevel variables. Social expenditures replaced GNI in our second model. This second model also includes all microlevel variables of model 1; for the sake of easier readability only the macrolevel effects are shown since the microeffects remain almost unchanged. The same is true for model 3. Here, our set of time regimes are introduced and replaced all other macrolevel variables. The individual level variables of model 1 are also included but not presented since the changes are only marginal.

The bottom of Table 1 shows the explained variances at the micro- and macrolevel. A first result in this regard is that relatively little is explained at the individual level: 12–13 % for stress, and 10–11 % for boredom. At the macro-level, the explained variance is much larger, 42–56 and 52–69 %, respectively. Our model with the regime types explains the most variance for both dependent variables stress and boredom. Thus, as far as the individual level is concerned many other determinants of stress and boredom must exist. Another caveat is the increased likelihood of significance of micro-level variables due to the large sample size. We thus only emphasize effects with a substantial Beta value.

Gender is one of the strongest determinants of leisure time stress and boredom. Women are significantly more stressed than men in their leisure time but to a lesser degree plagued by boredom. This can be related to the fact that women still are mainly responsible for children and the home. We, therefore, investigated the issue of women’s leisure time stress more closely by considering the interaction effects between gender, being employed, and having children. Table 2 shows that all three interaction effects are statistically significant: employed women are more rushed than non-employed; mothers more than non-mothers; and mothers in the paid labor force more than non-employed. This corresponds to the objective situation as elaborated in the comparative study of Rice et al. (2006) who found that mothers in two earner couples had the least amount of spare time, followed by single mothers.

Age is also significant. The older age groups (55–64, and even more the 65+ group), are less affected by stress than those in the middle age group (25–54 years, the reference

Table 1 Feelings of being rushed and bored in leisure time, 36 countries (Multilevel regression analysis)

	Feel rushed (Never-very often) ^a				Feel bored (Never-very often) ^a			
	Model Ia		Model IIa		Model IIb		Model IIIb	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
Constant	2.17**		2.15**		2.81**		2.77**	
Micro level								
Sociodemographics								
Women (Men) ^b	0.23**	0.10			-0.06**	-0.03		
Age (25–54 years)								
15–24	-0.11**	-0.03			0.24**	0.07		
55–64	-0.18**	-0.06			-0.18**	-0.06		
65+	-0.40**	-0.12			-0.19**	-0.06		
Education (Lo–Hi)	0.02**	0.02			-0.04**	-0.05		
Religion (None)								
Protestant	-0.02	-0.01			-0.11**	-0.04		
Catholic	0.06**	0.02			-0.04**	-0.02		
East Asian	0.03	0.01			-0.06*	-0.01		
Others	0.04	0.01			0.01	0.00		
Employment characteristics								
Hours worked weekly (40 h)								
< 40	-0.02	-0.01			0.01	0.00		
41–50	0.05**	0.01			-0.02	-0.01		
51+	0.13**	0.03			-0.06**	-0.01		
0 ^c	-0.13**	-0.05			0.11**	0.05		
Unemployed (Others)	-0.05*	-0.01			0.20**	0.05		
Housewives (Others)	0.03	0.01			-0.03	-0.01		

Table 1 continued

	Feel rushed (Never-very often) ^a						Feel bored (Never-very often) ^a					
	Model Ia		Model IIa		Model IIIa		Model Ib		Model IIb		Model IIIb	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
Eastern Religions	-0.21	-0.05	-0.25	-0.06			0.17	0.04	-0.07	-0.02		
Country groups												
Post communist countries	0.53**	0.19	0.56**	0.20	0.30*	0.11	-0.32**	-0.13	-0.15	-0.06	-0.55**	-0.22
Continental West Europe					-0.45**	-0.14					-0.75**	-0.26
Scandinavia					0.19	0.05					-0.40**	-0.12
English speaking countries					0.03	0.01					-0.27*	-0.09
Latin American					-0.27	-0.08					-0.23	-0.07
East Asian					-0.57**	-0.11					-0.23	-0.06
REF (Other countries)	REF						REF					
	Model Ia	Model IIa	Model IIIa	Model Ib	Model IIb	Model IIIb						
R ² _{Micro}	0.119	0.119	0.132	0.101	0.105	0.148						
R ² _{Macro}	0.423	0.419	0.565	0.523	0.558	0.698						

* Significant: $p \leq .05$; ** Significant: $p \leq .01$

N_{individual} = 50258, N_{country} = 36; Intraclass coefficients of Empty models: 0.090 (rushed); 0.097 (bored)

If an item was not answered by respondents or was not asked in a country, a Dummy has been included into Regression. These 'Invalid-Dummies' are not shown in the table
^a Range of values in square brackets; ^b Reference-group in parentheses; ^c Not working for payment; ^d Ratios of individual Household-income and country's mean, transformed by the natural log; ^e Mean-Index computed from 2 variables; Use free time for contacts and use free time for developing skills; ^f Watching TV daily; ^g pp US-\$ 2005 times 10,000; ^h % of GDP 1996 times 100. Data from 1996 were taken because newer ones are not available for all countries. As 1996 and 2007 data are correlated by $r = 0.92$ for OECD countries we decided to use old 1996 data for all countries in our analyses; In models II (Social Expenditure as Macro Indicator) GNI per capita was omitted; only changed coefficients and effects of Macro-Indicators are shown in the table

Models III contain all Micro level variables, on Macro level only country groups

group). So is the youngest group (15–24 years), but to a lesser degree. When it comes to boredom, however, the youngest and older age groups are in very different situations; the youngest age group is more affected by boredom than the middle group, while the older age group is affected less than the middle age group. In terms of leisure time stress, older age groups are in a relatively privileged situation of less stress and less boredom.

We also tested for interaction effects between age, work status, and educational attainment. The consideration was that individuals who work longer into old age could be more stressed and less bored. All interaction effects were entered in addition to the model with all individual level variables and the macromodel with GNI. Table 2, however, shows only the effects of the interactions. It shows very weak effects at best: People over 55 years who still work are not more stressed or less bored than younger people; also higher educated, older people are not distinguished significantly from the less educated in their leisure time experiences (except for being a little less bored). Thus, we can say that from the individual perspective of leisure time stress and boredom, it is no problem to work longer.

Education has a significant, but only weak effect. Better educated individuals are less likely to be bored during their leisure time, and are more likely stressed.

At the individual level, being a member of a *Protestant* religious community has a weak effect, but its direction does not tally with our expectation. Catholics feel more rushed than individuals without a religious denomination and Protestants do not differ from those without a denomination. A possible explanation is that Protestantism has its main effect on individual attitudes through the macro-level, by influencing national culture (see Deutsch 1966 for a general support of this argument). Protestants living in non-Protestant countries might also be influenced by the dominant national (non-Protestant) culture, while the same will be true for Catholics in Protestant countries. However, members of both these denominations are less bored in their leisure time. This is quite understandable considering that membership in a religious group often serves to integrate people closely into a community (Höllinger and Haller 2009).

As for *employment and work* characteristics, we test if individuals who work very long hours and are employed in high-status jobs are afflicted more by leisure time stress and less by boredom, and if individuals working in unskilled professions are more affected by boredom. The findings show that individuals who are not working at all are less time stressed and a little more afflicted by boredom; those working very long hours (51 h and more per week) feel somewhat more stress and less boredom in their leisure time. No significant effect exists regarding housewives. The conjecture that managers and professionals, as well as self-employed, are more affected by leisure time stress is confirmed only in the case of the latter. The expectation that unskilled workers will be more afflicted by boredom is supported.

Household and family situation emerge also as important predictors. The higher the level of income, the less likely it is that individuals experience boredom during their free time. This is quite a substantial effect, and perhaps reflects the fact that a high income increases the possibilities and range of leisure time activities. In terms of time stress, income has no impact. As for the household size, those in homes with children or with two or more adults are more stressed and less bored during their free time than single households. Thus, an ambivalent effect of living with family members and children emerged: it reduces boredom, but at the same time leads to a shortage of leisure time (see also Gavron 1966).

As for leisure time attitudes and behaviors, most of them have the proposed effects: Stress increases with a perceived lack of leisure time facilities and the wish to have more free time. (As in many other cases, this might in reality be a reciprocal effect: Leisure time stress will also increase the wish for more leisure time). There is also a relationship with

Table 2 Feelings of being rushed and bored in leisure time, 36 countries

Interactions micro level	Feel rushed (Never-very often)				Feel bored (Never-very often)				
	B	SE	Beta	R ² _{micro}	R ² _{macro}	B	SE	Beta	R ² _{macro}
Women * working	0.09**	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.41	-0.01	0.02	-0.00	0.10
Women * child	0.08**	0.21	0.03	0.12	0.41	0.06**	0.02	0.02	0.10
Women * Working*Child	0.10**	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.41	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.10
Age55 + *Working	-0.01	0.03	-0.00	0.12	0.41	-0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.10
Age55 + *Education	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.12	0.41	-0.02*	0.01	-0.02	0.10

Multilevel regression analysis: effects of Interactions on Micro level

* Significant: $p \leq .05$; ** Significant: $p \leq .01$

These interactions have been entered separately into the regression Models I in Table 1 (with GNI as macro indicator). For reasons of space, it is not possible present Table 1 six times, including these interaction terms. The other coefficients in Table 1, however, are changing only marginally

Child = one or more children in household

the utilization of free time; stress decreases if a person is watching TV very frequently. No association exists between size of community and leisure time stress. However, rural dwellers do feel more bored. The same is true for frequent TV consumers and individuals that perceive a lack of free time facilities and wish to have less leisure time. An utilitarian evaluation of leisure time, on the other hand, is associated with being less bored.

4.3 The Influence of the Social Context on Stress and Boredom

The level of development is considered in Hypothesis 1. From the theories of social differentiation and economization of social relations we deduced that time stress—and maybe boredom as well—should be more frequent in more developed societies. Table 1 shows that the level of development does not influence stress. Boredom, however, is lower in more developed societies. Thus, Hypothesis 1 must be rejected.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b refer to the dominant religion. Protestantism at the macro level has a significant and strong effect on leisure time stress in the direction that we expected: Individuals in Protestant countries are more stressed in their free time than those living in comparable countries.¹¹ The fact that Protestant religion has the predicted effect at the macro, but not at the micro-level supports the argument that certain values and patterns of behavior are formed at the national level.

Hypothesis 3a and 3b refer to the type of the welfare state. If this dimension is captured by a quantitative variable, we see only one effect: social expenditures reduce leisure time boredom but do not influence stress. Hypothesis 3a is thus refuted. Individuals living in post-communist countries are significantly more stressed as proposed in Hypothesis 3b; they are, however, also significantly less bored, which might be the other side of the time stress. A very interesting peculiarity of these countries emerges if we look at the correlation between leisure time stress and boredom:¹² While this relationship is positive in most countries, it is negative in five out of the ten post-Communist countries; in two others, it is very weak. We think that this unique assemblage can be seen as a consequence of the profound transformation of those societies since the breakdown of the state socialist systems in 1989/90. Individuals who were able to make use of the new opportunities might experience a rather high level of stress, but of a positive nature. We investigated this by looking at the correlations between leisure time stress and happiness. We got the astonishing result that in three of the nine post-Communist countries (Poland, Latvia and Bulgaria) leisure time stress is associated positively with happiness, while in four others (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia) there exists no significant association; in most other countries, the correlation is negative. By contrast, individuals in East Europe who were not able to catch up with this fast and profound change might be affected by boredom.

These results suggest a few patterns: Cross-nationally, leisure time stress does not covary with time- or economic prosperity, as the theories of differentiation and economization of social relationships might suggest. If at all, this may be the case for boredom. But also in this case, the changes do not correspond to those philosophical and sociological accounts which have forecasted its increase; rather, the contrary seems to be the case.

¹¹ These countries include the non-Protestant West European and the Far East Countries. In absolute terms, stress is highest in East Europe and some developed countries (e.g., Argentina and Philippines, but also Israel).

¹² These correlations and those between leisure time stress and happiness are reported in the supplemental material.

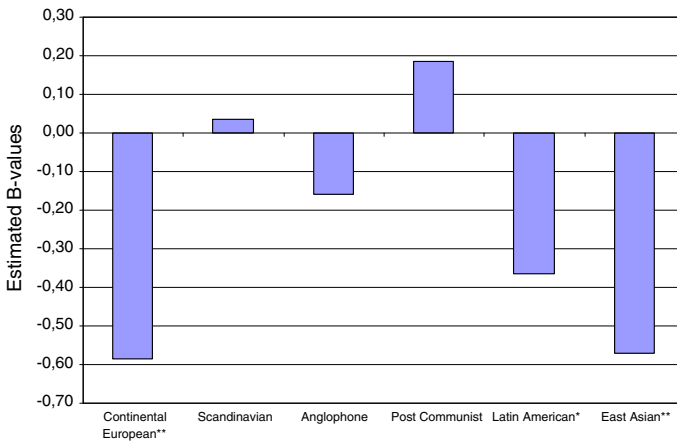


Fig. 4 Overall level of being rushed in different groups of countries in comparison to the reference group 'other countries' (estimated B-values). Predicted values. Country groups were included as dummy variables in the regression model of Table 1 (including GNI). A positive value indicates that people in a country group are more rushed than members of the reference group. A negative value indicates that they are less rushed. * Significant: $p \leq .05$; ** Significant: $p \leq .01$

As far as the rejection of a connection between the increasing social differentiation and the quality of leisure time is concerned, our findings confirm the warnings of Durkheim (1964:233ff.) against the (economic) assumption of happiness being produced by a division of labor or by the striving for happiness.

4.4 Leisure Time Regimes Around the World

Hypothesis 4 considered different groups of countries which are similar to each other in social-structural, political and cultural terms. Figures 2 and 3 showed in this regard that the continental central and west European countries are very similar to each other and in some way exhibit the "optimal" time regime among all the regions compared. We have to test, however, if the differences between the country groups persist after controlling for the micro level variables. The third models for both stress and boredom in Table 1 show in this regard that the inclusion of our country groups as macrolevel variables explains more variance than the previous models with various single macrosocial indicators. This classification alone explains about 57 % of the macrovariance of being "rushed" and about 70 % of being "bored."

However, an additional influence of the level of development is still possible. Therefore, we estimated additional models consisting of our time regime classification and GNI at the macrolevel and all individual level variables of Table 1. Figures 4 and 5 present the results of these additional models. They show that individuals in the continental west European countries and in the Far East are characterized by significantly lower levels of leisure time stress; the same is true, to a weaker degree, for individuals in Latin American countries (see Fig. 4). In terms of boredom, the continental west European countries, post-Communist countries and, to a weaker degree, the Latin American countries are characterized by a lower level (Fig. 5).

Let us consider the differences in the experiences of leisure time between the country groupings in more detail. For this purpose, an interaction between the presence of children

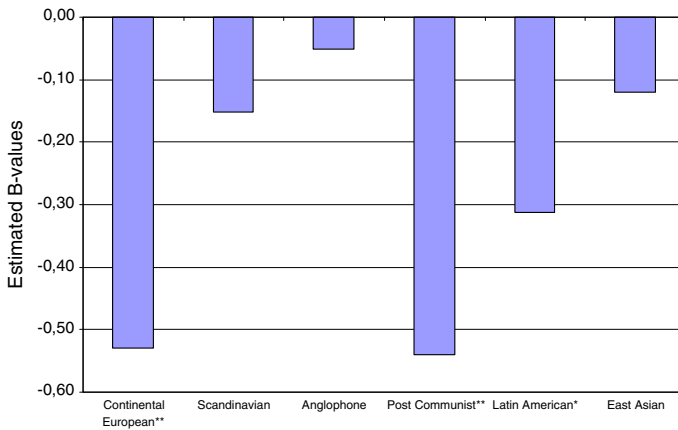


Fig. 5 Overall level of being bored in different groups of countries in comparison to the reference group ‘other countries’ (estimated B-values). Predicted values. Country groups were included as dummy variables in the regression model in Table 1 (including GNI). The negative values indicate that people in these country groups are less bored than members of the reference group “other countries”. * Significant: $p \leq .05$; ** Significant: $p \leq .01$

in the household and leisure time stress is included as additional variable. Figure 6 shows that the effect of children on feelings of stress in one’s leisure time is positive everywhere, but less strong in continental Europe and East Asia. Thus, in the first two groups of countries conditions must exist which exert less time pressure on parents than in most other countries. It seems particularly surprising that the Scandinavian countries, with their strong welfare state systems, do not offer better opportunities for parents concerning leisure time than the continental west European countries with their corporatist welfare state models. Let us discuss shortly the difference between these two groups of societies.¹³

The welfare state model of the social-democratic Scandinavian countries can be denominated as a “*workfare and inclusive people’s welfare model*”. It is characterized by high levels of employment and the highest proportion of sport activities. The surprising new finding of our study is that the quality of leisure time and overall welfare of people may not be as high as usually proposed. It is not difficult to reconcile our findings with those of Crompton and Lyonette (2006), who found that lower levels of work-life conflict among employed individuals exist in Finland and Sweden than in France. At the time of the ISSP-survey (2007), the proportion of women working was significantly lower in France than in Finland and Sweden (60 % against 74 and 72 %).¹⁴ The aforementioned authors, however, included only full-time employees in their analysis; however, leisure time stress is significantly higher among those working full-time (see Table 1). In addition, boredom seems to be an endemic problem in Sweden and Finland; it is remarkable that Scandinavians watch TV more frequently than individuals in continental West Europe (maybe, they do so particularly in the long and dark winters). Also, leisure time stress is relatively high—at least compared to the continental west European countries. A possible explanation is given in a critical view of the Swedish welfare state, written by an English journalist. Huntford (1974:272ff.) has argued that the development of such a strong welfare

¹³ See also the supplemental Tables S1, S2 and S3.

¹⁴ Eurostat Pressemitteilung 22.7.2008 (Stat-08-104_de-1.pdf).

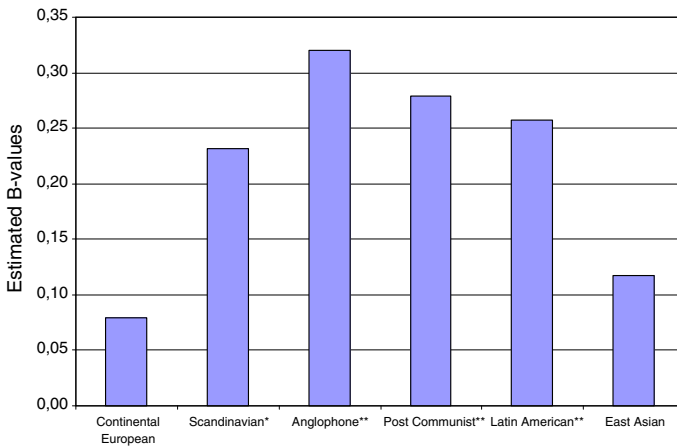


Fig. 6 Effects of children on being rushed in different groups of countries in comparison to the reference ‘no children’ (estimated B-values). Interaction terms between children and country group were included in the regression model in Table 1 (including GNI). The figure shows the estimated B-values of living with children for each country group. A positive value indicates that respondents with children are more rushed than respondents without children. Reference groups are respondents without children within a country group. ‘Other countries’ have been omitted because of their internal heterogeneity. * Significant: $p \leq .05$; ** Significant: $p \leq .01$

state was possible only because Sweden for centuries had been a rather centralized society, with an enlightened nobility and public bureaucracy, and with subservient citizens who expected all from the state and were satisfied with the state’s provisions. In this way, extremely high levels of social security and equality were achieved. The downside, however, was that individual freedom, responsibility and creativity were less developed and exciting public controversies and discussions disappeared. We could add that Sweden is also a very homogeneous society in cultural terms.

In Esping-Andersen’s widely-quoted book, the continental central and West European countries are denoted with a critical undertone as “conservative welfare states.” Yet, such a characterization overlooks the positive elements of these systems (Manow 2008). The acceptance and support of traditional family models in these societies provides more decision freedom for mothers and families, and it exerts less pressure on men and women to be employed at relatively old ages (Hakim 2002; Haller et al. 2000). Time is considered an important, independent dimension of social policy in these countries; it was discussed explicitly in the book of the Austrian political scientist Matzner (1982:238–256). The serious consideration of time problems in these countries is also reflected in the strict regulations and restrictions concerning the opening hours of shops at evenings and on weekends. This restriction is supported both by the unions and the Catholic Church. The positive side-effect of these strict regulations for the Austrian time regime has been clearly overlooked by Triandis (2000:27) when he argues that they are not convenient for the public. Our experience shows that this may be true for small groups (such as young singles living alone) but that the majority of people, particularly those with children, profit from having long weekends without stressful shopping. Also, the persistence of small family enterprises, consumer preferences for personal services typical for continental European countries as well as the focus on the development of public transport (with Switzerland as the leading country in this regard) may account for the surprising low level of both stress and boredom here. Switzerland, the country with the least stress and boredom in our sample,

is the opposite of Sweden in many regards. It is located in central Europe, is open on all sides to the exchange of economic goods and people, has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born people in Europe and even his native population is highly differentiated internally in religious and linguistic terms. The political system of Switzerland is strongly federalist, leaving most policy decisions to the areas of the 24 small cantons, many even to the communities; citizens have a strong direct influence on politics through referenda; the party system is rather split. Thus, in all these regards Switzerland is a diverse and heterogeneous country. It also has a highly developed infrastructure for free time activities and a unique landscape that offers possibilities for such activities throughout the year.

In France, a case in point was the fight of the small bakers in the Parisian region against the intrusion of a large industrial bread producer (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981). We could denote these countries as *change and time retarding societies*; as we have seen, the more conservative stance of these societies also has some positive side-effects. In fact, it has been argued that the speed of social change is as important as its direction; a change occurring too fast may lead to many unforeseen negative consequences.

Another variant of a “socialist model” is that of the post-communist East European societies. Here, we can speak of “*anomic transition societies*.” Evidently, the former high levels of employment do not exist anymore, since only about half of the people between 55 and 59 years of age are working, and less than 20 % after the age of 60. The data from the ISSP-survey also show that people in these countries take part in few sports, but spend a lot of time watching TV¹⁵ (an exception is Slovenia, the most developed country of this group). Poor leisure time infrastructure combined with moderate incomes which do not allow compensating for this lack may contribute to the rather high level of leisure time stress. At least a positive by-product seems to be a rather low level of boredom. A second consequence of the transition from communist to market societies is related to the pace of transition. In some countries, most notably in Poland, but also in Russia, the transition was achieved within a very short period. American liberal economists had advised governments to expose their economies to a “shock” in order to abolish the old structures. The consequence of this fast transition, however, was not only an economic crash, but also a massive deterioration in the living conditions for large sections of the population and—as we have indicated before—increasing cleavages between the old and new sectors of the economy and between the rich and poor (Lewada 1992; Piirainen 1994).

The time regime of the English-speaking, mostly Protestant countries can be labeled as an “*individualistic work-and-success-model*”: This is a very pronounced time regime; the countries are very similar, as Figs. 2 and 3 show. The regime is characterized by high employment levels, longer working hours than in continental Europe, and a common desire to have more leisure time. Leisure time facilities are abundant, but—compared to the high level of development—individuals seem to be quite rushed and bored. Thus, we can see here an effect of both culture and politics, namely of the Protestant ethic (or its repercussions) and of the relatively restricted, “liberalistic” welfare state regime. (see also Parsons and Shils 1951; Willi 1966; Schor 1993)

The Latin American countries form another model. Here, individuals work long into the old age and many hours per week, probably because many individuals have only low incomes and insufficient or no social insurance (see Nohlen et al. 1997:521–526). Data shows that many individuals also wish for more time for paid jobs. As for leisure, infrastructure is worse than in the richer countries, and individuals less frequently go out for

¹⁵ Lewada (1992:50) asked in a Russian survey around 1990 which activities provides most fun; watching TV came only in 11th place, mentioned by 19 %.

shopping or participate in sports; 41 % complain of missing leisure time infrastructure. In many Latin American countries, there is a remarkable welfare state tradition; its structure resembling that of the continental European states (Nohlen et al. 1997; Faust et al. 2004). Nevertheless, in a region where informal employment constitutes a large part of urban employment¹⁶ and where income inequality is higher than in most other parts of the world (GINI-coefficients ranging from 45 to 60), welfare state provision does not reach large sections of the population. Thus, our findings are understandable in showing that people in some Latin American countries often feel very rushed and in all countries considerably bored in their leisure time. These findings are quite remarkable also in view of the fact that some Latin American countries rank high in terms of life satisfaction and happiness (Haller and Hadler 2006). A high level of social embedding, close family and community relationships and an interruption of the somewhat boring course of the year by intensive feasts, often for days (with the Rio de Janeiro carnival as the most famous event), may contribute to this happiness. One study found that for Latin Americans friendship matters more for well-being than income, employment and personal assets (Graham and Lora 2009:7). This study, however, also found that the poor, especially in the countryside, exhibited a certain “optimism bias”. Overall, we may denote the Latin American pattern as a somewhat *depressed leisure time regime*. The variation between the countries within this group, however, is rather large with high levels of time stress in the countries in the south (Chile, Uruguay and Argentina) and high levels of boredom in Chile and Mexico. Further research and more detailed analyses would be necessary to explain these differences.

A quite different model can be seen in the Far East, which includes Korea, Taiwan and Japan. The level of time stress is as low in these countries as in continental central and west Europe, but the level of boredom is rather high, particularly in Korea. In Japan, extensive leisure time facilities have been developed in recent decades and there is also a trend toward giving more priority to private life (Linhart 1988; Fukutake 1989; Linhart and Frühstück 1998; Manzenreiter and Ben-Ari 2004). In Taiwan and Korea, on the other hand, many people see a dearth of leisure time facilities (see Supplemental material). Another important fact in this regard is that people work very long both in life-cycle terms (between 31 and 47 % still work at the age of 60–65 years, and about one-fifth even longer) and in terms of weekly working hours (more than one-third works more than 50 h per week). In many continental European countries and in most East European countries only between 10 and 20 % are employed in the age group 60–65 and only 20 % or less work 50 and more hours weekly. Even in the USA, working hours seem to be shorter than in East Asia although a high proportion of Americans is working in the age group 60–64. At the same time, the proportion of those wishing more free time is lower than in Scandinavia and the English speaking countries. The Japanese society (and the same may be true partly for Korea and Taiwan) is very homogeneous in cultural terms and it has a very low degree of economic inequality (with a Gini-index between 25 and 30), despite a weak welfare state (Lee 1987). Evidently, Japanese society and politics rely upon a high level of trust and commitment among its citizens. Summing up, we can label this pattern a “*work dominated model compressing and draining leisure time*”.

¹⁶ About 30 % in Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, and 45 % in Argentina; see World Labour Report (2000, p. 285).

5 Conclusions

We started from the observation that the amount of leisure time and its quality may not increase simultaneously. While the rise of free time is a pervasive feature in modern societies, several authors (Zahn 1960; Linder 1970; Scitovsky 1976; Gross 1994; Gershuny 2000) have argued that people will not be able to use this large amount of time in a meaningful way. Other writers, however (Klapp 1986; Bellebaum 1990; Ragheb and Merydith 2001), expect that the increase in incomes, consumption power and possibilities to spend leisure time lead to new time problems and stress in free time. Our analysis of the new, worldwide ISSP-2007 survey on Leisure Time found that both diagnoses possess some truth: Both trends can be found in present-day societies, whereby there are more of those who feel rushed in free time at least sometimes (not less than 60 %) than those who feel bored (more than a third).

We also showed, corresponding to many other studies, that there are indeed time-poor and time-affluent groups among the population: Among the first, we find women; adults in the middle years of life, when family and job make the most heavy claims on time (often denoted as “rush hour” of life); individuals with long working hours and those who live together with children or in larger households. Individuals who feel rushed in their leisure time also wish to have more time. Groups who suffer from leisure time boredom include young people; the unemployed; less skilled workers; and individuals living in larger households. Protestants are affected less by this experience. These individual-level variables, however, explain only a modest proportion of variance in stress and boredom. Therefore, other individual and macro-social factors must exist that reduce the quality of leisure time.

The focus of this paper was on the macro-social factors. We first investigated the single effects of several different macro-social dimensions. We found that there is no linear relationship between the level of economic affluence and the level of leisure time stress; only boredom decreases somewhat. Rather significant differences are observable, however, between groups of countries with similar socio-cultural and political backgrounds: Individuals in protestant countries are more affected by leisure time stress, those in post-communist countries by higher stress, but less boredom. However, we believe that these aspects should not be considered in isolation from each other. Therefore, we grouped the 36 countries into seven larger groups considering dominant religion, political history and type of welfare state, geographic proximity, and common (or similar) language. A statistical test of the explanatory power of these classification proved that it is superior to a consideration of the afore-mentioned macro-social dimensions. Our findings thus underscore a superiority of the Weberian approach to comparative analysis. Its essence is that we should not look for general laws of societal development, but try to detect characteristic patterns of social structure and paths of development. By developing ideal-typical models of such patterns and common to groups of countries—in our case typical “time regimes”—sociology is able to grasp general patterns of behavior without resorting to pure description or to the asserting of immutable social laws.

Our findings are quite relevant also for the booming research area on happiness and quality of life. Leisure time is a very important and increasing domain of life when it comes to subjective quality of life (Lane 2000:242; Frey and Stutzer 2002:29; Haller 2005). Considering leisure explicitly as an aspect of the subjective quality of life might help us to understand some of the paradoxes of findings in that research. Two issues may be mentioned here.

First, there is the *Easterlin paradox*, the fact that socio-economic standards of living did increase in the last decades while happiness in most countries showed no increase at all, and according to some authors has even decreased (see Lane 2000; Wolff 2004; Graham 2009; Graham and Lora 2009). If we know that the increasing leisure time, one of the most spectacular “positive” changes of the last decades, for many was connected with negative feelings, such a paradox may well be understood.

Second, comparative research on happiness shows that there exists a curvi-linear relationship between socio-economic development and happiness. Overall, individuals in rich nations are happier than those in poor ones; after a certain level of material affluence, happiness, however, does not increase linearly any more. Some societies, located in Latin America, clearly deviate from this pattern. The level of happiness of people in Colombia and Mexico, for instance, is comparable to that of US-Americans and Europeans, in spite of a considerable lower national level of wealth (Inglehart and Klingemann 2000; Frey and Stutzer 2002; Haller and Hadler 2006; Frey 2008). Maybe, the generousness individuals in the former countries deal with time (Levine 1998) contributes significantly to their surprising high level of happiness; in fact, this generosity is closely related to their high estimate of personal relations to other individuals—one of the most, if not the single most important determinants of happiness. An antidote to the Latin American’s handling of time could be people in the east European, post-communist countries where low incomes, growing prices, restricted leisure time facilities and a low level of interpersonal trust combined produce quite substantial levels of leisure time stress and, as a consequence, reduce objective and subjective quality of life. Our findings may also contribute to the surprising fact of the relatively low level of happiness in East Asia—a fact mentioned but left unexplained in Suh (2000:73). We found that leisure time among them is something like a residual category with work still dominating life, at least for men.

We can also deduce some policy recommendations from our findings. Elaborating specific “leisure time regimes” as the outcomes of an interaction between social and cultural patterns and social and political institutions implies that these regimes are dependent on very specific policies and practices in the different groups of countries and each of them includes both its specific time-rich and time-poor individuals. In view of this fact, the general recommendation put forth in Jean Fourastié’s pioneering work (1965), to aim for strong and linear reductions of working time seem not appropriate any more (see also Dumazedier 1974; Diener and Oishi 2000). Quite different problems of time emerge in different phases of the life cycle. What we need is a supply of a variety of forms and lengths of the working day and week, of institutions (like nursing homes, Kindergartens, full-time schools) which can support persons in need of time, but also of new forms of regulated interruptions of the work life, like Sabbaticals, and new forms of gliding entry into retirement and the like. For children and young people, however, new forms of leisure time education and attractive new forms of leisure time and sport facilities might be important.

Concluding, we suggest some areas for further research. First, it would be interesting to look at the factual leisure time activities and investigate their relationship with feelings of stress and boredom. Another line of research could investigate in detail the effects of leisure time activities and experiences on subjective well-being and happiness. These two kinds of analysis can be carried out with the ISSP-survey on “Leisure time and sports.” A third line of research could draw upon time use studies. Here, one could investigate in detail how different ways of spending leisure time are related to experiences of stress and boredom, but may also lead to experiences of happiness and “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 2008).

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