ABSTRACT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2014

SESSION V: FAMILY VALUE AS AN INSTITUTION

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES ON THE FAMILY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA BASED ON THE RESEARCH "SUNDAY WORKING AND QUALITY OF LIFE"

Keywords: modernization, quality of life, family well-being, working conditions, Sunday working

A description of the theoretical framework

Croatia is the youngest member state of the European Union, which was marked by the transition from a self-management socialist economic model to market neoliberalism and a long process of accession to the European Union. Since the processes of modernization and neoliberalism, which are visible through a change in the form of flexible and atypical working hours, are affecting family relationships (Lyonette and Clark, 2009) and following the existing research on the quality of life conducted in order to plan better social policies in the European Union (Eurofound, 2012; Lyonette and Clark, 2009), we decided to conduct a study ("Sunday Working and Quality of Life") about how such work in a store affects the quality of life. The research was conducted based on several theoretical assumptions related to the process of modernization and social importance of the family.

Some authors, mostly sociologists, through the processes of modernization and transition reflect on Croatia’s position after leaving communism which can serve as a broader social and political framework for understanding the contemporary position of the family. In his book titled From Communist Hell to Wild Capitalism Županov (2002) analyzing the three stages of Croatian modernization through the process of industrialization, particularly emphasizes the emergence of urban capitalism with its (semi)peripheral shape in the second stage, which is, inter alia, in Yugoslavia marked by the absurd of higher consumption than production. In the third stage or post-
war period, Županov outlines half-modernization as a hybrid Croatian particularity, which is more of a cosmetic than a real structural change. What occurs instead of entrepreneurship and economic renaissance is an uncritical appropriation of Western economic policies and import of market for services shaped as the American way of life (Županov, 2001).

These processes characterize the social and economic development of the Croatian state which brings changes in values and lifestyle, for which the family as a fundamental social institution can be a good indicator (Nimac, 2010).

For our study it is important that the family is a very complex and dynamic system in which what happens to one member of the family has an influence on all the other members and the family dynamics as a whole. In recent literature it is referred to as family well-being. It is no longer possible to completely separate work and family life domain which is referred to as the spillover model. Problems and dissatisfaction at work of one partner spill over into family relationships; reduce satisfaction in marriage and family as well as quality of life and satisfaction on a general level. Tiring and overtime work eventually takes its toll. Some of the possible, frequent consequences are fatigue, lack of sleep, stress, negative impact on the health and lack of energy to meet the marital and parental responsibilities (Fursman, 2009). Generally speaking, a work schedule that is less in line with the obligations of family life is more associated with stress about reconciliation of work and family (Barnett, 1998 to Alexander and Baxter, 2005). In the context of Croatia, family is an institution that citizens consider very important (Rimac, 2010). In the conducted research, results were obtained that are related to changes in family relations and the continued understanding of the family as an important social value.

The research hypotheses and a description of the data and the research methods

Franciscan Institute for the Culture of Peace and the Catholic University of Croatia conducted a study with the aim of public actualization of working Sundays and it’s repercussions on workers and their families. Using focus groups as qualitative methodology with in-depth approach we collected 45 participants in four major Croatian cities who we guaranteed anonymity and who had experience working Sunday’s in shopping malls, bakeries or small shops.

The most important findings

With research participants we discussed several main themes, namely working hours, overtime hours, work on Sundays and the importance of Sunday and free time. Almost all participants in our focus groups stated that their work week is not official 40 hours because of unpaid overtime as regular practice what reflects on their (low) quality time left for their family. Most of the negative impact on the family is very little time left for their partners and children. Working Sunday is especially hard for them because then many of their family members and friends have time to socialize, while they spend their Sunday at work. Since most participants where women who are employed in the commercial sector, we got a good insight into the conflict between their work and family roles, which are many and varied. Women generally, after completing the day's work, have the 'second shift' at home or, in other words, unpaid household and family chores. Many of them expressed a feeling of inferiority and powerlessness when they have to work on Sundays, and it is especially hard for parents. Using the words of our participants, when parents have to work on Sundays, "the children are left to themselves", they are almost "burnt out" after work for any talk or socializing so to work on Sundays is "the worst" for them. Therefore, the findings of focus groups suggest that leisure time, primarily weekends, are extremely important to employees, especially those who are parents, in order to maintain quality and satisfying relationships with their family members.

The research also indicates that Croatia produces and promotes consumer society and consumerism as a lifestyle. Participants employed in shopping centers mention a number of situations when during the organized evening purchases (the so called “shopping nights”) mothers walks through shopping centers in the late hours with small children and comment on how it seems that for most
visitors a shopping mall is a place for going out, encouraging what one participant commented on with regret “the creation of shopping habits”.

In the end, it is important to note that some potential participants refused to participate in this study mainly because of the fear of talking about this obviously sensitive subject, which is an important sociological finding that goes beyond the methodology note. It is the social context in which consumer culture encourages another one - and it is a culture of fear. These and other identifiable sections of neoliberal regimes we largely attribute to the inherited communist legacy of semi-modernization process and aggressive transition that took place under external pressures and not domestic conditions (Županov; 2002). These are the broader social circumstance which affect Croatian families and need to be monitored for the purpose of further social development (Neumayer, 2010) and properly oriented economic and social policies that are the foundation for the realization of the common good and human development.

Conclusions / discussion

Although the data from the latest wave of the European Values Study show that 98.2 % of the Croatian citizens said that their family is (very) important (Rimac, 2010), it seems that Croatia is joining the trend of high rates of divorce in which every third marriage ends (State Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Increased divorce rate indicates that today's family is facing many challenges with which it obviously cannot deal adequately and which could indicate the redefinition of the traditional values of Croatian citizens. To nurture a new generation, stable and functional family relations are necessary.

It seems legitimate to ask whether neoliberalism affects in the broader sense the changes in family relations or the situation should be viewed more focused as a part of the economic crisis. How these patterns affect children as members of society? If members of society, especially women, are exposed to poor quality of life that is reflected in the family, how will this affect the family and the society in the future? Will we have a "healthy" family and "healthy / sustainable" society if children are deprived of harmonious and maintained family relations?

In the social circumstances of encouraging consumer choice and lifestyle where the time of consumption merges with private leisure time, Croatian families are also a part of a vicious consumer circle. Thus, the family becomes another social institution from which something is expected but which is not invested in (Črpić and Baloban, 2005).

References