

THESIS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Time on campuses. A time sociological study of higher education students



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Time on campuses. A time sociological survey of students in higher education

– Doctoral (Ph.D) dissertation –

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The outline of the topic, the aim of the thesis

The problem raised in this thesis- i.e. the examination of full-time students' way of living with the help of time management- is worth viewing from several aspects. The analyses can be justified on the one hand by the new phenomena appearing these days (the system of student work, the spread of the use of the Internet etc.) and on the other hand by the recent changes taking place in higher education (the fact of expansion and its consequences). It is also worth noting that the research in students' way of living is rare in sociology, as students make up only a small particular proportion of the society. However, students' pace of living, value system and lifestyle have unique characteristics, which differ from the norms accepted by the greater part of the society. All this separation is emphasized by the appearance of campuses: their autonomy within the city creates a special micro-world for students. The survey of their lifestyle, the results beyond the actual figures cast light on several facts: the circumstances in which the future generation of the intellectuals is formed, the way they arrange their compulsory and optional system of activities, and their attitude we can expect from them after starting a career.

The relation to time and the management of time are imparted through socialization, and this kind of knowledge is an important part of social integration. It expresses the individual's scale of values, his attitudes to the path of life and its goals... It also shows several characteristics of culture and the extent of modernization. As in the case of the framework of lifestyles, we can speak about dynamic elements besides static ones in terms of relation to time: for example mobility in career or a great change in living conditions rearranges everything and can also cause serious differences between certain generations. Students' relation to time and their time management reflect the socio-cultural impacts originating from home, the characteristics of intragenerational mobility and the effect of higher education, which is the most important influence on their way of life.

The method which helps us to approach students' way of living is going to be the survey of time management. These researches in Hungary are done by lifestyle-sociology and are conducted almost exclusively with the technique called balance-of-time investigation. The Central Statistical Office carries out lifestyle and balance of time investigations on national and representative samples from time to time. They follow the methodology of an international research group led by Szalai Sándor, which was formed in the 1970s. Nevertheless, students in higher education are not separated as a special group in these repetitive researches: the analyses work with a category called 'student' (including secondary school students as well) and categories based on age. However, students' lifestyle in higher education differs from that in secondary schools: organizational frameworks of higher education do not match the features of secondary institutions. While in the samples taken on the basis of age, we can also find youngsters who do not go on to higher education.

The inadequacy of theoretical frameworks justifies the topic of this thesis, too. Although the standards of Hungarian empirical time research are outstanding even in international respect, the theoretical basis is not sufficiently available. The problem of time appeared in sociological theories as long as a century ago, and it has become an independent sub-discipline for the last decades, called sociology of time or „Zeitsoziologie". While in international literature we experience a flourishing of this topic, as lots of volumes and publications appear in connection with it, in Hungarian we can hardly see the signs of this tendency. The theoretical frameworks of international sociology of time are more and more

elaborate, still they do not give a basis for Hungarian empirical researches of time, as these researches have been done for decades without stable theoretical bases in sociology of time. The interpretation of the data collected in Hungary is rather made on the basis of researches of lifestyle. The two approaches, however, are far from being compatible. Consequently, the main goal of the theoretical chapters of the thesis was to summarize the bases in sociology of time in Hungarian too, and thus to make it available, supplying a need in our national research in this way. Therefore a considerable part of the thesis relies on foreign resources, even if their availability was highly restricted in many cases.

The interdisciplinary feature of the theoretical frameworks is aimed at showing the wide-range of spectrum of the phenomena examined by the sociology of time. The definition of time, the historical development of the notion of time, the effect of settlement structures on lifestyle, the study of the organizational frameworks of education all made it necessary to make use of the relevant findings in other branches of science, too (social history, settlement geography, pedagogy, anthropology, philosophy, chronobiology). In addition, we also deal with such segments of empirical, sociological study of time that cannot be classified into the category of balance of time investigations. So the goal of the theoretical frameworks can be formulated as to render the basics of sociology of time into Hungarian according to the international findings of researches and to systematize the scantily available sources- the findings referring to the problem of time appear only at random in sociology and in other sciences.

During the empirical research we strove to reveal the system of explanatory factors of time management as well as to describe students' way of living in a quantitative way in hours and minutes. On the one hand, time management is influenced by organizational frameworks to a great extent (e.g. compulsory classes, which can differ with respect to university and college majors and faculties) and on the other hand, the relation to time is mainly imparted through the socialization in the family, and shapes this aspect of students' way of living as part of their disposition. As our empiricism was a part of an extensive research based on questionnaires, the socio-cultural factors brought from home could be modelled well (financial and cultural capital, parents' educational level etc.)- using these explanatory variables in balance of time researches can certainly be considered unique. Of course we used the most common viewpoints taken into consideration in researches of the topic (gender, type of settlement), too, and we also regarded other factors that mostly influence students' way of living (place of residence, faculty of university or college). The aim of our analysis was to get to know how these variables affect the activities under survey, how intensely they explain certain use of time and how activities done by students match each other.

Applied methods

The empirical part of the dissertation is mainly based on questionnaires conducted by the research group of Regional University (Regionális Egyetem Kutatócsoport¹) in 2005, interviewing almost one thousand people, which concerned full time undergraduates of „Partium” (College of Nyíregyháza, Kölcsey Ferenc Reformed Teacher Training College, Ruthenian Hungarian Teacher Training College, Partium Christian University, and the following faculties of University of Debrecen: Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Technical College, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of

¹ NKFP-26-0060/2002

Pedagogical College, Faculty of Medical College, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics).² In this way there was an opportunity to examine the characteristics of students' way of living over the frontier and to compare their management of time to that of students from Hungarian faculties. The Research Group of Regional University used questionnaires for the survey, the profile of which was not suitable for the balance of time investigations that record and categorize the interviewees' day from minute to minute. The questionnaire covered several fields of investigation, and there was only one block of questions referring to management of time and free time activities. The questionnaire asked the students to estimate the amount of time spent on the following activities: sleeping, meals, body hygiene, passive recreation, attending classes, studying out of classes, self-education, money-making activities, household chores, transport, shopping, reading, watching television, listening to music, using the computer (without the Internet), the Internet, social life and hobbies.

The system of explanatory variables is made up of the following variables: faculty of university or college, gender, parents' educational level, place of residence (permanent or temporary), and the index of classical or modern free time-orientation. (We took into consideration the frequency of going to the theatre, or artistic activities for example, in forming the former variable, while we put the different use of the computer-among others-into the modern category.) There was also an attempt to survey students' financial situation-we formed the different groups on the basis of durable consumer goods available in the family. There were questions concerning the cultural capital of families, and we separated the categories representing each level of this cultural capital with the help of an index.

We also used the method of A, B and C tables applied by the Central Statistical Office too, to describe the different management of time in different groups of students in a more subtle way. The following methods were used during the examination: averages and dispersions, cross-tables, variance-analysis, correlation calculus, linear regression with numerical and categorical variables.

The most important goal of the empirical analysis was to demonstrate the use of time spent on each activity, to give the ratio of the students involved in the activities along the most important socio-cultural variables on the one hand, and with the help of factors on the other hand. These factors put students into basic categories, but obviously they do not emerge in balance of time-investigations concerning the whole society.

Results

On the basis of the data of the analysis we can state that we did not reach substantial findings by measuring the activities in hours and minutes. What proved to be more important was the effects caused by certain independent variables and their directions, the effect of certain activities reinforcing or extinguishing each other, and the whole system concerning students' way of living, which was outlined in front of our eyes as the statistical analyses proceeded.

Before stating the thesis in details, we have to outline the most important characteristics of the average use of time, as compared to the findings of the Central Statistical Office. Perhaps the most essential element of students' way of living is that the amount of hours, minutes spent on studying altogether (373 minutes) hardly falls behind the

²To the extent of one hypothesis there takes place a comparison with a research of similar profile done with questionnaires among first-year students in 2003.

time used similarly by the working population of Hungary. The system of student work is becoming more and more significant, as the amount of time spent on earning money demonstrates it (more than half an hour a day on average). The freedom of students' way of living can be symbolized by the high figures of free activities (329 minutes)- which can be connected to the data of **co horses** of the following groups-students and the age group from 15 to 29- made by the Central Statistical Office. Household chores do not play an important role at all in their life, while reading and the use of computer dominate the structure of students' activities. It is important to note that there is no data available in connection with this latter use of time, as this category does not exist in researches of the Central Statistical Office.

The hypotheses of the dissertation were the following:

- Regarding the factors influencing students' way of life, the ones connected to organizational frameworks are at least as important in influencing time management as the socio-cultural indexes.
- Time management of genders does not exactly coincide with the trends outlined in studies of the Central Statistical Office.
- Types of freetime orientation explain not only the activities that can closely be connected to index formation.
- There is a shift in variables explaining students' time management, comparing the sample taken in 2003 with first-year students and the sample taken in 2005 with undergraduates, which we used in our study.

In the next phase of our analysis we outlined the effects of the system of the explanatory variables. The use of time we got here showed an extremely strong connection with the variables. It is true for example in the case of the three groups formed on the basis of gender, faculty or the index of classical free time-orientation. In other cases, however, we can hardly find any significant connections- for example in the database of the 2005 survey, parents' educational level, type of settlement or modern free time index demonstrated fewer connections than the average.

Along the variable of gender we found numerous significant connections, although it also occurs that these connections cannot be noticed right in the cases where we presumed their existence before the analyses (e.g. in the case of jobs). Along some activities, however, there are almost always marked differences taking shape, which point at similar directions: e.g. household chores, shopping, most of the activities connected to studying and hygiene, which can be characterized by female dominance, or use of the computer and the Internet, plus hobbies, which play a more important role in time management of males.

In the case of the variable concerning faculties of universities and colleges, there is no data available for comparison concerning the characteristics of certain groups of students with respect to the use of time. It is worth noting that this variable is in strong connection with both the length of time of most activities and the independent variables of the analysis (e.g. supply with different capitals, parents' educational level, types of free time activities etc.). The acquired data outline the features of each faculty concerning lifestyle quite graphically, which show marked differences in several cases both in the data measured in hours or minutes and in the ratio of people doing the activities. We have to point out at the same time that the system of faculties at universities and colleges is an important medium of

differentiation within the intellectuals, thus it is a means of families' reproduction aiming at status.

The type of settlement, the place of residence and the educational level of parents influence only an insignificant part of time management, the outlining connections, however, can rarely be regarded as surprising. Nevertheless, we have to note that the type of settlement produces much more serious divergences during balance of time analysis in Hungarian society, as in the survey of the Central Statistical Office the lifestyle of groups formed along the variable differentiating the capital, county seats, smaller towns and villages shows considerable differences. Still, its effect within the sample of students is connected with only a few activities (mostly with class attendance and jobs for making money). It would be worth examining whether these variables compared to similar age groups of the Hungarian society produce the same results in the individual balance of time investigations, or it is just a phenomenon of students' way of living.

The effect of the different kinds of capitals proved to be more important- the economic capital for example decreased the added-up time spent on reading and the actual time spent on studying and reading, but it increased the rates in the use of the computer. In groups where the values of the cultural capital are the lowest, the following figures are the highest: the added-up average length of class attendance, the actual amount of hours or minutes spent on watching television, while the following figures are the lowest: the rates of those who read or used the Internet on the previous day. Looking at the effects of the two capitals, it is worth noting that these capitals influenced the length and rates of reading in opposite directions- high-level cultural capital increased, while economic capital decreased the length of this activity.

The types of free time orientation also considerably influenced students' way of living in terms of length of time. The category "modern" reduced the emphasis of housework and raised the emphasis of the activities in connection with the computer (in the case of the actual use of time, only the use of the Internet shows significant connection, though). The classical values of orientation increased the time used for activities in connection with studying, reading and housework, while in the case of social life and watching television we can find an opposite connection. So the high values of the two categories influenced the field of household chores in the opposite way- as the types of the capitals did in the case of reading. It is worth emphasizing that the impact of cultural capital and classical free time orientation do not totally cover each other in every case, although their effect produced similar characteristics several times.

During the correlation analysis we took the effects of the independent variables which were used previously out of the model, and on the basis of the results we got in this way, we reasoned out the coincidence of certain activities' length of time, and the direction of these connections. The coefficients showed strong connections in the case of activities focusing on home and household (housework, hobbies, shopping), and significant connections in the negative direction in their relation to class attendance and the length of time spent on studying.

With the help of the linear regression analysis we could confirm our hypothesis undoubtedly that it is the faculties of universities and colleges that influence students' time management to the greatest extent. Variance analyses had already suggested that the hypothesis was right, but these analyses could not prove anything. The following variables have considerable effect, too: gender, parents' educational level. The other categories have less important effect on students' way of living.

On the basis of empirical analyses we can state the following in connection with our hypotheses:

- The first hypothesis concerning the organizational frameworks and the effects of socio-cultural variables has to be revised, because there were some variables both among organizational frameworks (e.g. faculties in universities and colleges) and socio-cultural variables (cultural capital) whose effect was strong, while other categories had little impact.
- The second hypothesis, which formulated that the trend of genders is not completely compatible with the researches of the Central Statistical Office, is likely to be right. Reading and self-education showed male dominance, for example- which is in opposition with the national trends.
- The third hypothesis, according to which certain explanatory variables influence activities beyond their “scope of action”, seems to be right. The modern free time, for example, reduced the length of housework, and influenced activities concerning studying and social life, too.
- The fourth hypothesis, which presumed a shift between the two databases in the system of the independent variables, moving towards the end of the education, seems to be right with a little amendment. In the case of first year students the indexes of “brought from home” had stronger explanatory power (e.g. parents` educational level, type of settlement), while the impact of these variables proved to be weaker before graduation. Other variables, however, remained strong throughout the years, and maintained the system of inequalities among the students (e.g. type of capitals, faculty of university and college).

The findings of the dissertation reinforced that students` lifestyle is unique, different from the whole of the society, which can be perceived both in compulsory and optional activities, in time management and in the system of the explanatory variables. All in all, we can state that in the world of campuses certain differences brought from home seem to fade away (type of settlement, parents` educational level), while others keep their explanatory power until the end of education (e.g. gender). We can also state that students` time management is structured by further variables that are not relevant to the whole of the society (e.g. faculty of university and college).

This problem under survey could be further analyzed with the help of other techniques and from other viewpoints as well, as time management covers only one part of lifestyle, and balance of time examination is just one type to reveal peoples` relation to time.

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