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LEISURE, ECONOMICS AND SOCIETY

Summary: The article analyzes the meaning of leisure both in economic theory and the real socio-economic life. This analysis notes that the specificity of today society is the reason for the lack of leisure time because one – after work hours – devotes his time to family and others. The author of the paper asks the question whether it is possible to achieve in socio-economic life such a state that one becomes his own leisure time owner and not a slave. The author believes that the lack of leisure time causes irreparable damages not only for a man, but also for social life.

Key words: leisure, man, economics, consumer strategies, value, society, cohesion.

1. Time and leisure

A famous philosopher wrote: “What is time? If nobody asks me, I know; but, if I try to explain it to who is asking, I do not know”. All around us talks about time: day, night, seasons, life, so this statement can seem a paradox, but it is not. Many, indeed, are there definitions of time in various sciences and each of us perceives time differently depending upon states of mind. There are days passing as minutes and minutes passing as days, nevertheless a man has measured time with almost absolute precision and, if not so, life in an organized society would become impossible.

Time also measures economic science, but a part of this science is built in absence of time: a static and a dynamic economic science exists, as in physics, and the two parts, although built on opposite principles, are complementary.

In static economics, for example, objectives of agents' behaviour in a market are defined: the research of the maximum utility of consumers and of maximum profit of sellers; dynamic economics studies their strategies, in which past experiences and future expectations coexist in order to decide on present actions. It is therefore possible to conclude that the comparison between contraries, between time and absence of time, motion and stillness, matter and antimatter, contributes to sciences progress.

Inside economic science the above mentioned antinomy seems today to show itself again when talking about free time defining it as the share of time at man's disposal, beyond working time, but this definition proves vague itself and incomplete,

as vague and incomplete is defining health as absence of illnesses and peace as absence of war.

The history of economics is also the history of leisure evolution: in the past, free time was a luxury guaranteed by efforts carried on by many and accessible to a closed *élite* of privileged persons; afterwards, industrial revolution and machines diffusion have increased labour productivity, and the opportunity of having free time has increasingly spread within society. Now, in post-industrial age, due to the impulse of socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors, leisure has become a mass phenomenon of huge importance and, as a consequence, the traditional value judgment according to which it was considered a luxury or a consolation with respect to work has changed. It has been estimated in fact that in Italy total free time at one's disposal increased five times from 1945 to 2000.

Leisure has now assumed the same dignity as working time. A survey by National Statistics Institute detects that only the 20% of Italians consider free time as a time "out of work and school", while other definitions such as "socializing time" or "time for oneself" are used, letting imagine a next future in which free time represents space in which men will be able to find their own realization.

Free time employment cannot be simply identified as rest: a survey on free time structure in Poland detects that, in order of importance, it is devoted to television, social relationships, sport, reading, rest, religious practices, hobbies, culture.

The above mentioned considerations confirm the overcoming of the opposite interpretation of the two aspects related to time, and show the opportunity of considering leisure as not alternative, but *complementary* with respect to working time.

In fact, if we consider that economic activity is aimed at satisfying needs, also leisure employment is, and so it will be possible to state that needs which are satisfied during free time are not strictly economic needs, but also human needs, closer to social, cultural and relational life. Therefore it can be concluded that free time is *human* as working time, and so it is complementary to it.

The fundamental elements of human nature affirmed by Greek philosophy, defining man as naturally social and political being, are reflected in two complementary aspects of human time, work and free time. Therefore free time can be analysed in its relationship with its role both in economic and social life.

2. Leisure and economics

From an economic point of view the phenomenon of free time can be considered under various aspects.

First of all, free time is the result of technological progress strongly labour saving, which has initially manifested itself mainly in manufacturing industry and has determined a substantial change in labour market structure, marking the shift to post-industrial economy in which employment of labour in services sector is prevailing.

Moreover, technological progress has strongly increased labour productivity, with the result of a general strong decrease of both daily and weekly average working time and working engagement overall duration.

Leisure has become thus, on its turn, a factor of economic development under various aspects: the first is that it can foster employment redistribution and can therefore be the prerequisite for interesting solutions to the problem of unemployment. Several studies, in reality, have underlined the fact that the evolution of technologies and company organization can make a complete reorganization of labour market possible, leading to a considerable decrease in unemployment rate.

This leads to some interesting remarks: first of all that the slogan “work less and work everybody”, which appeared during protest episodes some decades ago, could be less rhetorical and more feasible than one can expect; secondly, that not necessarily a situation of “development without job” would mean civil society decadence, as, for example, ancient Greece history shows. In this case the complete time availability as free time could lead, depending on the way of use of it, to complete civilization or to full decadence, and this leads to the conclusion that fundamental element of human behaviour is not only time, but the *quality* of time employment, both working and free.

Anyway, the achievement of the objective of greater employment in labour market shows considerable difficulties. The instruments that have been used in order to ensure greater employment flexibility have not succeeded, until now in obtaining a more balanced sharing of free time, but instead they have nourished a precarious situation in employment risking to result in a boost to a greater working engagement, in greater economic discrimination and, as a consequence, in a bigger imbalance in free time distribution among persons.

The increasing free time economic relevance is also noticed by statistical data: the offer of products and services of the so-called “free time industry” is not easily definable both because it is characterized by an extreme time variability and because the sector, in some particular components, is more identified by demand than by offer.

In this respect it can be useful to refer to some principal indicators of leisure published by Eurostat. The European average annual expenditure for amusements and culture in PPS increased by 6,9% from 1999 to 2005 year; in 2005 year the highest expenditure (3943 units) was in the United Kingdom, where in that period, however, it increased less than the average (6,5%); the lowest expenditure (224 units) was in Romania, but it nearly doubled the value of the initial period.

Among the founding countries of the European Union the most disappointing performance was that of Italy and Belgium (it respectively decreased by 8,1 and 8,9% compared to the initial period); among the EU25 states the highest percentage increased compared to the average in Lithuania (4,1%), which expresses an amount in value more than double compared to modest initial expenditure (316 units) during the period. In the opposite situation is Slovakia, which value took down more than 26%; finally the growth in Poland shows a value below 2,2% compared to the ave-

rage, with an absolute value equal to a little more than a quarter of the maximum growth.

Finally it is interesting to note that the lowest performance compared to the average of the period was registered in 9 states: 6 members of EU15, out of which four are its founders (Belgium, Luxemburg, France and Italy), and two joined in 1973 (Denmark and United Kingdom), and three members joined in 2004 (Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic). On the other hand the best performance belongs to four states which joined in 2004 (Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and Malta), to a member state of EU15 (Finland) and to a country which joined in 2007 (Romania).

Those data should be explained, at least partially, because the bigger increase appears in itself when the reference points are modest, but, from possible observations it can be deduced that the consumers have a strong propensity to the expenditure connected with leisure. An emblematic case can be that of Malta, which, although an initial datum, tenth in the ranking of absolute values (2079 units), showed in the examined period an increase of nearly 32%.

Moving to the analysis of the items concerning specific aspects of leisure expenditure, it is possible to observe, that the lack of data concerning the opening year of the period (1999) allows only pointing out in 2005 the percentage gaps of countries data compared to the European average. So the analysis, devoted to the expenditure on photographic and cinematographic equipment and optical instruments, books, newspapers and periodicals, shall concern countries of EU25, taking into account also two countries (Romania and Bulgaria), which joined in 2007.

In essence, compared to previous analysis the data reveal to be extremely diversified and unequal. Referring to the purchase of radio and television sets it only exceeded the European average in ten countries; seven of which with values higher or near 200%, whereas the remaining fifteen showed only in eight cases percentages higher than 8%. On the other hand books and newspapers are bought with percentages higher than the average in the most part of the cases; the remaining cases concern France, Ireland and Luxemburg.

The diversity of the results derives, with a very good probability, from many reasons, only partially economics. Certainly we can relate to elements such as price, duration and obsolescence of the goods, which establish the characteristic of supply, but the argument of the use of leisure, in his extreme variety and variability during the time, involves also elements of personal, psychological and sociological evaluation, which characterize the complex and changeable picture of demand. All that can explain, at least partially, the complexity of the strategies realized in that particular market, which importance is continually growing as time goes by.

In reference to some main economic indicators referred to leisure published by the United Nations Organization, the tourism expenditure of European Union countries from 2000 to 2004 showed a 56% increase, with the growth above the average for five countries of recent enlargement (Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and for Finland, Greece, Luxembourg and Spain; titles of published books,

circulated newspapers and magazines copies showed an increase above 3% between 2003 and 2005, and finally the number of television sets increased of about 6,7% between 1995 and 1997.

If we make reference to the expenditure on entertaining and amusement, according to Department for US Trade data, in 1990 those were about 280 billion dollars, the equivalent of 7% of consumers whole expenditure, and equal to the triple expenditure on new cars. If then we also consider that more than one third of transport expenditure is due to holiday trips, that 60% of passengers do not go on business trips, and finally that a great share of consumers expenditure for accommodation, clothing, food and education can be classified as leisure expenditure, it follows that, in an economic system as the American one, mainly led by consumers expenditure, the main economic activity is leisure.

But the economic meaning of leisure goes beyond the expenditure for spare time, because it is necessary to take into account that the greatest share of consumer expenditure is made *during* spare time. Holidays and festivals are considered to be leading periods for retails: in particular the Christmas sales can be a turning point for the yearly economic result of a business activity and, lastly, it is impossible to watch a television programme during the leisure without being interrupted by commercial breaks.

It has also been affirmed that to go shopping has become one of the most common ways of using free time; shopping centres have become a meeting point for young people after school and a place where also elder people meet during spare time.

In order to play this important role of places attracting people, commercial centres had to substantially change their image. As it has recently been affirmed in a study by Italian Central Statistics Institute, commercial centres have changed their way of showing themselves to the public. They indeed do not anymore simply appear as a complex of shops, but as exhibition spaces, a particular kind of museum where people can spend their time watching showed goods as if they were art crafts. In this particular situation leisure is together with the advantage deriving from the fact that while in a museum it is not possible to buy exhibited works, this is possible and satisfying in commercial centres.

In this way, free time and economic time go together and are no longer distinguishable, and this is the result of a strategy thanks to which managers of economic and commercial activities, in order to get greater profits, sell not only goods, but also free time services.

- Now it seems to be possible to come back to the initial point of the analysis
- i.e. to the question we wanted to answer, if free time is residual with respect to working time,
 - or, complementary to it, the hypothesis of their substantial identity in the present post-industrial society ways and styles of living.

In order to solve this uncertainty, a possible way is not to analyse free time only under the aspect of its quantity, as an economic entity, but also from the quality point of view, so to underline social relevance of leisure.

3. Leisure and society

To start this problem it can be observed that in the evaluation of an economic system gross domestic product (GDP) appears only as a value of goods and services realized, without comprising the non commodities, as environmental pollution, that can risk humanity survival, but to which it is impossible to assign a market value being difficult to quantify them. However, everyone becomes aware that GDP could increase more for the construction of a public park than for the presence of a factory or for the achievement of a non polluting productive system than one harmful for the environment. This way of thinking can be applied also to leisure: indeed. Everyone can realize that, if we should succeed in adding the drift value from the expenditure to the GDP during free time, this could reach a considerably larger value and, at the same time, the consciousness of the importance of leisure expenditure could grow in society.

Referring to this a sociologist Daniel Bell affirmed that the post-industrial society would require a change in the structure of its values, adding to the values linked to the production efficiency the values connected with the achievement of social aims. This claim is based on the assumption that the expenditure of time by a man, must be necessarily geared to the fulfilment of a need, and that the last can be closely economic or closer to the social, cultural and relational life. In any case the two sides, the time and the needs that it can fulfil, are linked to the nature of a man and, for this reason, they are complementary, since they concern both the biological aspect and the social, political nature of his life.

In essence this extension of the scale of values in the contemporary society expresses the requirement of a "leisure culture" as a statement of opportunity through which use the man could reach a better and more absolute achievement for himself, not only in respect of relaxation and amusement, but also in respect of culture and three basic social dimensions: family, friendship and associationism.

Observing the reality there are not many available data to find one's bearing on "how" persons perceive the spare time, but information can be contained in a sample survey accomplished in Italy in years 1995 and 2000. Most of the interviewed considered the leisure as "time for oneself" and "time for rest", with an overall value of an answer that increased from 88,8 to 89,2 as far as the social dimension of leisure was concerned - and that is "time to give to the other", "time for friends", "time for the couple" and "time for the family". The overall value of the answer changed from 69,3 to 70,7 From the four possible indications only "time for family" increased, while all the other three noticeably decreased.

In every case, also if data tend to show that probably the social value of leisure is not still perceived adequately by persons, the fact remains that leisure can assume an important rule not only to realize itself fully, but also to build values of social cohesion and comprehension in a period in which isolation, divisions and conflicts still linger in human societies. In this dimension time there is indeed wealth and, as

every kind of capital, it will have to be used better and better not only for everyone but also, and perhaps most of all, for everybody.

The time is not pass without meaning for a man: in ancient times it was claimed that the dream of every man was to live on his own island; today, nowadays, we realize that men cannot advance alone, but they have to do it together.

Indeed, this is the way of future. As an Italian dreamer wrote: seas will become really seas, skies will become really skies, and roads will become really roads when a time will come in which men shall regard time as essential to really meet and understand each other, in an horizon that shall consider time as a good in the service of man and human society, abandoning forever a past which, for a long time, made the man as a slave of time.

WOLNY CZAS, EKONOMIA I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO

Streszczenie: W artykule analizuje się znaczenie czasu wolnego nie tylko w teorii ekonomicznej, ale również w realnym życiu społecznym i gospodarczym. Analiza ta zwraca uwagę na to, że specyfika funkcjonowania obecnego społeczeństwa sprawia, iż człowiek nie posiada czasu wolnego dla siebie, ponieważ poza pracą zwykle poświęca czas dla rodziny i dla innych. W opracowaniu autor zadaje pytanie, czy możliwe jest, aby w życiu społeczno-gospodarczym osiągnąć taki stan, w którym człowiek będzie gospodarzem wolnego czasu, a nie jego niewolnikiem. Autor uważa, że brak wolnego czasu w obecnej teraźniejszości przynosi niepowetowane straty nie tylko dla człowieka, ale również dla życia społecznego.