

Abstract

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The purpose and aim of the thesis is to explain the development of working time. The analysis of working time includes two dimensions, not only a quantitative dimension, that is the length of the working week, but also a qualitative dimension. The qualitative dimension includes distribution, intensity, and influence on working time. The working time configuration is thus analysed. Actors in the analysis are the labour market organisations and the state. A natural time-limit in this thesis is the late nineteenth century when labour market organisations were founded. Institutional settings and the organisation of production are analysed in order to understand the behaviour of the actors in the working time issue. The organisation of production includes technology, work organisation, and production concepts.

Methodologically this thesis compares in time and space. The main sources in the thesis are official committee reports, collective agreements, and negotiating protocols, case-studies, and interviews.

The thesis shows that working time in Sweden has decreased during four relatively limited periods intervened by periods without changes. The international description shows great similarities among the studied countries, i. e. Germany, Denmark, and Finland. The most important institutional factor is unemployment. Unemployment has been a very important trigger for demands to reduce working time in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. I show that quantitative changes in working time are coupled with qualitative changes in working time. A common denominator in the development during the twentieth century is a more intensified use of working time.

To interpret the development of working time I elaborate a theoretical framework. A central feature in this framework is the notion of economic and industrial development in leaps. These development blocks feature a transformation phase, a rationalisation phase, and a phase of structural crisis, leading to a new transformation phase. I claim that the three periods with working time reductions in the last century are connected to these development blocks. Within these development blocks, in the rationalisation phase, changes in working time have then occurred and new working-time regimes have evolved. This also explains the discontinuity in the development of working hours. In periods of reduced working hours transformations of the qualitative aspect of working time were desirable for employers. Employers see working time as an irreversible process. They are therefore unwilling to oblige demands on reduced working time in exchange for reduced pay only. Qualitative changes in hours of work originate from production needs and new work organisational ideas. Working time reductions have been possible through an exchange between higher work intensity and a new working time configuration.

Key words: hours of work, working time reductions, flexibility, organisation of production, work organisation, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Finland.