Bokprojektet: Attitudes towards work

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My contribution is a following up on the result from my dissertation *Attitudes toward Work in Western Europe and the United States*. In my thesis I used ISSP’s questionnaires *Workorientation I 1989* and *Workorientation II 1997* to study similarities and differences in people’s attitudes towards work in Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, Great Britain and US. ISSP has now carried out the survey for a third time, *Workorientation III 2005*, and I will take the opportunity to use this data to my contribution.

In my thesis I distinguished between four attitudes towards work. I took my departure in Goldthorpe’s et al. typology of three orientations to work: the instrumental, the solidaristic and bureaucratic orientation. However, relating these orientations to Weber’s action-typology, I claimed that it should be possible to expect also a fourth orientation, which I called individualistic. This is an orientation that looks upon work as an arena for self-fulfilment and self-realisation, i.e. a post-material orientation towards work.

In a factor-analysis of items from the work orientation questionnaire I found patterns that resemble the theoretical pre-understanding. However, the empirical attitude-dimensions did not completely correspond to the model. Firstly, I found an instrumental attitude, i.e. work is as a way of earning money, nothing more. This dimension is more common among manual labours than other occupational groups, among men and people with primary education. Secondly, I found a materialistic attitude in which a career and a high salary are of importance in a job. This dimension resembles the bureaucratic orientation to work and in particular characterize managers but also the youngest age group (18-29 year). Thirdly, an altruistic attitude was distinguished. A work that is important for society and in which you can help other people are regarded as important work-values. This attitude is more common among women and public employees. And lastly, I found what I am calling an individualistic attitude in which work autonomy is of importance. This attitude characterizes self-employed and professionals (only in Sweden, Norway and Germany).
In my chapter I will try to replicate these analyses, i.e. study if we find the same orientations to work in the 2005 questionnaire, and if the same groups are characterised by the attitudes. I will also study if there are any mean differences over time in the countries on the attitude-scales, and, in that case, discuss such changes.

In my thesis, the countries for comparisons were selected from the idea that attitudes towards work will vary depending on how the welfare state is organized, i.e. how generous and encompassing the social security systems are in the countries. I argued that the Nordic welfare states, with generous and universal social security system, have decommodifying effects on the labour force, which could affect people’s work orientation. Pecuniary reason to work will be downplayed in favour of more post-material orientations, i.e. as an activity of self-realisation. Therefore, I hypothesised that an individualistic attitude towards work should be more common in Norway and Sweden than in the other countries. The results from the study pointed in that direction. On the other hand, in the liberal welfare state represented by GB and US, the hypothesis was that pecuniary reasons to work should be more in the forefront. And I found that the materialistic and instrumental attitude were more common in these countries than in the Nordic countries. All in all, the patterns were quite as expected.

However, a critic that has been raised against this perspective is that countries also can be viewed upon as different production regimes and this should be the point of departure for comparisons rather than welfare state regimes. Production regimes are a more encompassing concept in which states are classified through the institutional systems of the production, the labour market and the welfare state (Hult 2004). There are two main configurations of production systems: Coordinated market economies (CME) and liberal market economies (LME). The production systems in CMEs are characterized by cooperation between unions and employers, qualified education and training, and a wish to compete on the global market through quality rather than costs. The production system is therefore dependent on a highly skilled and motivated work force that has a long-term relationship to the employer. Furthermore, the labour market use to be quite regulated and the welfare state generous. The production systems in LMEs have a more short term horizon in search for profit. The relationship between employers and employees are also more short term, hierarchical, and based on control by management. The labour market is deregulated and the welfare state is less generous.
In my chapter I will try to incorporate the concept of production regimes in a study of differences in attitudes towards work between the countries. In particular, I will use measures of the productions systems of the countries, i.e. autonomy, relationships with management, possibility of training to improve skills and job security, and study if these measures can explain differences. In doing this I hope to be in a position to discuss if it is more internal relationships in the production system that explain attitudinal differences between the countries, or if it is differences in the decommodifying effect of the welfare state.