

International Research Group for the Social Study of the Weekend: *Enhancing the comparative study of the social uses of time*

Recently, a group of British, French and Portuguese researchers joined in an effort to further develop, through the theoretical and empirical means of the social sciences, the understanding of the causes and implications of the transformations the *weekend* has gone through in the last few decades. By engaging in this debate, these researchers wish to enhance the comparative study of the production, appropriation and socially differentiated ways of using *time*, this way contributing to the recapture of one of the core subjects in the history of social sciences.

Despite some important reconfigurations the economy and the sphere of social practices have gone through, it's accurate to say that the weekend has remained a relevant and pervasive institution. This is the result of a long, complex and sometimes conflictive historical process leading to its shift from being merely "the end of the week" to being "the weekend", a separate time (and space) with its own specificities. In recent times, though, some important transformations seem to have taken their course. However to a greater or lesser extent, for many people the weekend is being eroded in the move towards greater "productivity", the maximisation of profit or "output". The weekend as the privileged time-space for social encounters, leisure and individual and collective expression of cultural demands is far from being universally taken for granted, so to say.

Notwithstanding, it seems the weekend continues to be a significant "organiser" of meanings and practices in people's everyday lives. If it is so, how is it significant and why? What do people actually *do* on Saturdays and Sundays these days? Is it possible that the weekend "as we used to know it" is somehow being lost? For whom and in what conditions?

The constitution of a research group focusing on these questions would allow the opportunity to address a number of contemporary social and political issues dealing with the changes and present configuration of time and especially with this specific time that's the weekend. Although it seems that there's a growing pressure

towards the erosion of the boundaries between the weekend and workdays, only a deepening of the theoretical and methodological debate and of comparative fieldwork research on these matters can actually allow us to assess the extent of this weekend “encroachment” and the persistent socially differentiated forms of producing and using this specific time-space configuration.

The inception workshop of this newly created research group, hosted by the Institute of Sociology in March 2011 at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto, with funding by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), was an opportunity to address these issues, by gathering around the table the outlooks, insights and work experiences of several researchers sharing an interest on the matters of social transformations and the uses of time. Subjects such as the historical formation of “week” and “weekend” as separated times; the historic linkage between the uses of time and religion; the transformations in religious practice and its times; the changing uses and perceptions of time in different social contexts, such as the ageing inner city and the rural community; the specific ways through which migrants use and perceive work time and spare time; the new patterns of organising the week and living the weekend precarious workers put forward; and the changes in leisure associated with economic restructuring and the emergence of new means of communication were all addressed at the group’s inception workshop in Porto, following the presentation of the results of some of the researches the participants are presently involved in¹.

The consolidation of an international interdisciplinary research group was the main corollary of the meeting. Although it has a set of core members, the structure of the group will remain informal and open to the participation of researchers interested in the study of the weekend and the general issue of time and its uses from a social science historically informed perspective – and basing on the results of field research, whenever possible. The comparative study of these subjects the constitution of an international research group of this kind will allow will be especially interesting for the assessment of the extent of the supposed transnational trend toward the deregulation of time and the subsequent dilution of the boundaries between the week and the weekend or, contrariwise, for the depiction of national, regional or local specific forms of “protecting” and maybe reinventing the uses of the weekend and of free time. And it’ll also surely be a great opportunity for theoretical and methodological crossover and innovation.

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¹ See http://isociologia.pt/App_Files/Documents/irgssweekend_3-4march2011_110301093136.pdf for some additional information on the March 2011 group meeting and the group’s core members.

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