

Stefanie Gerold | Michael Soder

Killing three birds with one stone?

Exploring the effects of a working-time reduction policy on well-being, gender and the environment

Stefanie Gerold

Institute for Ecological Economics, WU Vienna

Macroeconomic Policy Institute (IMK), Hans Böckler Foundation, Germany

Introduction

Working-time reduction as a cornerstone for a sustainable economy to ...

- reduce unemployment and mitigate growth pressures (Antal 2014; Jackson/Victor 2011)
- improve health and well-being (e.g. Wirtz et al. 2009; Alesina et al. 2005)
- reduce gender disparities in paid and unpaid work (e.g. Sirianni/Negrey 2000; Coote et al. 2010)
- reduce environmental pressures (e.g. Knight et al. 2013)

Introduction

Working-time reduction as a cornerstone for a sustainable economy

- Actual effects of WTR depend on respective policy design and institutional circumstances (Kallis et al. 2013)
- Voluntary, flexible WTR with income cuts to achieve both well-being and environmental benefits (Pullinger 2014)
- Channeling future productivity gains into more leisure – more acceptable than income cuts (Schor 2005)

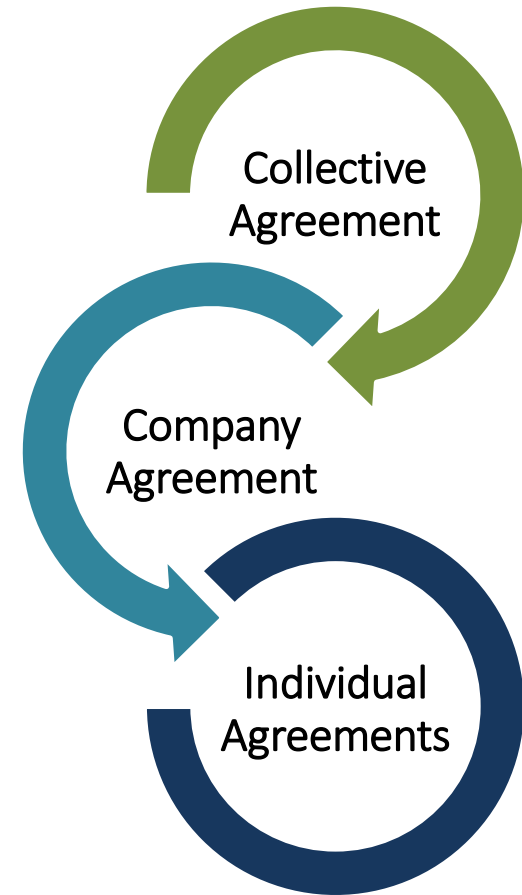
The Leisure Option („Freizeitoption“)

in the collective agreement 2013 of the electrics/electronics industry in Austria

3% **pay raise** or additional **leisure time**
(approx. 5h/month or 60h/year)

Agreement between **works council** and
company management

Agreements between **employees** and
company management



Data and methods

Research question:

What are the implications of the leisure option on employees' **well-being**, **gender equality** and the **environment**?

- 18 problem-centred interviews with employees of a large company in the electrics/electronics industry in Austria
- Qualitative content analysis

Findings

How do employees use the leisure option?

- Mostly for single days, e.g. long weekends, or combined with regular holidays
- Some accumulate over time (for early retirement or sabbatical)
- Time mostly used for family and children, also for sports, weekend trips, recreation

Implications on well-being and work-life balance

- Positive effects, mostly due to additional autonomy and flexibility in time management, but also due to recreational effects

Findings

Implications on gender equality

- Leisure option often used for family and children
- It enables men to participate in family life, and relieves women in reconciling family and work
- Women (have to) use the leisure option regularly, men tend to save it

Implications on the environment (in terms of consumption)

- Income losses might reduce consumption
- Less working days lowers emissions from commuting
- Activities in leisure time: short weekend trips vs. family time

Conclusions

- Findings suggest that voluntary, flexible working-time reductions (with income losses) have the potential to increase employees' well-being, improve gender equality, and reduce environmental pressures.
- But there are also **trade-offs** and **conflicts**:
 - Income losses might be good for the environment, but not feasible for part-time workers or those with low incomes
 - Fewer working days might reduce emissions from commuting, but gender equality might benefit more from shorter daily hours

Literature

- Antal, M. (2014). Green goals and full employment: Are they compatible? *Ecological Economics* 107, 276–286.
- Coote, A., Franklin, J., and Simms, A. (2010). 21 hours. Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century (London: New Economics Foundation).
- Coyne, I.T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 26, 623–630.
- Jackson, T., and Victor, P. (2011). Productivity and work in the “green economy”: some theoretical reflections and empirical tests. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 1, 101–108.
- Kallis, G., Kalush, M., O’Flynn, H., Rossiter, J., and Ashford, N. (2013). “Friday off”: Reducing Working Hours in Europe. *Sustainability* 5, 1545–1567.
- King, L.C., and van den Bergh, J.C.J.M. (2017). Worktime Reduction as a Solution to Climate Change: Five Scenarios Compared for the UK. *Ecological Economics* 132, 124–134.
- Knight, K.W., Rosa, E.A., and Schor, J.B. (2013). Could working less reduce pressures on the environment? A cross-national panel analysis of OECD countries, 1970–2007. *Global Environmental Change* 23, 691–700.
- Pullinger, M. (2014). Working time reduction policy in a sustainable economy: Criteria and options for its design. *Ecological Economics* 103, 11–19.
- Schor, J.B. (2005). Sustainable consumption and worktime reduction. *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 9, 37–50.
- Sirianni, C., Negrey, C. (2000). Working time as gendered time, in: *Feminist Economics* 6/1, 59-76.
- Witzel, A. (2000). The Problem-centered Interview. *Forum Qualitative Social Research* 1.