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Biographies and Volunteering: the Distribution of Social Time in the Society

Abstract

The distribution of time forms both biographies and societies. The distinction between work and everyday life does not take the variety of social tasks performed into account. The first part of the article thus deals with the questions of the existing contexts of supportive social work and the criteria for their definition. As meta-categories, family-related work, volunteering, paid work, and work on oneself are described. The individual biographical schema of life can be oriented toward a select, single work form or it can be pluralistic, meaning that the person combines different forms of work. On the level of the society, the coverage of social tasks results from this individual decision, together with existential security, and fairness in the distribution of paid and unpaid work between woman and men. Therefore, the distribution of responsibility for different social support issues among state, private enterprise, civil society, and family is important. The empirical study combines two qualitative methods (n= 50 volunteers, n= 12 experts) and two quantitative surveys (n= 100 volunteers, n= 45 institutional experts). The instruments reveal the different means of entry into volunteering, the dimensions of sense, and the needed resources and competencies. Moreover, the learning effects and the impact on life are presented. As a recent project, attention is paid to the development of a web tool, which offers a social time profile. Everybody can make a comparison to other people and reflect on the allotment of their own time.

Contexts of social work

Although the issue of the distribution of time is essential to biographies, there is uncertainty about the categories in which we distribute our time. The classical divisions between "work" and "leisure" or between "work" and "free time" are becoming increasingly inadequate. Heimgartner and Findenig (2017) and Heimgartner (2018) have therefore developed a list of categories of social contexts over which time is distributed. Five main categories are taken into account (cf. table 1):

- a) *Personal growth related work*: So far, little attention has been paid to the question of time for oneself. The rarely used term *personal work* signals that the person needs phases of rejuvenation, self-care and education. Relationships in general can benefit from individuals working on themselves.

- b) *Family-related work*: A second block is related to *family-related work*, which has different sub-types (e.g. education and caring for children, caring for one's partner or parents and grandparents, household tasks, etc.).
- c) *Volunteering*: A third block of activities is related to *volunteering*, which is usually divided into two forms, formal (organisational) and informal (non-organisational) volunteering.
- d) *Paid work*: For the economic wellbeing in our society, forms of *paid work* are essential. There are also various specific forms of work (i.e. depending on the degree of involvement in the social system).
- e) *Other forms of work*: In addition, *other forms of work* are considered, e.g. practical training, bartering on a local basis, civil service obligations and compulsory military service.

In order to be able to determine differences and similarities in all the ways of spending time, the set of defining criteria (cf. Table 1) is correspondingly long, e.g. payment, obligation, integration into an organisation, family relationship, etc. The presented list is longer than the usually used defining criteria when only one main category is dealt with, e.g. volunteering is characterised as unpaid, aimed outside the household and voluntary. However, in regard to the complexity and the variety of needed distinctions, the number of defining criteria increases.

Singularistic vs. pluralistic biographies

In view of the multitude of ways one might spend time, we know relatively little about the time use distribution of people over their lifetimes. It is clear that different time uses are prevalent in different phases of life. It is exciting to presume that this is not only the consequence of individual decisions, rather it is also due to a recognition of social conditions and constraints, which leads to different biographical outcomes.

For our context the primary interesting question is whether it is possible to combine family-related work, paid work and volunteering. A biographical makeup combining these three work forms equally is labelled as a pluralistic biography. It differs from a singularistic biographical solution wherein only one form of work dominates, e.g. focusing only on paid work, only volunteering or positioning family-related work in the foreground.

Table 1: Categories of time distribution and defining criteria

Main Categories	Context of time distribution / defining criteria	Payment	Social assurance	Financial support	Obligation – not voluntary	Organisational	Documented units	Household	Family related	Education related	Focus on oneself
Personal time	work on oneself	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
Family-related work	family-related work: care and raising of children	no	partly	yes	yes	no	no	partly	yes	no	no
	family-related work: taking care of parents	no	partly	possible	partly	no	no	partly	yes	no	no
	family-related work: taking care of partner	no	partly	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
	family-related work: household	no	partly	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
	family-related work: relatives	no	no	possible	partly	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Volunteering	informal volunteering	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
	formal volunteering	no	partly	no	no	yes	no	no	no	partly	no
Paid work	side employment	yes	partly	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no
	paid work with social security contribution	yes	yes	possible	no	yes	no	no	no	partly	no
	undocumented work	yes	no	no	no	partly	no	no	no	no	no
Other forms of work	exchange work	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
	compulsory civil and military service	no	partly	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
	volunteer work	no	partly	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no
	practical training	possible	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no

It is interesting to think about the different consequences biographical approaches collectively lead to (cf. Olk, 1992, Jakob, 1993, Hollstein, 2015). What are the effects for the society when some categories of work are encouraged and others are neglected? It is a question about the social support quality of our society and therefore elicits the question of which quality criteria we want to see realised. Security and safety, gender equality, and coverage of social support seem to be central crite-

ria. Whereas security and social support are not easily to quantify and differ individually, the distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women is clear (Statistik Austria, 2009, Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015). Currently, it can be said that the time spent in unpaid and paid work between women and men is unequally distributed (cf. Table 2). About half of the populace still does more unpaid work than the other half (cf. Funk, 1992, Wessels, 1993, Beher, Liebig & Rauschenbach, 2000).

Table 2: Distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men (hours per week)

	Statistics Austria (2009) (covering more than 10 years)		Federal Statistical Office Germany (2015) (covering more than 18 years)	
	women	men	women	men
Paid work	19:42	30:42	16:09	25:13
Unpaid work	32:06	17:36	29:29	19:21

Unpaid volunteering activities in Austria are unequally distributed. There are some groups in the society that are more engaged in volunteer efforts than other groups (cf. Chart 1). In particular, it depends on age, rural or urban living, educational level and profession.

State, private enterprise, civil society or family

It is also important to consider the different activities performed by the state, the private sector, the civil society and the family system. Due to the heterogeneity and overlapping of these greater functional systems of the society, differences can only be defined in a goal-oriented manner.

However, it seems obvious to assume that the *private economy*, through its paradigms and structures, features specific services. As often require more cost-intensive face-to-face involvement.

The modes of *civil society* differ from for-profit on the basis of the liberation from monetary dependency. There is often a community-orientated process. In particular, the purpose, the common good and social wellbeing come to the fore. Human problems and needs initiate volunteering, although there is no financial compensation. Domains included in the civil society are disaster relief, culture activities, environment support, religion, social affairs, politics, community affairs, education and sport.

The *state*, with its special financial possibilities, has its own content priorities. It has specific tasks on the agenda; they are dependent on the recognition of problems. In addition, it is mainly material and thus limited in scope.

Finally, a relatively strong, emotional bond characterises the *family*. Moreover, in the family as a primary institution, there is a realisation pressure that is immedi-

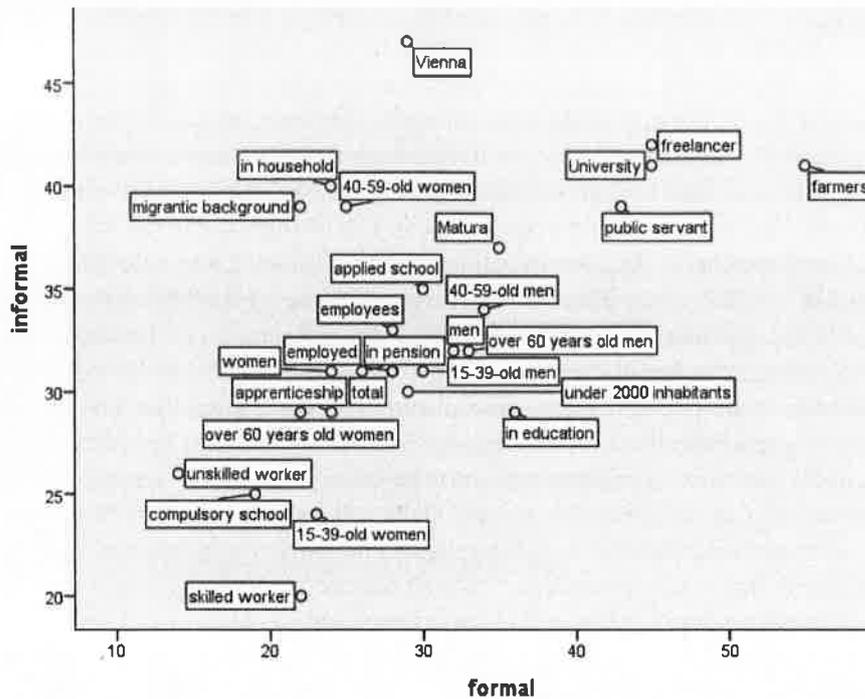


Chart 1: Rates of informal and formal volunteering in Austria (per cent) (Source IFES, 2013, Hofer, 2015)

ate and existential in everyday life. Therefore, they have to take care of such issues in any way they can, depending on the options available, as the family is the last line of support. In contrast, families and individuals carry the risk of excessive isolationism, so the individual and family interests do not necessarily have to encompass the social needs and concerns of the community.

Methods of the study

In a qualitative empirical study, volunteers (n=50) and expert representatives of institutions (n=20) distributed throughout Austria were asked about the biographical relevance of volunteering (cf. Heimgartner & Findenig, 2017). Two different guides were used for the interviews, and 13 main dimensions were included in the guide for the interviews with the volunteers: start and course, activities, figures of sense, participation possibilities, experiences, resources and competences, learning processes, value, relations, relationship to the addressees, supervision, limits, potential. After the transcription, a content analysis was performed (MAXQDA supported). These methods are quantitatively supplemented. Two differing surveys involved 100 volunteering persons (age: mean = 48.33; sex: 64.6% female) and 45 institutions, in which volunteers are working.

Results

First, the interviewed persons described their entry into volunteering. The heterogeneity of the biographies is apparent from the very start. Social contexts, problem contexts and connections to individual personalities have been delineated. Some people note a familial background. The social milieu in which one is living can also lead to the decisive stimulus for commitment. Life changes are in the focus of other life descriptions, e.g. children in school, children moving out or retirement are examples of this content. There is additional access based on the issue or the problem. On the one hand, individually experienced suffering gives the impetus for a wish to change something in society. Frequently, it is the individual need for social contact that triggers a volunteer commitment. This is true for people who are unemployed in particular. On the other hand, there is the perceived need or the awareness of the problems of other people. It is the desire to improve their life situations. Contexts are also the competencies that make you feel suited to a particular voluntary activity. Here, references to internships and work are mentioned. Some people mention that volunteering is part of their life concept. Finally, simple research is also partially responsible for finding a way into volunteering.

Table 3: Entry paths to volunteering

Social context	Problem context	Personality context
family roots	individual problem	individual competencies
children in school, grown-up children, moving out of the children	solve problems	work experiences
social milieu and role models	individual unemployment	educational practice
start of retirement	social inclusion	life concept

Dimensions of sense

Volunteering is considered to be a stronghold of sense (cf. Peglow, 2002). In this study, 17 different meanings are specified. They have been coded into the following categories:

- Characteristics (e.g. social thinking)
- Altruistic sense constructions (e.g. pleasure, deficiencies in the lives of the others)
- Political meaning (e.g. empowering others, political position)
- Conceptual ideas and role-consciousness as a citizen (e.g. duty)
- Cross-life intercultural reconstructions (e.g. "because I have done well in life, I want to give something back")
- Social exchange situations (e.g. feedback, resonance)

- Need-related sense (e.g. change, curiosity, health, happiness)
- Meaningful dimensions of shaping the society (e.g. desire for change)
- Religious approaches (e.g. conveying faith)
- Self-referencing moments (e.g. individual mission)
- Egocentric considerations (e.g. deficits)
- Community-oriented orientation (e.g. positive coexistence)

People interpret their demands and perceptions very individually and integrate them into their life concepts in different ways. For example, the “change in a small world” is indicative of a modest approach that deliberately separates itself from a comprehensive world improvement or even omnipotence. Co-determination can be claimed in the individual organisation, as it refers to the choice of the services or to the freedom to opt out. This gives a feeling of power. An important background for those who volunteer can be a general want to shape and to transform society.

Resources and competencies for volunteering

The attention to the organisational conditions of formal volunteering has increased in the last decade, e.g. volunteering organisations, volunteering centres, education for volunteers, coordination of volunteering (cf. Rosenkranz & Weber, 2002, More-Hollerweger & Heimgartner, 2009, Hofer, 2015).

The results concerning the required resources for engagement are on the contrary surprisingly scarce. This corresponds to a want for spontaneity and independence. As an example of spontaneity, the following example may apply: “I am not a person who thinks a lot about things. I then started to raise money. We sat down there and, as I said, made some contacts, where we asked for cooperation and for financial help. We needed a car and a place. I didn’t have anything at all. So nothing. I did not even have a car at the time. But we just needed it to go around and search for sponsors. We then went to the S. and K. and asked everywhere.”(AI_10: 30). Engaged people refer to only four dimensions: the time, the space, the materials and an accompanying person(s). Although volunteering is subject to a more complex organisational model, this has to be taken as an inspiration when reflecting on the thresholds for the commitment.

The important competencies are first of all found in the interpersonal area. Emotional lines (e.g. “compassion”) and communicative concepts (e.g. “eye-to-eye communicating”, “approaching people”) are connected with inner values (e.g. “personal optimism”, “not the boss”). The communicative concepts are also relevant for organisational cooperation. As a starting point, personal care is mentioned (e.g. “to take care of oneself”, “recognise one’s own limitations”). In addition, the interviewed persons point out the fact that for some services, formal qualifications are necessary.

Learning and impacts in volunteering

Volunteering is a way of learning (cf. Düx, Prein, Sass & Tully, 2009). In our study, the primary outcome expressed is an emotional state. Volunteering is rewarding through contact with valuable people and institutions. It means the establishment of relationships, sometimes friendships. A further meta-statement is captured with “no stuck thinking”. It is thus clear that volunteers are developing through their tasks and relationships. On the other hand, there is the avoidance of isolation and boredom. On a personal level, the establishing of borders is also mentioned. The experience with new settings is also a source of education. They are also regarded as being at the core of positive perception. To be successful, to be accepted, to be praised, to please others – these are important dimensions connected with the settings.

The support of volunteers includes a number of different offers for further training (e.g. meetings, seminars, courses). This continuing education also has a rewarding character. It is also interesting to note that prerequisite training can raise interest in volunteer issues. People appreciate being able to improve and test themselves via further education.

Volunteers talk about a fuller life, and also about friendships that have developed. Their own inclusion is important in everyday life-related situations such as the loneliness of older people, paid unemployment or migration, regardless whether it is regional or transnational migration. A relationship to one's own health is therefore introduced.

The quality of the connections between paid work, formal volunteering, informal volunteering, family-related work, personal work and paid work: conducive, neutral or conflicting

The gender perspective reveals that men in particular have a very cohesive interpretation of paid work and personal time. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to find paid employment conflicts with family-related work (33%), formal volunteering (32%), and also with time for oneself (25%). 41% of the men also confirm that formal volunteering and paid work conflict with each other. Many women, on the other hand, find informal volunteering and family-related work to be compatible (56%). They also say that formal volunteering and family-related work are positively associated (43%). For both sexes, formal volunteering and personal time are beneficial (56% women, 58% men). 18% of women and 11% of men experience a conflict between time for themselves and time for the family.

Table 4: Assessment of the relationship between work categories

Work Category	Women			Men		
	Beneficial	Neutral	Conflicting	Beneficial	Neutral	Conflicting
Formal to informal	46.3%	44.4%	9.3%	46.4%	46.4%	7.1%
Formal to family	43.3%	38.3%	18.3%	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%
Formal to paid	31.5%	37.0%	31.5%	37.0%	22.2%	40.7%
Formal to personal	56.4%	29.1%	14.5%	57.7%	34.6%	7.7%
Informal to family	57.9%	36.8%	5.3%	29.6%	59.3%	11.1%
Informal to paid	24.5%	54.7%	20.8%	19.2%	50.0%	30.8%
Informal to personal	47.4%	38.6%	14.0%	33.3%	63.0%	3.7%
Family to paid	25.9%	40.7%	33.3%	38.5%	38.5%	23.1%
Paid to personal	36.5%	38.5%	25.0%	64.0%	20.0%	16.0%
Family to personal	49.1%	32.7%	18.2%	44.4%	44.4%	11.1%

Connections between formal engagement and family

The explanations of the connections between formal volunteering and the family show a diverse picture (cf. Table 5). In some individual biographies volunteering has a compensatory function that replaces fragile family structures. A conceptual extension has also been found in this direction; some volunteers regard the people that they are helping as their family.

As a challenging management task, the compatibility between family, formal volunteering and paid work is described. It is considered to be a permanent struggle related to making temporal compromises. The long list of tasks in the family can also be an impediment for a voluntary commitment. However, constructive designs are also noted. Task-related, ideals and existence-assisted support of the partner are mentioned.

Criticism is introduced in relation to the lack of financial compensation for unpaid work. A family budget under the control of the partner does not mean having personal retirement savings; separations and divorces can worsen living situations. It is interesting to conclude that the family also benefits from a volunteering family member through that person's increased life satisfaction, learning processes, and positive experiences as a whole.

Table 5: Support, hindrance and compensation of family and volunteering

Support	Hindrance	Compensation
Learned as child	Compatibility as a task	Broken or missing family
Appreciation of the family	Family as hindrance	Family for the clients
Family financial situation		Family problems as starting point
Support of partner		
Family benefits		

Connections of formal volunteering, paid work and informal volunteering

The relationship between volunteering and paid work is difficult to see clearly in several aspects. On the one hand, it is noted that many voluntarily done tasks should be paid; on the other hand, respondents report difficulties on the side of employers to agree on a combination of formal volunteering and paid work. However, there are also positive experiences: improved compatibility and enrichment of life are mentioned. It is reported that some employers support volunteering in three ways; (a) as a volunteer; (b) with time for the volunteers; (c) with understanding and support for the creation of the time-compatibility. A transformation of formal commitment to paid work is also pointed out in some cases.

Informal and the formal engagement sometimes compete temporally, although both are characterised by a similar social style. Increased formal volunteering can thus lead to a decline in informal engagement on an individual basis.

Institutional developments in the years 2000 to 2016

Overall, according to the figures of the institutions involved, the number of volunteers in the social sector increased on average from 2000 to 2016. The percentage of over-60 participants is above the percentage of 24 year olds in the surveyed organisations, however the number of under-24 volunteers is growing gradually. In the interviews, a development of volunteering as pre-employment and post-employment and pre-family event and post-family event is stated. The number of pluralistic biographies, which consider volunteering over the lifetime, sees no changes. A U-curve is also to be found. This means that a higher participation rate among younger and older people and a relative decline in active participation in the family and professional phase is recognised. Participation in social support services has been taken on more by women, according to the surveyed organisations. In the interviews, the desire for more men contributing in the social sector is expressed. It points to the fundamental question of whether a balance of women and men in all sectors is called for, or if different domains in volunteering of women and men are acceptable.

Concerning gender, there is also a discussion about vertical discrimination. Women, relative to their involvement in woman-dominated sectors, still too rarely manage the organisations. It is difficult to say how gender equality can be achieved concerning the imbalance of unpaid and paid work. The starting point is that the acceptance of the taking on of paid work and the related training measures for both sexes have increased. One strategy is to redistribute family responsibilities to the state and to the private sector, so that the time is available for paid work. The evaluation of this shift depends on the extent to which a loss of quality of life results from this shift away from family life. In addition, men could work less on a paid basis and they could be more concerned with unpaid tasks. However, men must have the

financial stability to be able to do so. Especially in view of the high level of identification that men have with paid work, this is unlikely – despite all the life quality and equality arguments.

The helping of refugees in recent years is considered to be a decisive phase in the development of voluntary commitment in Austria. In an almost entirely novel way, people have built up their own structures of engagement. With strong support from the new forms of media, and also with a new assumption of responsibility, initiatives have emerged in large numbers, which at least complement the traditional systems and organisational structures.

Such initiatives have shown different speeds of realisation. A threatening development in volunteering in this area is the polarisation about providing assistance. It revives the traditional debate surrounding the acceptance of problems and emergencies. Not all human problems are equally recognised (e.g. poverty, psychological problems and traumatisation) and volunteers in this field are therefore sometimes criticised.

Voluntary commitment is not just for some people (e.g. addressee, client); it also has an integrative relevance for the volunteers themselves (including people with mental problems, people searching for paid work, people with cognitive impairments, people of an advanced age) (cf. Munsch 2003). For all of them, their own volunteering and participation can be used to improve on their education and integration. Accompanying people in volunteering takes on a new quality, the intensity increases, linguistic skills have to be expanded, psychological skills are necessary, permanent support and assistance are to be introduced, all of which may exceed the current available resources.

Strategies to limit non-participation

The following strategies to prevent non-participation are mentioned by the interviewed persons:

- a) Information and placement: At the basic level, information and placement work has to be accessed, for example, more volunteer centres and community projects should be established in Austria.
- b) Project-oriented offers: The next element is “project-oriented offers”, which give people the opportunity to get involved on a short-term basis. This corresponds to greater initial flexibility in terms of time and the trend of people seeking more concrete targets.
- c) Financial security: The financial security of people is often mentioned as a basis for participation. Economic instability endangers the readiness of people to engage on a volunteer basis, and this makes the financial status of community members more questionable, reducing overall trust in institutions and the state.

- d) Acceptance of time distribution: The acceptance of time distribution is another strategy element. Pluralistic biographies should be socially recognised and implemented. This already begins when children are in school, where the engagement in the community should start, and continues with higher education and paid work, where opportunities for community engagement should be provided.

The role of the state in formal volunteering and the future of volunteering

The state is seen as the authority, which in the end has to attend to the quality of human lives. Minimum support (basic income) is praised as an instrument that allows people to seek involved. For this reason, access thresholds for minimum social security should be kept low for all people in order to avoid absolute poverty and thus evoke secondary problems.

The state is often seen as the one to cover the material costs and the infrastructure for volunteering. Here, the state is actually supplemented by many donations that come from the private economic sector and from individuals. Furthermore, as a task of the state, it is noted that the state should involve the organisations in social planning. The Volunteer Council is a model in this area.

A detachment of the state is perceived in various areas in which the interviewed volunteers perceive serious problems. They ask for the state to share the load when it comes to responsibility. In this way, the people who are involved in the project have the role of discoverers of problems. They argue for an increased quality of life, they demand human rights and sometimes simply humanity. A continuous discourse should therefore be held concerning the decision about which services are paid by the state and which are left to civil society and committed individuals. In this sense, a "repolitisation" (Notz, 2012, 103) should always be reflected in voluntary commitment.

Some of the interviewed persons go beyond the present reality with more utopian perspectives. They demand, for example, complex monetary systems that also take account of the hitherto unpaid work. They are also considering the possibility of a flat-rate basic income.

However, the state itself is also confronted with limitations in terms of what it can do. Engaged people who support this position are fundamentally committed to the system of division into family, civil society, state and private economy. The consequence is that fair participation of all people in these systems should be realised. How such fairness looks and how it can be achieved cannot be stated in the light of the current individualistic design, because the consensus is that volunteering in Austria should remain voluntary, as it is defined by law.

For the future, interviewed persons expect varying developments. The role of volunteering in one's biography in terms of competence and occupation is growing.

In this context, an increase in the importance of training in the area of volunteering is also mentioned. Volunteering will be more often realised as projects – with more structured procedures, time clarifications, and clear goals. Overall, individual responsibility will gain importance for voluntary commitment. It is expected that people will be more independent from the organisation and will work in mediated initiatives based on personal resources. In addition, it is expected that incentive systems will develop; they will shift the voluntary commitment towards exchange. Balancing-measures of various kinds are envisaged (for example transportation services and public services). The model includes time-management systems, which are recorded in a database and handled like currency. On the social side, there is a certain uneasiness concerning demographic change. Older people are increasingly a target group, and potentially an active group. Refugee movement is another striking aspect of society. In this context, it is important to see migrants as potential volunteers, to address and encourage them, and to set up structures in such a way that they take care of the commitment of all groups of people. A change in the regional economy is also expected – with a stronger rise in local community structures (cf. Klöck, 1998, Elsen, 2007). The acceleration of human processes is also worth mentioning. Here, volunteering may play an important role as a perceptible and meaningful use of time.

In a further project, we look at the question of how much time people spend on paid work, formal and informal volunteering, family-related work and on personal work. In doing so, we are developing an electronic tool that enables people to measure their time budgets. The social time profile of the users displays an immediate comparison to other people – like a time footprint. Based on this, the possibility for comparison and reflection is created. Impulses for the optimal management of time should be given and developments for individual social engagement should be stimulated. Further tasks are the stability and distribution of the electronic tool, which should stimulate the discussion about time.

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Soziale Arbeit – Social Issues

herausgegeben von

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Arno Heimgartner

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Social Development

Ways of Understanding Society and Practising Social Work



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