

Time Pressure in Modern Germany

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Abstract : This article examines the issue of time pressure from a historical, theoretical, and policy perspective. It is divided into five sections. In the Introduction, the author outlines the significance of time pressure as a “social problem.” The second section examines Georg Simmel’s analyses of the effects of money on the acceleration of social life in modern societies, and relates these analyses to current research in the area of time study. In the third section, three current social trends contributing to time pressure are examined, namely : (a) compression of time as a function of life-cycle, work, and consumption ; (b) new household time requirements ; and (c) effects of time “economisation,” that is buying time for money, on social exclusion. The fourth section examines time use and time pressure trends among employed Western Germans from the 1960s to the 1990s, using time diary data from the author’s 1991/92 and other time use surveys. Included in this section is an analysis of social demographic and life cycle differences in time use. The concluding section contains a comparison of German time use trends with those of other OECD nations and a brief discussion of the time policy implications of the observed trends.

1. Introduction : Time pressure as a “social problem”



Time famine has emerged as a major social problem in modern societies. It substituted hunger for food as a major social concern. Time famine is a social problem in the sense attributed to “social problems” by Robert K. Merton (1971). It affects nearly everyone, its origins are social, and it violates social standards. However, unlike other social problems, such as unemployment, the damaging effects of time pressure on the quality of life rarely attract politicians’ attention. Time pressure is frequently treated as an individual phenomenon or psychological stress, and thus “neutralised” as a social problem. Suffering from time pressure is interpreted as a matter of “right” individual attitudes or effective time management. Of course, individual life style strategies and attitudes help relieving time pressure. However, from a macro sociological perspective, pursued in this article, the current proliferation of “time crunch” is viewed primarily as a consequence of a change in the time culture of modern societies rather than a result of personal mal-adaptation. [...]