Inequality, leisure time and *life skills*: individual and social implications for well-being

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Very preliminary version, please do not quote

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Abstract

Some studies on inequality have taken into account the multidimensionality of individual well-being. Nevertheless, few studies have paid attention to leisure time, despite its indisputable influence on well-being. The first goal of the paper is to shed light on the empirical evidence on leisure time distribution and its relationship with income; some elaborations on recent data relative to the Italian time use survey 2008-2009 will be also shown. An evaluation of whether leisure time is correlated with income distribution, compensating for or magnifying income inequality, will be proposed. The paper will also provide an explanation of the socio-economic mechanisms and the incentive system behind the evidence on leisure time distribution and its evolution in the last decades, drawing on the theories of Veblen, Gershuny, Becker and Scitovsky. The second goal of the paper is to consider how individuals endowed with different incomes allocate their leisure time across different activities, taking into account that they may also differ in terms of *life skills*. The latter represent the individuals' cultural capital and play a fundamental role in shaping individual decisions about how to use leisure time, which in turn produce non-negligible "social externalities". In this framework, an analysis of the implications in terms of individual and social well-being of different distributions of leisure time across income classes will be put forward.

Key words: multidimensional well-being, inequality, leisure time, *life skills*

JEL Classification: J22, D31

"*Cultivated leisure is the aim of man*"

(Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*)

1. Introduction

Some studies on inequality have taken into account the multidimensionality of individual well-being. Nevertheless, few studies have paid attention to leisure time, despite its indisputable influence on well-being. The first goal of the paper is to shed light on the empirical evidence on leisure time distribution and its relationship with income. In this regard a very short literature review will be proposed together with some elaborations on recent data relative to the Italian time use survey 2008-2009 (section 2). The paper will also provide an explanation of the socio-economic mechanisms and the incentive system behind the evidence on leisure time distribution and its evolution in the last decades, drawing on the theories of Veblen, Gershuny, Becker and Scitovsky (section 3).

The second goal of the paper is to consider how individuals endowed with different incomes allocate their leisure time between different activities, taking into account that they may also differ in terms of *life skills*. The latter represent the individuals' cultural capital and play a fundamental role in shaping individual decisions about how to use leisure time, which in turn produce non-negligible social externalities. In this framework, an analysis of the implications of different distributions of leisure time across income classes, in terms of individual and social well-being, will be put forward (section 4).

In section 5, a brief summary of the main reflections emerged in the paper will be proposed, pointing out the relevance of a multidimensional approach to the study of inequalities which takes into account the role of leisure time.

2. Empirical evidence on the distribution of leisure time

There are different ways to obtain information on individuals' time use but the most useful data to analyse leisure time are *time use surveys*, i.e. daily diaries, which allow to know in detail individuals' time allocation between different activities and, eventually, its variation through time, when they are available for more than one year. Through this kind of data we can calculate the average values for the main macro-categories of time which the day of an individual may be divided into: personal care, work, study, family/home care, leisure. Furthermore, we can obtain such average values with regard to the entire population, only employed individuals, only unemployed ones or other groups.

A very famous study concerning time use is "The Overworked American" (Schor, 1991), where the author presents evidence of an increase in the average work time of Americans in the period 1969-1987,

due to an increase in the hours worked per week as well as in the number of weeks worked per year, but also in the participation rate of women and teenagers, which was higher than the decrease in the participation rate of men begun in the 1950s. In 1987 the average American worked 163 hours more per year compared to 1969 (305 hours more for women and 98 hours for men). If we consider also family work the average increase is almost the same (162 hours), while for women it is 160 hours (family work for women decreased by 145 hours) and for man it is 166 hours (family work for men increased by 68 hours).

The period considered by Schor saw the outbreak of a crisis after a long period of prosperity at the beginning of the 1970s. Hence, on the one hand, enterprises may have turned to more overtime and reduced holidays for their employees; on the other hand, employees may have been encouraged to offer more hours of work or look for a second job (*moonlighting*) because of low wages. In general, during the 1980s, the economic crisis fostered the breakdown of cultural and political obstacles against longer work hours in the United States. Schor also asserts that this increase in working hours regarded all Americans, irrespective of their gender, employment status or income position, and corresponded to a decline in leisure time.

More recent data (Aguiar and Hurst, 2007; Aguiar and Hurst, 2008; Aguiar and Hurst, 2009; Attanasio, Hurst and Pistaferri, 2012) allow to identify more precisely the differences in the quantity and quality of leisure time between individuals. Such studies are based on *American time use surveys* covering the period 1965-2005 and they show a general increase in leisure time[1] (Aguiar and Hurst 2007).

Such increase in total leisure was accompanied by an increase in leisure inequality across individuals with different educational attainment (*proxy* of income). In particular, taking account of the changes in employment rates, such studies show that leisure time has increased for the less educated and decreased for the more educated. At the same time, while in 1965 the less educated worked longer hours than the more educated, in 2003 the situation seems to be reversed[2]. As regards the type of leisure activities, the increase in hours devoted to TV watching has been compensated by the decrease in hours devoted to social exchange and cultural activities.

This trend towards the redistribution of leisure time from the higher income classes to the lower ones, even if more evident in Anglo-Saxon countries, seems to be common to many developed countries. This *status/leisure gradient reversal* has been shown also by the sociologist Jonathan Gershuny, on the basis of the Multinational Time Use Study, which collects and harmonises the time use surveys of many countries since the 1980s (Gershuny, 2000; Gershuny, 2011).

[1] In the period considered, the increase in leisure for the average American was between 4 and 8 hours, according to the different indicators of leisure the authors defined (Aguiar and Hurst, 2007).

[2] Such observation regards men; in effect, in 1965 more educated women already worked more – on the market – than less educated women. However, such difference is much more evident in 2003.

In Italy, according to Gershuny (2011), a redistribution of leisure time from the more educated towards the less educated took place in the period 1988-2003. Some further results on Italy are presented in this paper analysing the Italian time use survey 2008-2009 (Istat, 2012). Such data derive from three sub-surveys: a family questionnaire (44606 individuals), a daily diary (40944 individuals in total, 14787 for working days, 13286 for Saturday and 12871 for Sunday) and a weekly diary (15641 individuals). Daily diaries are made of episodes of 10 minutes, in which individuals indicate their "primary activity", their "secondary activity", where they are and with whom. Activities have been freely described by respondents and codified afterwards, following Eurostat Guidelines. Starting from the episodes it is possible to calculate how many minutes each individual allocates to each activity, matching this information with personal and family characteristics (gender, marital status, education, employment status, etc.), contained in the family questionnaire. The weekly surveys only contain the number of hours worked per day by each individual; however, they are not considered in the following analysis.

The aim of the elaborations on the Italian time use survey 2008-2009 is to establish how leisure time is distributed across individuals with different educational attainments and/or different employment status - considered as *proxies* of income - in more recent years. In order to have an idea of how education levels correspond to occupations, Table 1 shows a cross tabulation of the two variables.

Table 1: Education levels vs. Occupations for the age group 15-64

	Education				
Occupation	*second-level degree*	*first-level degree*	*upper secondary*	*lower secondary*	*primary*
high-level employee	70.5%	3.4%	18.8%	7.3%	0.0%
medium-level employee	19.2%	6.0%	55.0%	19.2%	0.6%
low-level employee	0.8%	1.0%	23.4%	64.5%	10.2%
professional	51.8%	5.8%	38.8%	3.5%	0.0%
entrepreneur	7.0%	1.9%	42.7%	41.6%	6.8%
self-employed	2.2%	1.7%	28.9%	57.1%	10.0%
atypical	11.0%	3.4%	36.9%	38.0%	10.7%
unemployed	7.6%	4.5%	37.0%	45.2%	5.6%
student	2.1%	3.9%	36.1%	56.9%	1.0%
retired	5.8%	1.1%	19.8%	40.8%	32.5%
inactive	4.3%	1.1%	21.9%	48.9%	23.8%
Total	9.3%	2.9%	33.5%	43.7%	10.6%

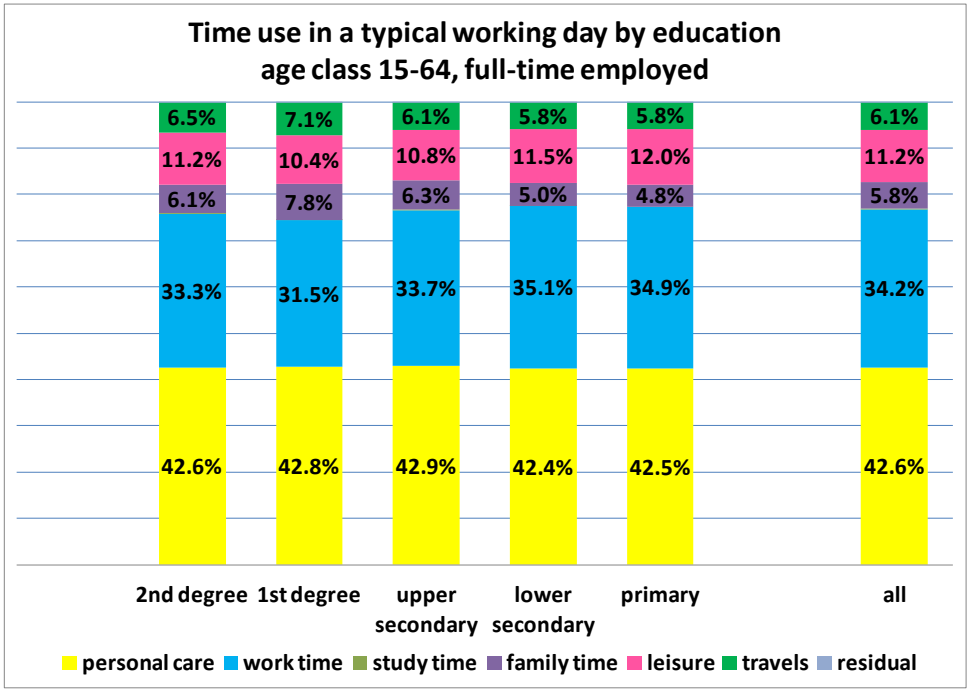
Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

As expected, the greatest share of high-level employees (70.5%) and professionals (51.8%) is made of individuals with at least a second-level degree; such individuals presumably belong to the top part of the

income distribution. As regards the other occupations, different hypothesis, as to the position in the income scale, may be put forward. Considering only employee workers, the position in the occupation scale seems to be much linked to the education level, with the greatest share of medium-level employees (55%) having up to an upper secondary level of education and the greatest share of low-level employees (64.5%) having up to a lower secondary level of education. In these cases, a more direct relationship between education and the position in the income scale – the higher the former, the higher the latter – may be supposed. With reference to non-employee workers, the relationship between education and income may not be linked to education in the same way as for employee workers. In particular, entrepreneurs have quite low educational levels (mainly, upper and lower secondary), while they are likely to be in the upper part of the income distribution. For the other two categories of non-employee workers, especially for atypical workers, it is not easy to hypothesise a general correspondence in the income scale, mainly because of the heterogeneity – in terms of income - characterising them.

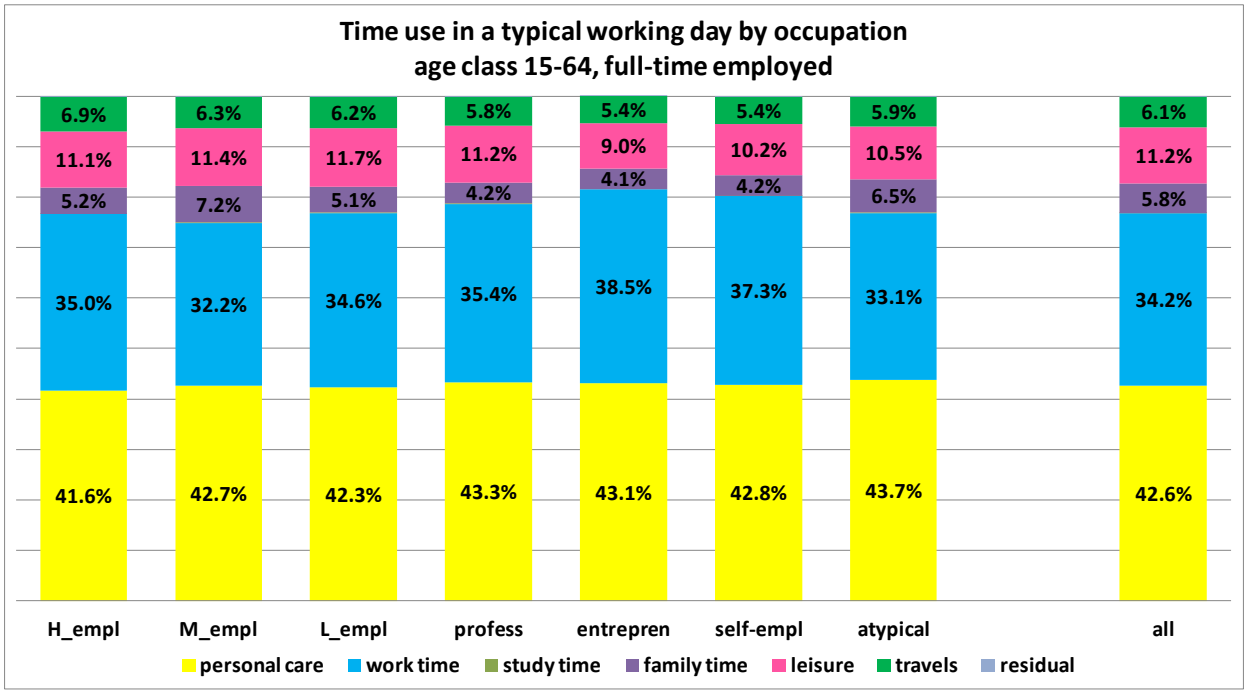
Turning specific attention to the distribution of time, first of all, an overview of time use during a typical working day is proposed, considering seven main categories of time (*personal care*, *work time*, *study time*, *family time*, *leisure*, *travels*, *residual*) and calculating the percentage share of each category over 24 hours. According to Fig.1 and Fig 2, no striking differences in time allocation between full-time employed workers with different educational attainments and with different occupations, in the age group 15-64, can be pointed out.

Fig.1: Time use of full-time employed workers in a typical working day by educational attainment



Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

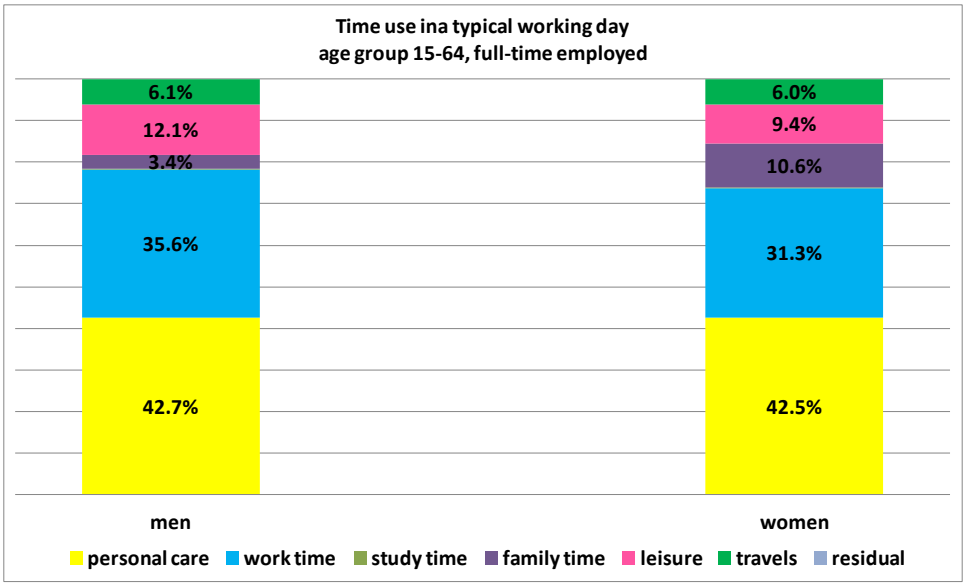
Fig.2: Time use of full-time employed workers in a typical working day by occupation



Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

However, comparing the time use of full-time employed men and women, in the age group 15-64, in a typical working day, some differences emerge (Fig.3). Men work on average 1 hour more than women (8.5 versus 7.5 hours), but they spend less than 1 hour in family care - compared to 2.5 hours for women - and they enjoy 3 hours of leisure compared to 2 hours for women.

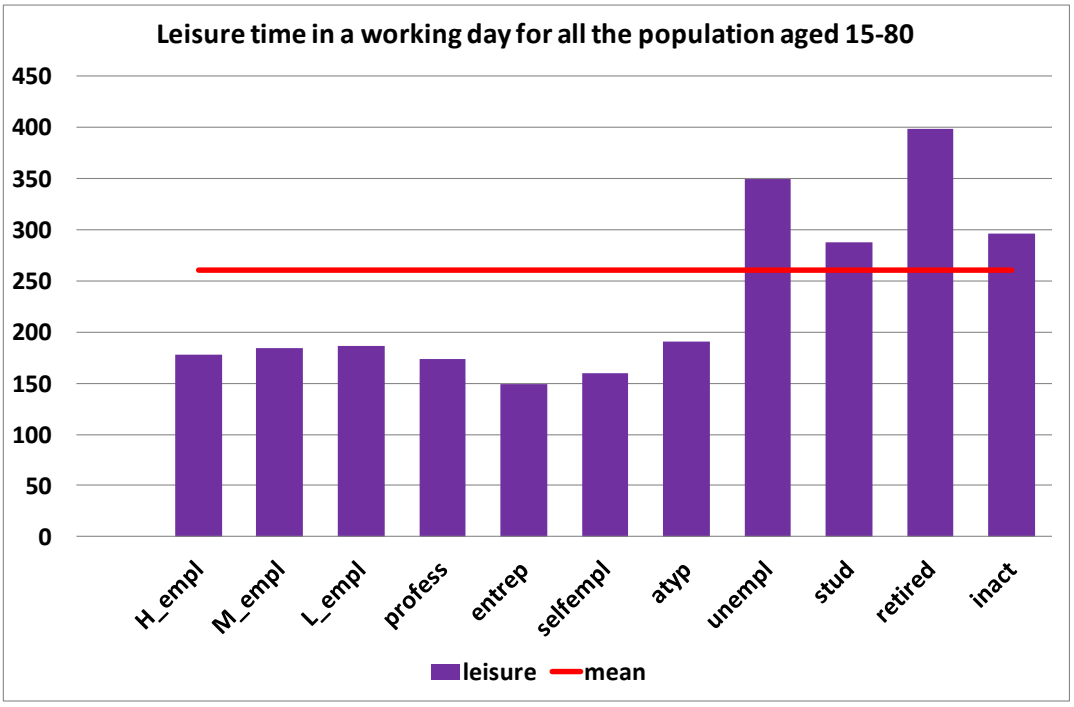
Fig.3: Time use of full-time employed workers in a typical working day by gender



Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

But how does leisure time distribute across the entire population? In this respect, figure 4 shows how leisure time in a working day varies across the population aged 15-80, according to employment status; not surprisingly, retired, unemployed, students and inactive individuals have more leisure time than the rest of population, namely workers.

Fig. 4: The quantity of leisure time in a working day by employment status, population aged 15-80



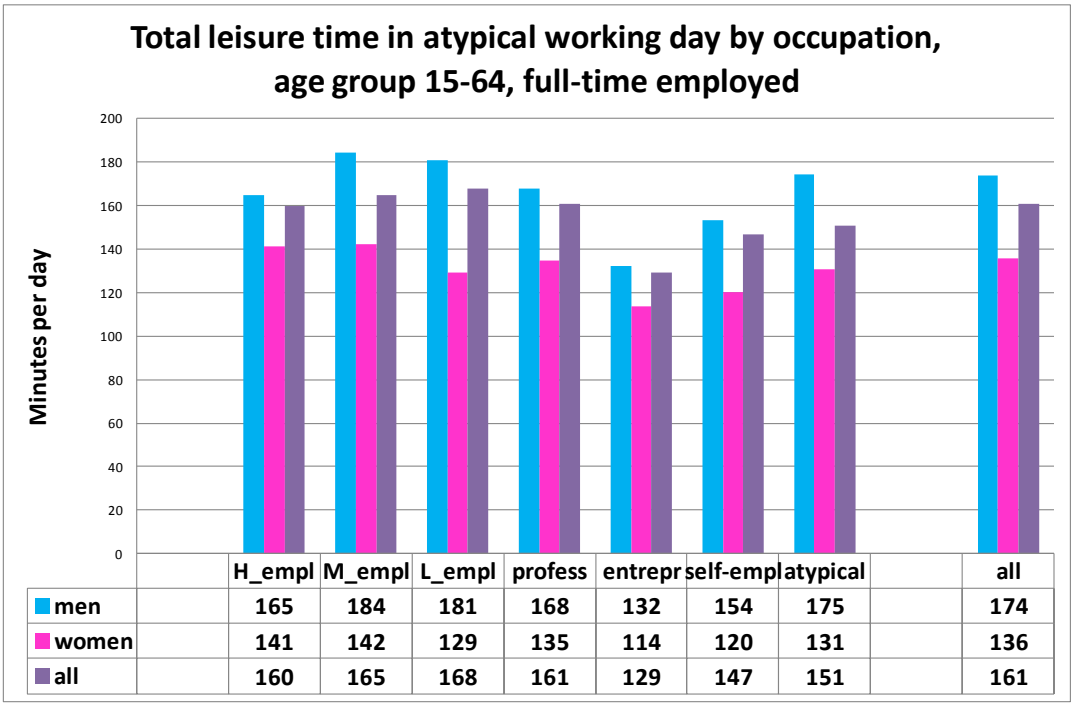
Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

In order to leave out involuntary leisure time in Fig.5 the analysis is focused only on full-time employed workers: between employees, the differences are on average very small (160 minutes a day for high-level employees against 168 minutes a day for low-level employees), even if differing results emerge for men compared to women (male high-level employees have less leisure time than medium-level and low-level employees, while for women the opposite holds true). Looking at non-employee workers[3], except for professionals who can be compared to high-level employees, average values are slightly smaller, with entrepreneurs declaring the lowest value (129 minutes on average). However, for the very nature of self-

[3] High-levels employees and professionals can be compared both in terms of education and position in the income scale. By contrast, entrepreneurs and the category called "self-employed" (which comprises non-employee workers who are not professionals, entrepreneurs or atypical workers) cannot be likened to low-level employees in terms of their position in the income scale, even if they share low educational levels. Moreover, as already mentioned, the category of atypical workers is very heterogeneous, both in terms of education and of position in the income scale.

employment, an understatement of entrepreneurs' and self-employed workers' leisure time may be supposed.

Fig. 5: The quantity of leisure time in a typical working day by occupation



	H_empl	M_empl	L_empl	profess	entrepr	self-empl	atypical	all
men	165	184	181	168	132	154	175	174
women	141	142	129	135	114	120	131	136
all	160	165	168	161	129	147	151	161

Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

According to the regression analysis on the quantity of leisure time in a typical working day presented in Table 2, older individuals, women (compared to men) and married or divorced individuals (compared to single) have less leisure time. Furthermore, when considering only employed individuals, the variables linked to education (the reference modality is *second-level degree*) are no more significant. As regards the variables linked to employment status (the reference modality is *high-level employee* in all columns but the forth one where), the signs of coefficients are those expected. In particular, when considering all the population in the age-group 15-64, medium- and low-level employees have more leisure time compared to high-level employees. The same holds true for atypical workers and all non-employed individuals. In the regression with all employed individuals, the signs and significance for the coefficients relative to employees is maintained, while they are no longer significant when the regression is run only on employees.

Finally, considering only professionals, entrepreneurs, self-employed and atypical workers, entrepreneurs and self-employed seem to have less leisure time than professionals (reference modality), in line with descriptive statistics. In the regressions some controls (health status, geographical area) and some

variables that could influence the quantity of leisure time were also considered. More in detail, the models take account of the fact of having a pet, a babysitter and a care person for old/sick relatives or for household chores. In addition, they consider if workers have a full-time or part-time work arrangement and a second job. Some interaction variables are also included[4] (high-income worker, low-skilled self-employed, high-income employee) but they are not significant in any of the models.

Table 2: OLS regression on the quantity of leisure time in a typical working day

	all	**all employed**	**only employees**	**only non-employees**
age	-1.815***	-6.117***	-6.352***	-2.806
woman	-74.371***	-46.064***	-47.505***	-31.557***
married	-41.225***	-26.695***	-26.471***	-26.295***
divorced/widow	-21.333***	-13.844**	-8.245	-34.442***
Education				
first-level degree	-13.098	-8.959	-10.919	15.047
upper secondary	-9.621	-8.284	-7.516	-11.177
lower secondary	-12.998**	-2.913	-0.092	-10.168
primary	-29.480***	-9.129	-9.392	-8.418
Employment status				
medium level employee	34.187**	33.224**	31.265	
low level employee	25.668*	25.933*	22.592	
professional	-2.965	8.235		(base)
entrepreneur	-18.12	-23.892		-44.780***
self-employed	-10.583	-12.608		-31.536**
atypical	39.899**	20.45		0.823
unemployed	193.483***			
student	119.764***			
retired	207.990***			
inactive	166.690***			
Controls and other variables: age2, health, area, pet, babysit, care person, high-income worker, low-skilled self-employed, high-income employee, second-job, part-time				
Constant	245.257***	272.485***	279.809***	225.210***
Obs.	12932	5043	3712	1270

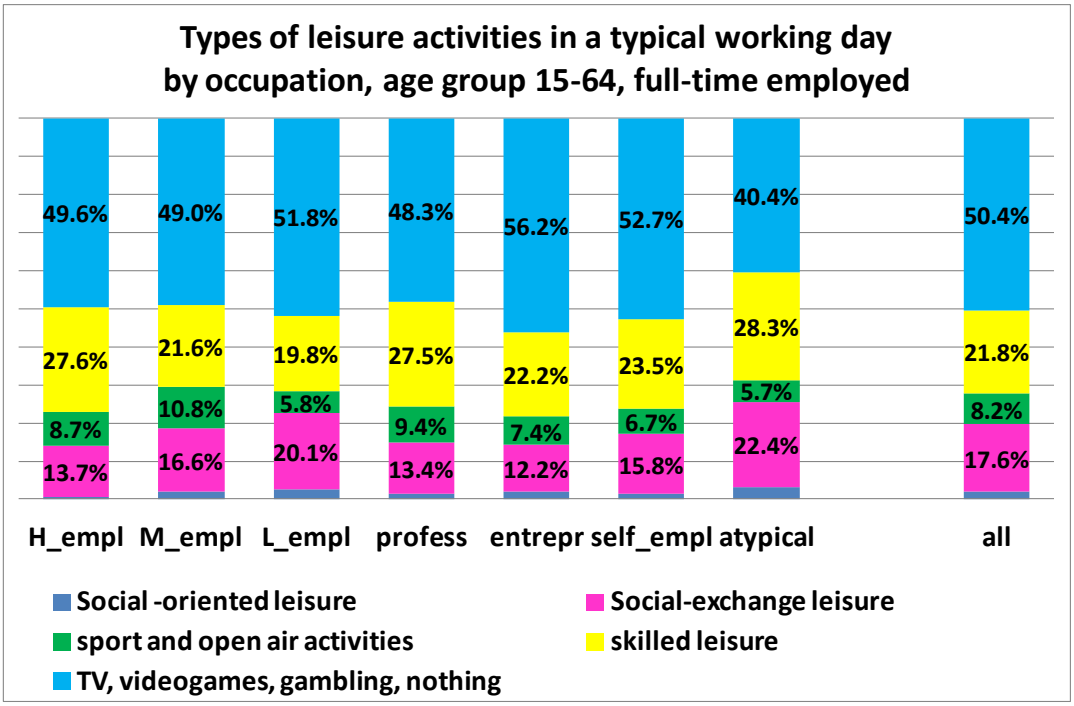
Source: Uso del tempo 2008-2009, Istat (2012)

[4] High-income workers are high-level employees or professionals with a second-level degree or more; low-skilled self-employed are entrepreneurs and self-employed with an upper secondary, lower secondary or primary level of education; high-income employees are those high-level employees with a second-level degree.

In addition to the previous analysis of the "quantity" of leisure time, an analysis of how individuals allocate their leisure time between different activities (quality of leisure time) can be also carried out. For this purpose, leisure activities have been classified in five categories: *social-oriented leisure* (i.e. formal and informal volunteerism), *social-exchange leisure* (i.e. social life with family and friends), *sport and open air activities*, *skilled leisure* (cultural activities, hobbies, computer science) and *low-quality leisure* (TV, videogames, gambling, nothing).

In Fig.6, we can see how full-time employed workers allocate their leisure time in a typical working day between these five types of leisure activities. The most evident result is that the greatest part of leisure is devoted to low-quality leisure by all groups of workers, irrespective of their occupation (atypical workers have the lowest share, 40.4%; entrepreneurs have the highest share, 56.2%). Considering this result about the types of leisure activities in a typical working day together with the fact that the allocation of the 24 hours is very similar between full-time employed workers with different educational attainments and occupations (as shown previously, in Fig. 1 and Fig.2), a process of *cultural homogenisation* in the distribution and quality of time could be hypothesised.

Fig.6: The quality of leisure time in a typical working day by occupation



Source: Uso del tempo, Istat (2012)

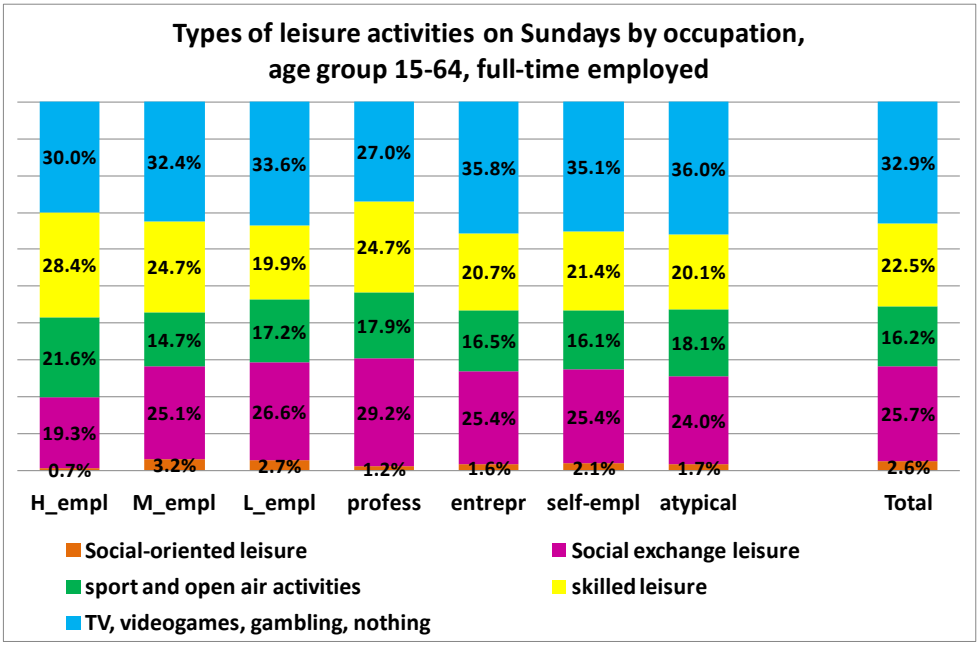
In addition, as most low-quality leisure corresponds to TV watching (while other low-quality activities play a minor role), such activity could be seen as a kind of "*vital habit*" - like sleeping - nobody can

get along without, especially in a typical working day, when it could represent both the easiest way to get news and information and to relax from work. Another factor that could play a role is its being a low-cost activity compared to other types of leisure activities.

As regards skilled leisure, high level employees, professionals and atypical workers have the highest shares; at least for the first two categories of workers, this evidence could be in line with the hypothesis that skilled leisure requires the acquisition of a "cultural capital[5]" (*life skills*) in order for individuals to be able to engage in and enjoy it. As to sport and open air activities, there are no great differences between the groups of workers; however, low-level employees have the lowest share, which may be due to the fact that such activities often imply non-negligible expenses that low-level employees – who are very likely to be at the bottom of the income scale - cannot afford. Finally, high-level employees and professionals show the lowest shares for social-exchange leisure, while the shares for social-oriented activities is very low, almost null, for all groups.

Given these results, an analysis to establish if the allocation of leisure time across different activities changes on Sundays[6] may be interesting.

Fig.7: The quality of leisure time on Sundays by occupation



Source: Uso del tempo, Istat (2012)

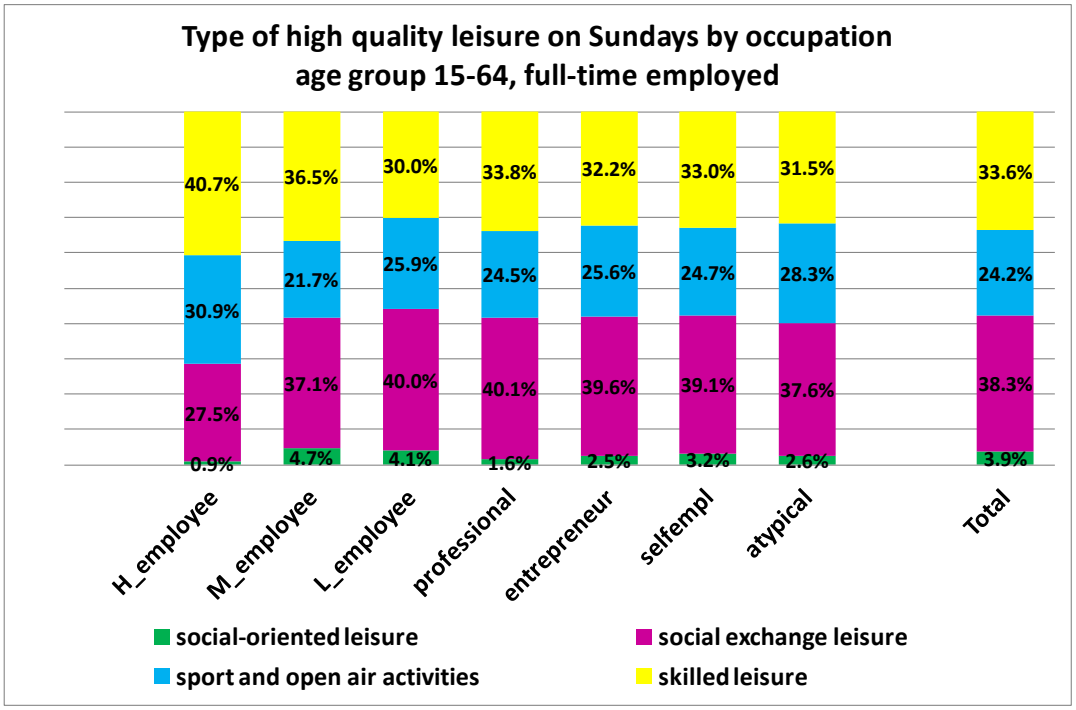
[5] The concept of *life skills* used in this article refers to that of *consumption skills* used by Tibor Scitovsky in the 1976 edition of *The Joyless Economy*. More specifically, in the appendix "Culture is a Good Thing", added in the 1992 revised edition of *The Joyless Economy*, Scitovsky himself introduced the expression *life skills*, as an alternative to that of *consumption skills*.

[6] In the descriptive statistics and in the regression analyses run for Sundays, a control for "typical Sunday" is taken into account; in other words, only individuals declaring that they completed the diary in a typical Sunday are considered.

In Fig. 7 we can see how the shares of the different activities change for all groups of workers on Sundays[7]. In this case, the share of low-quality leisure significantly decreases on average; in particular, the sharpest decrease is reported for professionals. By contrast, skilled leisure increases slightly only for employees, while decreasing for all other types of workers. As regards sport and open air activities and social-exchange leisure, there is a significant increase for all groups of workers on Sundays, in particular for high-level employees. The shares of social-oriented activities are slightly higher but still very low. Overall, the decrease in low-quality leisure on Sundays – compared to a typical working day - is compensated for mostly by sport, open air activities and social-exchange leisure.

Furthermore, looking at how individuals allocate their time only between the different "high quality leisure" activities - namely all leisure net of TV, videogames, gambling and nothing - high-level employees are the only category devoting the greatest share of their high-quality leisure time to skilled leisure (and also the lowest share to social-exchange activities), while, on average, the greatest share of high-quality leisure is made of social-exchange activities (see Fig. 8).

Fig.8: High-quality leisure time on Sundays, by occupation



Source: Uso del tempo, Istat (2012)

[7] Please note that the individuals interviewed on Sundays are not the same as those interviewed on a working day, because each individual completed only one of the two types of diaries. This is the reason why mean values over the entire week, i.e. weekly average leisure time (or subcategories), are not calculated.

A regression analysis on the quantity of skilled leisure on Sundays (containing the same variables as in the first set of regressions, with the addition of work-time classes as controls) is shown in Table 3. It confirms that the relevant variables in all cases (but in the model considering only non-employees) are those related to education. In particular, the quantity of skilled leisure is smaller for all individuals with an educational level lower than a second-level degree (reference modality). By contrast, employment status is not significant in any of the regressions. Such results seem to be quite plausible, because – as already mentioned - the kind of activities skilled leisure is made of generally require knowledge and skills, which more educated individuals are more likely to be endowed with.

Table 3: OLS regression on the quantity of skilled leisure time on Sundays

	all	**all employed**	**only employees**	**only non-employees**
age	0.213	0.11	0.907	-4.267**
woman	-20.981***	-15.054***	-14.390***	-14.556**
married	-20.847***	-26.872***	-30.628***	-14.614
divorced/widow	-20.982***	-24.767***	-33.353***	3.294
Education				
first-level degree	-25.969***	-18.344*	-18.013	-10.961
upper secondary	-29.036***	-16.944**	-16.805**	-9.919
lower secondary	-44.931***	-25.431***	-24.459***	-16.905
primary	-65.631***	-37.823***	-38.809***	-19.283
Employment status				
medium level employee	-5.609	-10.161	-0.906	
low level employee	-6.703	-15.382	-6.012	
professional	-17.536	-16.631		(base)
entrepreneur	-18.749	-9.503		6.702
self-employed	-11.145	0.492		17.465
atypical	-10.067	-15.996		-6.591
unemployed	-4.713			
student	8.685			
retired	8.144			
inactive	2.996			
Controls: age2, health, area, work time classes, pet, babysit, care person, high-income worker, low-skilled self-employed, high-income employee, part-time, second-job				
Constant	126.861***	124.346***	100.915***	186.857***
Obs.	11317	5048	3742	1202

Source: Uso del tempo, Istat (2012)

To sum up, the existing empirical evidence on leisure time distribution and its relationship with income inequality has shown a redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor in most developed countries in the last decades (Aguiar and Hurst, 2007; Aguiar and Hurst, 2008; Attanasio, Hurst and Pistaferri, 2012; Gershuny, 2000; Gershuny, 2011). On account of this evidence, the emergence of a unique time allocation model driven by globalisation could be hypothesised; in particular, similar time and consumption models may be the results of the incentive systems that capitalistic development and globalisation have triggered.

The results obtained from the Italian time use survey 2008-2009 suggests two fundamental ideas, which are not in contrast with the previous empirical evidence on the redistribution of leisure time: 1) a *cultural homogenisation hypothesis*; 2) the *TV watching as a "vital habit" hypothesis*. The former refers to the absence of relevant differences in time allocation between individuals with different employment status or education (hence with different positions in the income scale); in particular there are no striking differentials in hours worked and in leisure hours. Furthermore, the allocation of leisure time between different activities seems to be very similar in working days, while some relevant differences emerge only on Sundays. Comparing these results with that of Gershuny (2011) – namely, the *status/leisure gradient reversal* – an hypothesis that could be put forward is that after the redistribution of leisure time occurred in the period 1998-2003, a new process of convergence towards a standard model of time allocation may have started. Adopting a dynamic perspective, a comparative analysis of the three time use surveys - using the same definitions of leisure time and the other categories of time for the three surveys - would help draw more robust conclusions about the characteristics of the process of redistribution of leisure time during the three decades within which the time use surveys were conducted.

With reference to the quality of leisure and more specifically to the second hypothesis, data suggest that leisure activities mainly consist of low-quality leisure (i.e. TV watching) for all income classes, confirming also in this case previous literature (Aguiar & Hurst, 2007). However, the analysis for leisure time on Sundays suggests that – despite the predominant role of low quality leisure for all individuals – some differences in the quality of leisure between individuals exist and may be linked to education. Such evidence may be compared to what has been recently shown for the United States (Sevilla et al., 2012): drawing on the *American Heritage Time Use Study*, which covers the period 1965-2003, the authors find that, together with the increase in the quantity of leisure time for all groups, a decrease in leisure quality[8]

[8] Quality of leisure is assessed through the use of three indicators: *pure leisure*, *co-present leisure*, *leisure fragmentation*. These indicators exploit information about secondary activities (i.e. the simultaneity of leisure activities with non-leisure activities), co-presence (i.e. the fact that other individuals may be present during leisure activities) and the number and average duration of leisure intervals during the diary day. The rationale behind these indicators (based on the evidence provided by *Activity Enjoyment Ratings*, *Day Reconstruction Methods, Experience Sampling*) rests on the following assumptions: 1) leisure activities with no "distracting" accompanying activities are

has occurred. Furthermore, the relative growth in leisure time enjoyed by the less educated (see also Gershuny [2000] and Gershuny, [2011]) seems to be accompanied by a greater decline in leisure quality for them compared to the more educated. Another interesting finding is that the decrease in leisure quality is not due to any single activity, like TV watching[9].

In the light of the empirical evidence of the unequal distribution of leisure time quantity and quality, in the following section some socio-economic mechanisms and incentive systems which could make for this evidence will be analysed, drawing on sociological as well as economic literature.

3. What lies behind leisure time distribution across income classes: social comparisons and economic incentives

A first important contribution to explain the empirical evidence relative to the redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor occurred in the last decades comes from *relative income* and *social comparisons* theories, which lie at the border between sociology and economics. According to these theories, status-seeking activities can explain a large part of individuals' economic choices. *The theory of the leisure class* by Thorstein Veblen (Veblen, 1899) is the first systematic study devoted to this theme. Veblen points out that in primitive societies those individuals having power on others used to keep for themselves the activities which allowed to enjoy leisure time (e.g. hunting), while leaving activities requiring more work effort (e.g. agriculture) to the others. Since then, according to Veblen, the availability of leisure time has represented a symbol of high social status (*badge of honour*).

The way to assert one's social status has changed over the years. Certainly, leisure time was a symbol of high social status for aristocracy in the Middle Ages. For this reason, the capitalist bourgeoisie born with the industrial revolution tries to mimic the aristocracy by means of leisure time. Nevertheless, the "new rich" of industrial societies, differently from the *rentiers*, derive their fortune from the ownership of physical capital, which requires some work effort thus reducing the time available for leisure activities. That is why these "new rich" turn to *conspicuous consumption* as a

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associated with higher utility; 2) individuals report higher levels of instant satisfaction from activities done in the company of others and when they synchronise their working schedules with partners; 3) individuals with more fragmented leisure may be more rushed and stressed.

[9]Even if in this article all leisure activities but *TV watching, videogames, gambling and nothing* are considered as "high-quality leisure", a parallel with the results of Sevilla et al. (2012) may be identified in the fact that, when taking out low quality leisure, high-level employees – the group with the higher percentage of highly-educated individuals (see Table 1) – are those who devote the greatest share of time to *skilled leisure*. The latter, as it will be argued in the following sections, can be considered as the kind of leisure leading to higher levels of satisfaction (see for example Scitovsky, 1976).

symbol of high social ranking. In other words, the trend towards consumption activities motivated only by the desire to acquire social esteem comes from a time scarcity problem.

Veblen's work is the cornerstone for the literature on social comparisons, which introduced concepts like "relative income" and "positional goods[10]". In Duesenberry's and Frank's works, social competition does not regard leisure time anymore because it is based on income and consumption. In Bowles and Park (2005), the desire to mimic those who are better off influences the individual time allocation between work and leisure time, in favour of the former. The mechanism is similar to what behavioural economics calls "loss aversion": when income inequality increases, those who are at risk of losing their position in the social ranking feel much more damaged than those earning positions. For this reason, the former will increase their working hours in order to increase their income, which is the main tool of social comparison. Such model may help explain the evidence on the redistribution of leisure time, namely the trend towards a progressive redistribution of leisure time for high-income earners.

A more sociological view very near to the theories of relative income and social comparisons is that proposed by Gershuny (2000, 2005, 2011), whose studies are aimed at exploring the changes in individual time use along with the economic and political evolution of modern societies. According to Gershuny, the key of economic success is no longer the ownership of land – as it was for the *rentiers* of the pre-capitalistic period - nor the ownership of physical capital – as it was for the "new rich" of the Veblenian time. In post-industrial societies, very high incomes may derive from human capital: the problem is that human capital produces income only if actively employed on the market. For this reason, in contemporary societies, being "busy with work" while lacking leisure time is a symbol of social prestige. In other words, work has completely substituted leisure in its function of *badge of honour*.

Another element which may have contributed to the redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor is the greater pleasantness of the work of high-income earners (Gershuny, 2011): the content of some jobs (managerial, professional, technical) can be compared – in terms of stimuli – to that of the activities that the rich used to engage in during their leisure time in the past. As a consequence, this feature of high-income earners' jobs may reinforce their incentive to work long hours.

[10] Positional goods are goods from which the individual derives utility in relative terms, in the sense that their ownership defines the individual's position in the social hierarchy. Such goods produce negative social externalities because they imply "cascade expenses", which are wasteful, as their only goal is that of maintaining/improving one's own status in the social ranking. This is the so-called "keeping up with the Joneses" hypothesis (Hirsch, 1985; Frank, 1985, 2007)

In addition, the reduction of leisure time for the rich in modern societies can give rise to the phenomenon of inconspicuous consumption (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2005): the purchase of some goods is functional to the accumulation of a "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1984), which lies between the purchase phase and the actual consumption of them. In fact, consumption is postponed to a hypothetical future, which may never come true. Behind the purchase of such goods there is not a desire to show but an aspiration: lacking the time to enjoy those goods immediately, individuals buy and keep them as a symbol of potential leisure. In this sense, consumption is only planned and the purchase of goods is only triggered by the will to define one's identity through the use of symbols. At the same time, potential leisure is set against actual leisure, which translates into the consumption of goods which are not time-consuming.

In mainstream economic theory there is not a unified theory of leisure time; in particular, in the microeconomic theory of choice, "non-work time" is generally considered as undistinguished leisure time. In effect, in the traditional economic theory there is no trace of a "consumption time" as well, because consumption is seen as an instantaneous act, without any temporal dimension.

A different view is instead proposed by Becker (1965) with the *household production function approach*: Becker assumes that the allocation of non-work time is relevant in term of economic well-being. His hypothesis is that individuals maximise a utility function which does not directly depend on the quantity of market goods and services but on the quantity of *commodities*. The latter are the result of a production process the individual (or the family) carries out, combining market goods/services and her/his time, according to a production function. In this way, Becker suggests that the cost of time (measured as forgone earnings) should be introduced among the variables which influence individual decisions.

In this context, the maximisation of utility is subject to three constraints: a monetary constraint (relative to the purchase of market goods/services), a time constraint (the individual time endowment, to be divided between the time devoted to work and to the production of *commodities*) a technological constraint (the production function linked to *commodities*). The first two constraints, both dependent on the quantity of commodities the individual decides to produce, can be put together in a single constraint. As a result, the total constraint on resources equals what Becker calls *full income*, i.e. the maximum income an individual can get devoting all of her/his time to market work. The combination of the monetary and temporal constraints is based on the assumption that time can be converted into market goods/services through money income. Hence, the resources in terms of *full income* correspond either to direct *commodities* production costs (the prices of market goods/services) or to time costs (the forgone earnings necessary to produce *commodities*). Each individual will thus forgo a certain amount of money income, depending on the quantity of commodities he decides to produce.

The optimal condition maximising the individual utility function implies the equality of the marginal rates of substitution between the *commodities* and their "shadow prices", i.e. the average production costs, including both the time opportunity cost and the prices of market goods/services. According to this approach, the production of a unity of each commodity requires a given quantity of the market goods/services (first input) and a given quantity of time (second input): such quantities represent production coefficients and identify a specific technology. In this framework, some commodities are *time-intensive* and others are *goods-intensive*; as a result, the relative price of the two kinds of inputs will influence the production (consumption) choice of some types of commodities rather than others.

The distinction between the different kinds of commodities help understand the link between income inequality and inequality in leisure time: applying Becker's model, we could suppose that the more wage inequality increases, the more those at the top of the income scale will be incentivised to produce/consume goods-intensive commodities rather than time-intensive ones. Besides, these same individuals could become victim of a peculiar vicious circle: in order to purchase an increasing quantity of market goods they will have to work longer and longer hours (thus increasing their incomes), but at the same time they will have less and less time to enjoy what they buy. This problem was discussed by Staffan Linder in *The Harried Leisure Class* (1970), which was more generally focused on the increasing scarcity of time in modern societies.

According to Linder (1970), time is a scarce resource but differently from other resources it cannot be accumulated; what is more, in equilibrium, time resources must be distributed in such a way that, at the margin, they provide the same utility in all their uses. As a consequence, the increase in productivity characterising economic growth – which corresponded to increased wages – have induced a change in time allocation, displacing the previous equilibria. In particular, the increase in the value of work time requires an equal increase in the value of non-work time in order to have a new equilibrium. Such adjustment can occur in different ways; the first and most immediate way is an increase in the quantity of consumption goods per unit of time. Clearly, in Beckerian terms, this means that the production/consumption of goods-intensive commodities must increase, to the detriment of time-intensive commodities.

The review of the economic literature contributions useful to explain the phenomenon of the redistribution of leisure time across income classes would not be complete without mentioning Tibor Scitovsky's contribution. Already in 1959, Scitovksy considered such phenomenon a consequence of the evolution of modern capitalism (Scitovsky, 1959). In the famous book *The Joyless economy*, some years later, he linked the redistribution of leisure time to one of the founding principles of the Western capitalistic model, specifically of its American version: the *economy of time* (Scitovsky, 1976). Such

principle consists in the trend towards the use, whenever possible, of any technical device helping save time[11].

The belief according to which any kind of time and effort saving implies and increase in well-being must be linked to the moral superiority assigned to production and money-making activities by the Puritan ethics (Scitovsky, 1973). In the Puritan view, the production side of life is the most important one, because the creation of market value represents a measure of the individual contribution to the improvement of society (Scitovksy 1973, 1976). As a consequence, the introduction of devices or processes that trigger productivity is always welcome.

Nevertheless, the economy of time has also caused some paradoxes, according to Scitovsky, and one of them is the redistribution of leisure time from the supposed *leisure class* (the rich) to the supposed *working class* (the poor). At the basis of this redistribution, there is another paradox: the increase in work productivity – thus in the "price" of time – of middle- and low-income classes has not implied an increase in the scarcity of time for these individuals. In fact, they benefited, overall, from a reduction of work time, so that their leisure time increased together with its value. By contrast, the higher and higher wages of those workers at the top of the income scale have created such a big incentive to work longer hours that they cut on a lot of non-working, i.e. non productive, activities. On account of this, we can suppose that the driving force behind the mechanisms of the redistribution of leisure time has been increasing income inequality.

Furthermore, Scitovsky asserts that the category most damaged by the evolution of modern capitalism has been that of the intellectual professions (Scitovksy, 1959). In effect, the latter have not benefited neither from an increase in productivity allowing a reduction in time, nor from an increase in wages; hence, in an attempt to defend their relative income, they were forced to increase their work time.

Finally, the changes in the distribution of leisure time across income and employment classes have been accompanied, according to Scitovsky, by an increase in the price of personal and household services (e.g. housekeeping), which induced many individuals to turn to household production, sometimes in the form of "do-it-yourself" activities. Such phenomenon could have contributed to a further reduction in leisure time, especially of that part of leisure time that could have been devoted to artistic and cultural activities.

The redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor Scitovsky talks about in 1976 becomes one of the peculiar characteristics of the *Joyless economy*; with this expression Scitovsky refers to the American society at the end of the 1970s, when the average American enjoyed the highest

[11] The *economy of time* principle is much linked to another Scitovskian principle, the *economy of effort* (both physical and mental).

income per capita in the world but was not equally satisfied or happy, drawing on the first surveys on happiness levels. The American society is "joyless" because it is incapable of identifying what the activities and the goods conducive to high levels of overall well-being are. The goal of Tibor Scitovsky is then to explain such dissatisfaction, making use of a "psycho-economic" theory.

Even if Scitovksy focuses on the analysis of the American model, setting it against the European one, he himself forecasts a convergence towards a unique model near to the American one. As mentioned in the previous section, Gershuny (2000, 2011) supposes that developed countries are converging towards a unique model of time allocation. But the way in which individuals allocate their time strongly influences the functioning of society. For this reason, the convergence of time allocation models could imply a convergence in social models.

In the next section, drawing on the psycho-economic theory of Tibor Scitovsky, an analysis of the implications in terms of individual and social well-being of the redistribution of leisure time and, more in general, of the relationships between income inequality and time use, will be proposed.

4. The social role of leisure time and life skills: implication for well-being

Keynes, in the essay *Economic possibilities for our grandchildren*, forecasted that technological progress and capital accumulation would free individuals from the "economic problem", i.e. from the burden of subsistence. As a consequence, they would not need to devote most part of their time to work but, at the same time, they would not know what to do with the time gained: a "leisure problem" would emerge. These remarks are in line with an optimistic expectation about economic growth, according to which a *leisure society* is the natural outcome of increasing economic progress[12].

Before Keynes, Marshall had proposed similar reflections:

But unfortunately human nature improves slowly and in nothing more slowly than in the hard task of learning how to use leisure well. In every age, in every nation, and in every rank of society, those who have known how to work well have been far more numerous than those who have known how to use leisure well (Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 1907, pp. 719-720).

[12] According to Juliet Schor (1991), the representation of modern society as a *leisure society* is misleading because the "reference society" is the Western society of XVIII and XIX centuries, which was characterized by the hardest work schemes of any time. If the comparison were made with the pre-capitalistic period, it would be clear that we are not in a leisure society. In effect, Schor denounces the myth of a pre-capitalistic period made of 80-hour working week. By contrast, in the Middle Ages, despite the lower life standard, individuals enjoyed much more time than in modern societies. Monetary poverty was somehow counterbalanced by "time-richness". The main element is the value of time: capitalistic development, which is based on the accumulation principle, gave time an economic value which time hadn't got in previous historical periods.

The empirical evidence on leisure time mentioned in section 2 does not seem to confirm a “leisure problem” with the same meaning given to this expression by Keynes; by contrast, the ”leisure problem” which has emerged in the last decades refers to the lack of leisure time of some income classes and to the individual and well-being implications deriving from it.

The income class which seem not to have benefited from an increase in leisure time with the evolution of the capitalist system is that of high-income earners, even if it may be quite heterogeneous. In particular, as already mentioned, the leisure problem may refer only to those high-income earners who obtain their high incomes from work and not from the physical capital previously accumulated.

At the same time, low-income earners saw their leisure time increase: how could such an increase be judged? At first sight , from a social justice point of view- and in a multidimensional view of well-being – the increased leisure time of the poor may be judged positively because it would compensate for income inequality. In this regard, the sociologist Dumazadier (1967) talked about a process of political modernisation including a “democratisation” of leisure time. The reduction of working hours for the poor would promote both the birth of new “proletarian” leisure activities and the spreading of traditional leisure activities across the poorest income classes. The progressive liberation from toil would give the poor the opportunity to devote more time to education, mind cultivation, cultural and social-oriented activities.

Nevertheless, the increased leisure time of the poor may be used for other kinds of activities and this would have consequences in terms of individual and social well-being. With regard to this aspect the concept of *life skills* (or *consumption skills*), introduced by Tibor Scitovsky (1976) is crucial. These skills determine the effects that the use of leisure time has on well-being both of the rich and the poor; indeed, their accumulation allows individuals to widen the range of activities they can engage in during their leisure time. In this context, cultural and social-oriented activities (sports, music, language studies, social exchange) are those associated to the highest levels of individual well-being because they produce long-lasting stimulation. However, such activities are costly (both in terms of time and individual effort), especially in their initial phases: the cost derives from the necessity of acquiring skills. The role of life skills is then essential to understand the well-being implications of the distribution of leisure time. More to the point, in the absence of life skills, neither the rich nor the poor are able to use their leisure time in a way that is conducive to high levels of individual well-being.

In particular, the lack of skills can make the poor’s dissatisfaction and boredom – derived in turn from the lack of true stimuli in the activities they engage in – even deeper. This is a general problem of “joyless economies”; another consequence may also be the spreading of criminal and violent activities, which also results in negative social externalities. Taking these aspects into account, the greater availability of leisure time for the poor does not effectively compensate income inequality.

Such remark on the social effects of the activities undertaken by the poor during their leisure time recalls attention to the more general problem of the social impact of different uses of leisure time. Looking back, the time devoted to idle speculation has been a necessary condition for the development of intellectual and creative activities, which are at the basis of political and cultural progress. To a large extent, this was possible thanks to the "good" use of leisure time made by the so-called *leisure class*, which was endowed not only with monetary resources but also with cultural ones. In other words, as they were endowed with cultural capital, they could transform their leisure time into high-value social activities. In addition, the abundance of leisure time contributed to make such effect quite evident.

Overall, the availability both of time and life skills is the key element to make the leisure time of the rich socially valuable. Along economic development, the availability of time and life skills by the rich has changed: empirical evidence (see section 2) suggests that the availability of leisure time for the rich has reduced. The availability of life skills through time is less clear. Scitovsky (1992) suggests that between the 1970s and the 1990s in the United States emerged a new rich and educated class (the *affluent college-educated upper class*), in search for a more refined lifestyle compared to that of their parents, which was inspired by the Puritan values of production. This phenomenon may represent a change if compared to previous decades; in this case, leisure time scarcity would be the only problem.

Nevertheless, another element needs considering: how is it possible to acquire life skills? Indeed, the investment in life skills depends on individual evaluation of costs and benefits associated to them. The fact that in many developed countries human capital, an more generally work, can lead to high level of compensation may alter the incentive to invest in life skills, especially if they do not coincide with human capital. The investment in life skills corresponds to a non-monetary compensation an individual can benefit from only in the future. As a result, if production skills yield high monetary and immediate compensation, individuals will not be incentivised to invest in life skills. In turn, this will imply that during leisure time, individuals will be induced to consume "comfort goods" and to engage in activities which do not require high-level skills (e.g. TV watching, shopping, driving for pleasure etc.). The question is that such activities will have very limited positive effects on individual and social well-being. Specifically, well-being will be low because it positively depends on the engagement in activities with a high content of *novelty*, while it is negatively affected by repetitive and monotonous activities.

Furthermore, low-income classes are influenced by high-income classes when they choose what to do. In this respect, Becker's model, presented in section 3 can explain the choices of individuals with high incomes but cannot explain the choices of low-income individuals. According to his model, the latter should produce time-intensive commodities. The main question is that Becker does not take into account life skills and *trickle-down* effects, which induce the poor to follow the habits of higher income classes.

The choices of high-income classes may have led to a "comfort society", where individuals are no longer able to enjoy the "good things" of life, deriving from the true stimuli associated to cultural and social-exchange activities. This was possible mainly thanks to the economic power of the rich, which has strongly influenced the productive system, causing negative social externalities. The lack of time of the rich induce them to *careless shopping*: the rich, in order to save time, choose the most expensive products, as if price were a perfect quality index (Scitovsky, 1964). Such an attitude may contribute to lower the quality of products for the entire society, because it does not impose any discipline on producers. In particular, there is no premium for producers' virtuous behaviour; by contrast, narrow profit-oriented behaviours are encouraged.

Beyond *the affluent college-educated upper class*, according to Scitovsky, between the 1970s and the 1990s in the United States, another social class emerged: the *new underclass of the unskilled poor*, who come from the worst schools of the worst American neighbourhoods. They are school drop-outs suffering by "chronic unemployment". Their culture is made of TV, futile mass-produced objects and family problems. In this case, the lack of true stimuli – linked to the lack of cultural capital – generates a sense of dissatisfaction and boredom which can translate, as already mentioned, into violent and criminal activities. In other words, the lack of life skills associated to the availability of (unwanted) leisure time may determine very negative social outcomes, which adds to the impossibility to transform the availability of leisure time in a instrument to compensate for income inequality.

In conclusion, the lack of life skills may be a general problem; nevertheless, such problem may have more severe consequences in the case of the poor. Indeed, the rich – thanks to their resources – may decide to acquire life skills in order to reach higher well-being levels (as in the case of the American *affluent college-educated upper class*). By contrast, the poor are not given this opportunity. Overall, the production of positive social externalities through leisure time may be limited by two obstacles: the lack of leisure time of the rich and the generalised lack of life skills, whose consequences for the poor are even worse.

One of the negative implications of the redistribution of leisure time occurred in many developed countries seems then to be the loss of the positive social externalities historically deriving from the leisure activities of the rich *leisure class*. This is not to say that we should go back to a society in which a privileged *leisure class* enjoy the surplus produced by a poor *working class*. Alternatively, the intention is that of pointing out that the economic development that has taken place has both increased inequalities and culturally impoverished society as a whole.

If the incomes of those at the top of the income scale were lower – thus reducing the incentive to work more and more - positive social externalities may be produced though a proper use of leisure time. A more equal society may be richer in stimuli, especially because attention would partly taken away from the productive side of the economy and individuals may thus have more incentive to acquire life skills. A

renewed interest for life skills would foster the rediscovery of arts, culture and social-exchange activities, which can lead to higher level of individual and social well-being.

Inequality-reducing policies should be associated to policies aimed at re-orienting education systems, in order to correct the present bias in favour of production skills. More generally, long-term policies should aim at promoting some sectors, like that of cultural and social-oriented activities. The appropriate use of long-term policies may reveal a very effective tool to guide an economic growth meant to create more equal societies, which are able to use time in order to improve their well-being.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of leisure time distribution by previous studies showed that in the last decades there has been a redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor. This trend has characterised, in general, many developed economies, becoming a peculiar feature of the evolution of modern capitalist societies. Furthermore, a special focus on the most recent Italian time use survey revealed that a *cultural homogenisation process* may have taken place in the last years for two reasons: 1) there seem to be no great differences in time allocation across individuals with different positions in the income scale (using employment status/occupations as *proxies*) in working days; 2) leisure time mostly consists of low-quality leisure, namely TV watching. However, some differences in leisure activities across individuals emerge in non-working days (i.e. on Sundays); specifically, such differences are linked to individuals' education levels.

On the basis of some sociological and economic contributions, some hypotheses about the causes of the unequal distribution of leisure time were put forward. First of all, the type of economic development that has prevailed has made human capital – when it corresponds to production skills - the key element for individual economic success. In other words, the access to high incomes often depends on the accumulation of human capital. The main question is that in order for human capital to generate high incomes, long work hours are required. Accordingly, work has completely substituted leisure time in its function of *badge of honour*, i.e. symbol of high social status. In this context, wage structures characterised by increasing inequality may be an incentive for those at the top of the income scale to increase ever more their work time, to the detriment of leisure time.

In a multidimensional view of well-being, a reflection on the consequences of the redistribution of leisure time in terms of individual and social well-being was also proposed, in the light of the widespread sense of dissatisfaction characterising modern capitalist societies. In this regard, Scitovsky talked about *joyless economies*, meaning that individuals are not able to identify those activities leading to high levels of satisfaction. In addition to individual consequences, negative social externalities have also been shown, with reference both to the availability of leisure time across income classes and to the quality of leisure time. For this purpose, the concept of life skills (or consumption capabilities) was used. They play a key role

in determining individual choices as to the type of activities to engage in during leisure time, hence the social externalities which may derive from them. The incentive system characterising modern capitalist societies seems, in general, inadequate to encourage a sufficient investment in life skills.

On the one hand, the greater availability of leisure time for those at the bottom of the income scale did not seem to compensate for income inequalities, when individuals are not endowed with life skills. By contrast, it can even lead to negative consequences both at the individual and social level. On the other hand, the reduction of leisure time for the privileged class was identified as an obstacle to the production of positive social externalities, independently of the availability of life skills.

In effect, one of the negative social consequences of the redistribution of leisure time from the rich to the poor seems to be the loss of the positive social externalities which were once associated to the high-value social activities (idle speculation, intellectual and creative activities) carried out by the so-called leisure class, which was endowed both with leisure time and life skills. This does not mean that we should go back to the past; however, this phenomenon points out the general cultural impoverishment and negative effects on social well-being brought about by the kind of economic development that has taken place.

In conclusion, inequality-reducing policies – lowering the incentives of the privileged class to work longer and longer hours – may limit the excessive attention on the accumulation of production skills, fostering that of life skills. These policies should be accompanied by long-term interventions on education systems, in order to avoid a total crowding-out of the investments in human capital - which is at the basis of economic growth – and to encourage a better combination of production and life skills. More generally, an economic model aimed at the creation of more equal societies, where leisure time can eventually compensate for income disadvantages, should be promoted, with a view to higher levels of individual and social well-being.

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