

Work - life balance as an important area of research

Równowaga praca – życie pozazawodowe
ważnym obszarem badań

Key words: balance, work, life, scientific research.

Słowa kluczowe: równowaga, praca, życie, badania naukowe.

Streszczenie

Zagadnienie wzajemnych relacji między pracą i sferą pozazawodową stanowi coraz częściej przedmiot pogłębionych badań naukowych w wielu dyscyplinach. W niniejszym artykule problem równowagi między wskazanymi sferami życia jednostki został zaprezentowany jako ważny obszar analiz, szczególnie w obszarze nauk społecznych.

*There's more to life
than increasing its speed"*

Gandhi

Introduction

This paper undertakes the problem of *balance between work and non-work life*, which is essential for the proper functioning of an individual in every aspect of one's life. The complexity of undertaken issues helped to formulate the hypothesis that the relationship between these, so important spheres of human life, should be a significant area of research.

The essence of the relationship work - non-work life

The balance between work and non-work life is a phenomenon that does not have a universal definition, which has become present in the literature since the turn of the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. It can be said that since that time a kind of invasion of work on personal life has begun. The processes of globalization and the associated competition in the economy contributed to a number of modifications of

lifestyle of a contemporary man. One of them, resulting from progressive civilization changes, is the appropriation of the personal sphere of an individual by work.

Undertaking a theoretical-problematic reflection it must be assumed that the essence of the discussed problem are three conceptual categories: *professional work, personal life, balance*.

Professional work is often referred to as the most valuable form of human participation in community life, through which both the needs of an individual and the social objectives pursued for present and future generations are met. In very simple terms it can be said that it meets the three basic and interrelated functions: (1) economic - through work a man generates economic value in the form of goods or services, creates new values, contributes to the well-being of individuals and society; (2) income - work is a means of obtaining income, and (3) social - work is a means to satisfy professional and social aspirations of individuals. Work is a key form of activity and an inherent property of people. It is an essential part of life of adult individuals, although it is equally important to prepare for work during the period of youth. An individual through work creates not only material goods but also new values as its consequence. In addition, the work itself can be considered as a value, because it is closely linked to the man who gives it specific meaning.

Undoubtedly, work is the dominant factor in the development of our civilization, which over the centuries underwent numerous changes, which can be summarized as follows:

Physical work → *mechanization* → *automation* → *robotization* → *computerization (intellectualization of work)*¹.

Transition from the world of industrial civilization to information is accompanied by previously unknown phenomena causing significant changes in the sense of human labor. These include: the dispersion of labor unity in time and space, the increase of competitiveness and faster pace of innovation in the global economy, increasing complexity of work, global competition, the development of smaller and larger organizational units, changing the concept of work and career, total quality management TQM, more frequent teamwork, the increase of cultural diversity².

Emphasizing the above-mentioned phenomena, defining the direction of development of the contemporary labor market and signaling especially the first one, i.e. *the dispersion of labor in time and space*, it should be noted that it became a cause for the disharmony between the sphere of work and non-work. This disharmony is a direct result of the changing nature of work and employment and has an impact on people's lives. The professional sphere functions in close interaction with other planes of existence of individuals; with social roles that they play in their biographies of life. Therefore, when writing about the role of work in human life it should be emphasized how important the balance between work and non-work life is. Only in terms of synergy and appropriate proportions between these two areas of life of an individual it

¹ A. Bogaj, *Man in the work environment*, [in:] *Pedagogy of work*, edited by S.M. Kwiatkowski, A. Bogaj, B. Baraniak, *Academic and Professional Publishing*, Warsaw 2007, p. 30.

² M. Frese, *Changes of the work character*, [in:] N. Chmiel (editor), *Work and organizational psychology*, Gdańsk Psychological Publisher, Gdańsk 2003, pp. 462-474.

will be possible to understand the meaning of existence and the correct determination of recognized values.

The second category that constitutes the essence of the described issues is the non-work sphere, identified with personal, private life, which an individual devotes his time and energy outside work to. While the professional life of man comes down to work, the personal, private life is usually identified with the family. In the social sciences, the *family* is sometimes described as: an institution, social group, educational environment, and above all, a system in which there is an interaction between all its members. Family members are a reference system for one another, are a source of patterns of behavior, activities, attitudes and also information on the accepted values. The quality of marriage and family life depends on the process of homeostasis. In light of the family system homeostasis is a dynamic equilibrium, which the family keeps in certain, relatively fixed boundaries, which means that members of the family system are trying to preserve stability in the relationship and are involved in maintaining balance, both directly and indirectly, and in a situation threatening stability jointly take actions to maintain balance³.

The sphere of personal life of an individual also includes *leisure time*, so a time of rest, recreation and the time remaining after work, family responsibilities, personal care treatments. Energy expenditure during work causes physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion that forces the individual to relax. Only after rest they will be able to recover lost energy and continue to work. Restoration of power is important because it allows one to take on new tasks and prevents fatigue which is one of the causes of health problems. The cycle of work and rest is dictated by working time and repeated daily rhythm⁴.

The sphere of non-work is an important part of the biography of a person's life, that is why the involvement in work should not exclude the possibility of involvement in the personal sphere. This type of engagement underlies the feeling of success resulting from balancing the professional role and the role fulfilled in the family. A sense of balance between the two favors the perception of life satisfaction, while its absence is a major cause of experiencing work-family role conflict⁵.

Moving on to the third conceptual category - *balance* - as the basis for the optimal relationship between work and private life, it can be identified with such terms as: balance, stability, homeostasis, a sense of satisfaction with one's life. As pointed out by D. Clutterbuck the essence of balance between work and non-work sphere is "a condition in which an individual copes with a potential conflict between the requirements for engaging in work and fulfilling other roles, giving them a sense of well-being and fulfillment"⁶. H.J. Greenhaus et al describe this balance as the degree to which a person is equally committed to their role at work and in the family and the degree of satisfaction with these roles. Such an understanding of the balance between work and personal life

³ Quoted in: T. Rostowska, *Marriage, family, work and quality of life*, Impulse, Krakow 2009, pp. 43–53.

⁴ Z. Ratajczak, *Work and organizational psychology*, PWN, Warsaw 2007, p. 167.

⁵ Quoted in: T. Rostowska, *Marriage...*, op.cit., p. 146.

⁶ D. Clutterbuck, *The balance between work and private life*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Krakow 2005, p. 26.

involves three elements: the balance of time, the balance of commitment and the balance of satisfaction that result from fulfilling the two specified roles⁷.

However, it should be emphasized that the identification of the work - non-work life relationship only with a proportional division of time devoted to these two spheres of life is not entirely correct and can lead to overlooking the negative effects of disturbances of mutual balance that are also caused by other factors, such as: quality of work; intensity of work and the excess of tasks assigned an individual to perform; career orientation; summary of the total working time, commuting to and from work and family responsibilities⁸.

The issue of the relationship between work and non-work life is well illustrated by the Work - Life Balance Compass proposed by Converge International. The central streams of work and life are represented by the horizontal axis (West-East) and vertical axis (North-South) respectively. These two axes mediate both the situational and aspirational segments as well as the independent and interdependent segments of a person's work-life balance. The central work stream is concerned with balancing the short-term aspects of one's vocation (workload: hours/day, days/week) with the long-term aspects (ambition: career progression, years/job). Meanwhile the central life stream deals with balancing the personal and relational (i.e. family, friends, etc.) priorities.

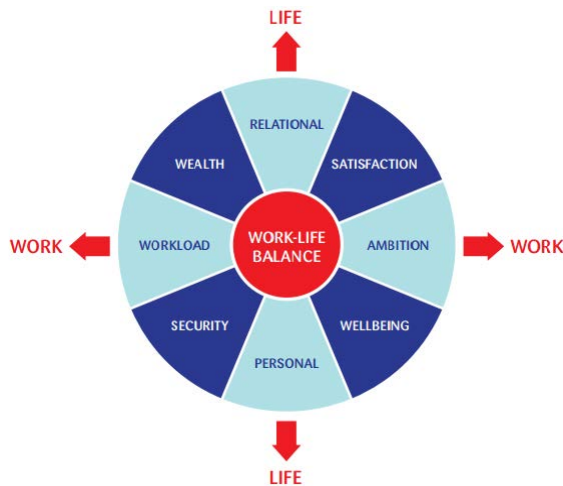


Fig. 1. The Work – Life Balance Compass

Source: *Converge International, Striking a Work-Life Balance Understanding Attraction & Retention in Today's Workforce*, p. 8.

The emergence of conflict between work and personal life can interfere with development of an individual in terms of physical, mental and social functioning.

⁷ H.J. Greenhaus, M.K. Collins, & D.J. Shaw, *The relation between work-family balance and quality of life*, "Journal of Vocational Behaviour", Vol. 63, 2003, pp. 510–531.

⁸ S. Borkowska, *How much work, how much life beyond?*, [in:] *The work-life programs theory and practice*, ed. S. Borkowska, IPISS, Warszawa 2011, pp. 18-20.

Therefore the analyzed issue can be dealt with at three levels of problem-theoretical reflection, as well as empirical research:

1. individual,
2. microeconomic,
3. macroeconomic.

The three levels are interlinked, so they may be the subject of scientific interest.

Work – non-work life conflict in the light of selected studies

As previously highlighted, the balance between work and non-work life is a complex phenomenon, which is why there are different dimensions of the conflict between them.

According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work⁹ relying on the analyses of researchers, the conflict between work and personal life, especially family, can be defined as a source of stress due to irreconcilable requirements associated with the operation of an individual at work and in the family, which are present in both of these environments. It can take two forms:

1. conflict between work and family and
2. conflict between family and work

The conflict between work and family can, on the other hand:

- be connected with time,
- result from requirements associated with the functioning at work and in the family,
- result from specific (e.g., conflict) behaviors¹⁰.

Analyzing the methodology of international empirical studies devoted to this issue it should be pointed out that mainly two dimensions of conflict have become the object of researchers' interest: concerning time and concerning obligations load. The time-related balance occurs if people believe that they devote sufficient amount of time to work and the right amount of time to be with family and on social commitments such as social contacts, hobbies and interests. This conflict can occur if the time required for family life, competes with professional activity. The second dimension of the conflict stems from the load of duties and occurs when stress or fatigue in one area affect the other, resulting in the imposition of the sphere of family and professional life . Workload in one area reduces the energy needed to perform a specific role in the second sphere. It can therefore be concluded that the conflict between work and non-work sphere is 'two-way'¹¹, since professional life may

⁹ European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Family Issues and Work-Life Balance*, E-Facts, No 57, Feb 16, 2012.

¹⁰ E.I., Kotowska, A. Matysiak, M. Styrz, A. Paillhe, A. Solaz, D. Vignoli, G. Vermeylen & R. Anderson, *Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life and work*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2010, pp.1–96; S.D. Carlson, M.K. Kacmar & J.L. Williams, *Construction and Initial Validation of a Multidimensional Measure of Work-Family Conflict*, „Journal of Vocational Behaviour”, Vol. 56, 2000, pp. 249–276.

¹¹ See: M.R. Frone, J.K. Yardley, K.S. Markel, *Developing and testing an integrative model of the work-family interface*, „Journal of Vocational Behavior”, t. 50, Vol. 2, 1997, pp. 145–167.

interfere with family life or the pressure of family responsibilities may interfere with professional one¹².

With reference to the results of the "European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS)"¹³, it can be concluded that the conflict between work and personal life is widespread in Europe. Analyzing the statistical data on the dimension of conflict associated with time, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- 28% European workers believe that they spend too little time with the family,
- 36% employees believe that there is not enough time for other social contacts, and 51% do not have time for hobbies and interests,
- 40% employees are of the opinion that they have too little time to have a family life or other social obligations; these workers, however, feel that they spend enough time at work,
- only one quarter of the participants in the study claim that they are able to maintain a balance between the amount of time devoted to work and the amount of time devoted to family life and social commitments.

Statistical data concerning the dimension of the conflict arising from the load of duties showed that a significant proportion of workers experience difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities because of the intensity of their work and the time spent:

- about 50% of employees reported a case of overlapping time requirements associated with work and family life due to the pressure in the workplace or at home,
- 22% of employees declare that at least a few times a week after returning home were too tired to perform some necessary housework, and 26% say they meet with such a situation at least a few times a month,
- only less than 10% of the study subjects said they did not experience any kind of pressure¹⁴.

Referring to the results of EQLS it is worth noting that the EU Member States were divided into six groups, each with different conditions that affect the balance between work and family life. These groups are referred to as "the classification of countries in terms of ease of reconciling work and family responsibilities":

1. The first group includes the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland and Sweden. These countries offer the best conditions for reconciling work and family life.
2. Slightly less favorable conditions are present in the Benelux countries: Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and France.
3. The third group are the Anglo-Saxon countries: Ireland and the Great Britain. These countries offer worse conditions for reconciling work and family life, in particular in the institutional and cultural aspect.
4. Next are the German-speaking countries, in which the support provided to working parents and carers is very small, which results in high marginal effective tax rates and insufficiently developed state care system.

¹² E.I. Kotowska, A. Matysiak, M. Styrz, A. Paillhe, A. Solaz, D. Vignoli, G. Vermeylen & R. Anderson, *Second European...*, op.cit., p. 42.

¹³ Ibid. For the first time this study was conducted by Eurofound in 2003, the second study was carried out in 2007. Data from the third study published in 2012 are similar.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 42–53.

5. The fifth group consists of southern European countries. This group does not support people in combining family responsibilities with paid work. State care system is underdeveloped, and financial support for families is severely limited. Women experience exceptionally high barriers to entry into the labor market.
6. The last group consists of the former socialist countries, which are characterized by a much stiffer models of organization of working time than in the other studied countries, and a highly pragmatic approach to women, i.e. a strong emphasis on their economic role¹⁵.

The presented data show that Europeans are more dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend with their families, than the amount of time spent at work. This means that professional life interferes with personal life to a greater extent than the other way around.

The phenomenon of progressive imbalance between the two spheres of the individual's biography is recorded not only in Europe. As the global research, carried out for the second time by Regus, among 26,000 employees in more than 90 countries shows the highest balance between work and private life achieve Mexicans (the average score in the study is 149 points), Indians (138 pts.) and Brazilians (137 points). Below the world average (120 pts.) are, among others: the Netherlands, the USA, Australia, Great Britain, Japan, Belgium, Germany and France.

The overall results obtained in Regus studies are presented in Diagram 1.

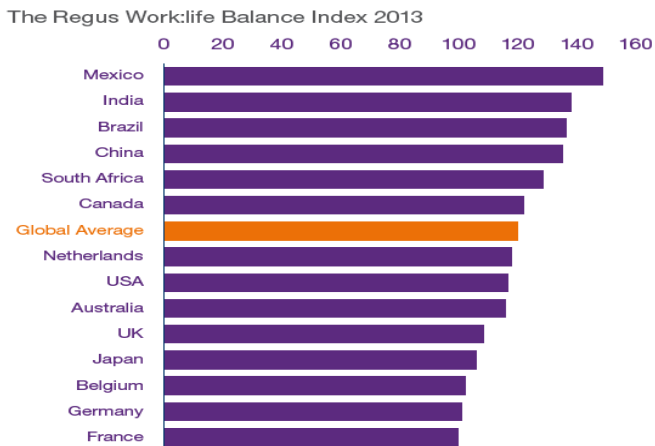


Diagram 1. The Regus Work: life Balance Index 2013

Source: Boomers struggle to find their balance, Regus: Work-life Balance Index 2013, Regus Plc 2013, p. 5.

In the cited study a balance index for Poland was also found and amounted to 113 points. It means that Poles have more and more trouble keeping the right balance between work and private sphere. As the study of 'Time Budgets' of the Central Statistical Office in Poland show a worker has an average of 4 hours and 39 minutes of free time during the day - that is the time not devoted to work and commuting,

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 9–11.

housework or childcare. As many as 40% of working professionals declare that during the week they have no time for themselves and fulfil only the necessary duties. They can have a rest only at weekends, but at the same time 64% of working respondents say they work on Saturdays and Sundays¹⁶. Such a situation has negative consequences for employees who by excessive load feel a growing frustration, and ultimately burnout. Its effects are dangerous also for employers.

According to the previously mentioned European Agency for Safety and Health at Work the conflict occurring between work and personal life generates negative consequences in the form of, among others: a worse state of mental and physical health, a sense of fatigue, lower life satisfaction, higher levels of stress, greater emotional exhaustion, the probability of falling into alcoholism, stronger anxiety and greater depression¹⁷. The conflict experienced by employees may also affect the companies in different ways and in many areas. It is estimated that productivity losses caused by personal or family health problems cost U.S. employers 225.8 billion USD (about 170.6 billion Euro) per year¹⁸.

The table below shows selected negative consequences of imbalance concerning individuals, economic organizations and society at the macro level.

Table 1. Some negative consequences of the lack of balance between work and non-work life

For societies at the macro level (national, regional, etc.)	For economic organizations	For employees and their families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – decreasing number of births, – deferring the birth of the first child, – growing number of divorces, – growing number of single-parent families, – growing social inequality, – increasing incidence of heart diseases, cancer and neurological diseases, – insufficient childcare, – growing sphere of pathology among them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – absenteeism, – fluctuation increase; loss of investment in human capital, – less commitment to work, – stress, – lower concentration at work; – worse quality of work and reduced productivity, – worse relationships with customers and frequent loss, – less creativity and innovation, – lower profits and worse competitive position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – stress, – conflicts in the family, – worse childcare, – divorces, – alcoholism, – falling prey to drugs, – dependence on cigarettes or sweets, – insecurity of work and family.

Source: S. Borkowska, *The balance between work and non-work life*, [in:] "Acta Universitatis Lodzianis Folia Economica", 2010, no. 240, p. 17.

¹⁶ Poles are the busiest people, www.fakt.pl, access date 17.03.2014.

¹⁷ R.M. Frone, M. Russell & M.G. Barne, *Work-family conflict, gender, and health-related outcomes: A study of employed parents in two community samples*, "Journal of Occupational Health Psychology", Vol. 1, No 1, 1996, pp. 57–69; D.T. Allen, L.E.D. Herst, S.C. Bruck, & M. Sutton, *Consequences Associated With Work-to-Family Conflict: A Review and Agenda for Future Research*, "Journal of Occupational Health Psychology", Vol. 5, No 2, 2000, pp. 278–308; S. Rose, T. Hunt, B. Ayers, *Adjust the Balance: Literature Review Life Cycles and Work Life Balance*, 2007. Retrieved 28 April 2011, from: <http://www.equalworks.co.uk/resources/contentfiles/4912.pdf>

¹⁸ W.F. Stewart, J.A. Ricci, E. Chee & D. Morganstein, *Lost productive work time costs from health conditions in the United States: results from the American productivity audit*, "Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine", Vol. 45, 2003, pp. 1234–1246.

Concluding, one should express concern that the problems with keeping proper balance between work and non-work life are becoming more visible and affect not only Poland, but occur worldwide.

The need for further research on work - non-work life relationship

An imbalance in the relationship work - non-work life is an example of the growing pathology, which takes place in the global socio-economic system, especially in developing countries, as well as highly developed. Therefore, this phenomenon should be included in the research area of different sciences.

The need to maintain a balance between work and personal life has been claimed by psychologists, sociologists, educators, economists, philosophers and ethicists for a long time. The idea of harmonious human development dates back to ancient times and it can be found in the philosophical, religious, social and political doctrines. Currently, this idea is expressed most fully in the concept of sustainable development, whose overriding objective is the growth of personal and social well-being, as well as a harmonious arrangement of the relationship between man and nature. The described concept involves satisfying human needs necessary for the proper physical, mental and spiritual development, and therefore the need to achieve sustainable quality of life, the essential element of which is the balance between work and non-work life. In the pursuit to achieve sustainable quality of life what is needed is ‘harmony’, ‘adequate proportion’, ‘synergy’ or the aforementioned ‘balance’ - associated with inner peace, bliss and a sense of satisfaction from their social roles. Mutually balanced relations reduce the tension associated with combining competing professional and non-work obligations and consequently counteract its negative effects.

The complex subject of the relationship between work and personal life includes a number of specific issues which should be the subject of scientific research. These involve: working time and leisure time; quality of life and quality of work; occupational stress, burnout and workaholism; family-friendly employment and the so-called ‘family-friendly workplaces’; work-life balance programs used in enterprises; actions of local and national governments to promote work-life balance; European social policy, including family policy, labor market policy, and others.

The following figure shows selected sciences which are the strongest related to the analyzed issue.

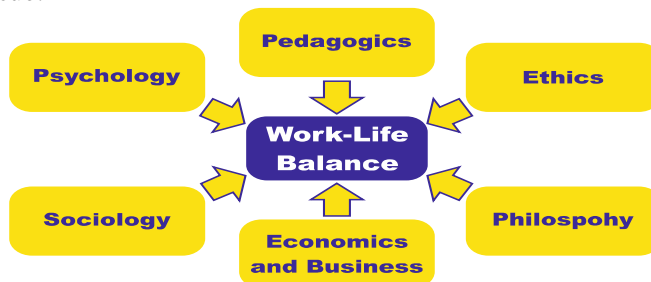


Fig. 2. Interdisciplinary issues of work – non-work life balance

Source: Author's.

It should be emphasized that indicated in earlier deliberations three levels at which one can deal with the described problems, should be the object of interest and research of a number of specific disciplines. Hence, the disciplines depicted in the drawing are only examples.

Referring to the first level of analysis - *individual*, it seems necessary to mention the idea of 'Slow Life'¹⁹, which is essentially absent in scientific reflection. It is based on the observations of life of a contemporary man, which is very largely conditioned by time. The fast pace of life today seems quite natural. Often it is a matter of pressure exerted on an individual by the surrounding world: they want to experience as much as possible in the shortest possible time. The idea of 'Slow Life' has its roots in Italy, where in 1986, Carlo Petrini, an Italian restaurateur and food critic with a group of friends in a protest against the creation of a McDonald's restaurant, founded a non-profit organization Slow Food, which promotes regional cuisines and healthy food. In 2001, *New York Times* placed Slow Food on the list of eighty ideas that shook the world. A silhouette of a snail, which symbolizes the slowness of life, self-control and seriousness became the hallmark of this movement. Over time, this new philosophy moved to other areas of life. In 1999 The World Institute of Slowness was created, which marked the beginning of another variety of 'slow', which together form the Slow Planet: slow Ravel, slow art, slow wear, slow parenting, slow money, slow sex, slow city. These trends together form the Slow Planet, which promotes the idea of improving the quality of life in all its aspects and celebration of being 'here and now' and opposes globalization and uniformity of life.

Moving on to the next levels of analysis, on which the considered issue can be described, it is worth noting that the sense of balance between work and non-work life is not the same for each employee. It is different depending on individual characteristics, organizational, local and national culture, economic situation of the country, and especially the situation on the labor market. On the *microeconomic* level, employers can come to a conclusion that in the interests of the balance of their employees, it is necessary to create such methods of work and time and the conditions of its implementation, which will meet the needs of employees and customers, and help foster a culture of accountability for 'give and take culture'. These needs underlie the formation of the so-called work - non-work life programs in organizations²⁰.

Referring to the third level, *macroeconomic*, it should be indicated that in practice of the developed countries two models of actions have emerged to promote the relationship between work – non-work life: American and Western European²¹. The first is characterized by the dominance of voluntary action by employers to shape equilibrium model. The second model is social and obligatory in character. It is geared to family-friendly policy and the development of flexible forms of employment and work organization. EU member states take a number of initiatives to improve the quality of work, and thereby improve the balance between work and the sphere outside

¹⁹ Slow life & garden – Polish journal devoted to the subject of SLOW.

²⁰ S. Borkowska, *The balance between work and non-work life*, [in:] "Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis Folia Economica", 2010, no. 240, p. 8 et seq.

²¹ See: S. Borkowska (ed.), *The work-life programs theory and practice*, IPiSS, Warsaw 2011.

work. They also take a lot of effort in ensuring the protection of labor and social rights. Therefore, the issue of Work - Life Balance is considered to be supporting the achievement of the objectives of the European strategy for economic growth and employment.

To sum up the reflection devoted to the implications arising from issues undertaken in the article it can be concluded that it is an important area of research, including both the individual and the micro- and macroeconomic aspects. Research on this issue should be focused on both the causes of this phenomenon, its effects and ways to prevent it. This issue can be examined from the perspective of the country. There are also appropriate international comparisons prepared with the use of macro indicators such as general strategies of social security and national cultural and social norms. Then such studies could provide a significant contribution to addressing broader, international issues, i.e. help to improve the creation, implementation, shaping and evaluation of the social policy in building the optimal relationship between work and personal sphere of European citizens.

Conclusion

The issue of the relationship between work and non-work sphere is not yet in my opinion adequately the subject of in-depth scientific research and analysis. However, it seems that with the increase of the phenomenon of imbalance between these areas of life of an individual, it will become in the near future, an important research problem for many scientific disciplines.

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