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**CHANGES IN THE RELATION  
TO WORK**




**Generations at work**  
Brussels, 16 May 2008



Changes in the meaning of the concept of work in a long term (Méda, 1995)

- In the eighteenth century, work has been defined in particularly by economists as “that which creates wealth”;
- In the nineteenth century, work has been considered as the creative freeing of man, the transformational and negative power of man enabling him both to obliterate nature and make the world in his image and thus express and transform himself : work is the « essence of man » (Hegel, and Marx) ;
- In the twentieth century , it's the establishment of the wage-earning society: the various rights set up to protect workers would be centred on the link with wages : work is the « system for distributing income, rights and protection ».


We are work-based societies. (Habermas)



## Changes in the relation to work over the last forty years : Maslow and Inglehart

In the post-industrial society, preoccupations of individual expression and the quality of life were becoming more important than those of survival.

- Work has been considered as an obligation vis-à-vis society and has corresponded to an “ethic of duty” ;
- Then, work had an instrumental value and it is sought for the security and the income it provides ;
- Today, in our wealth countries characterised by “post-materialistic” values, work should above all enable individuals to fulfil themselves.

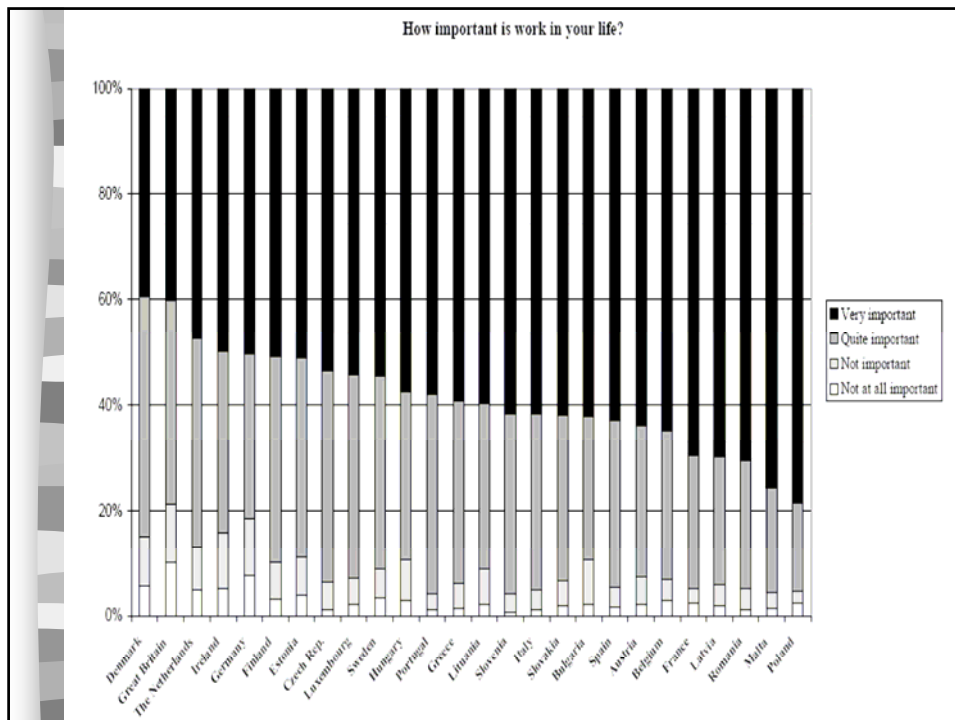



In order to answer to these questions and to validate (or no) these hypothesis, we have used :

- international surveys: the *European Values Surveys* (EVS), the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) and the *European Social Survey* (ESS).
- national surveys from the six countries
- outcomes from the literature review and narrative interviews in the six countries


Work occupies a central position in the life of Europeans: only a minority of persons interviewed in the EVS – less than 20% in almost all countries – said that work was “not very important” or “not important at all” in their life.


The narrative interviews validate that work is a very important organiser of identity, time and self-development in the studied countries.




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- A majority of the population says that work is “very important” in the majority of countries, with the exception of Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands : only 40% of Danes and Britons say that work is “very important”.
  - This proportion is close to 50% in Germany, Sweden or Finland, but also in the Czech Republic and Estonia. It is between 50% and 60% in Hungary and Portugal
  - It is much higher in a few continental countries (Belgium, France, Austria), in two countries in the South (Spain and Italy) and in a few new member countries (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia). More than 30 points separate it from the UK and Denmark.

This heterogeneity might be explained by :

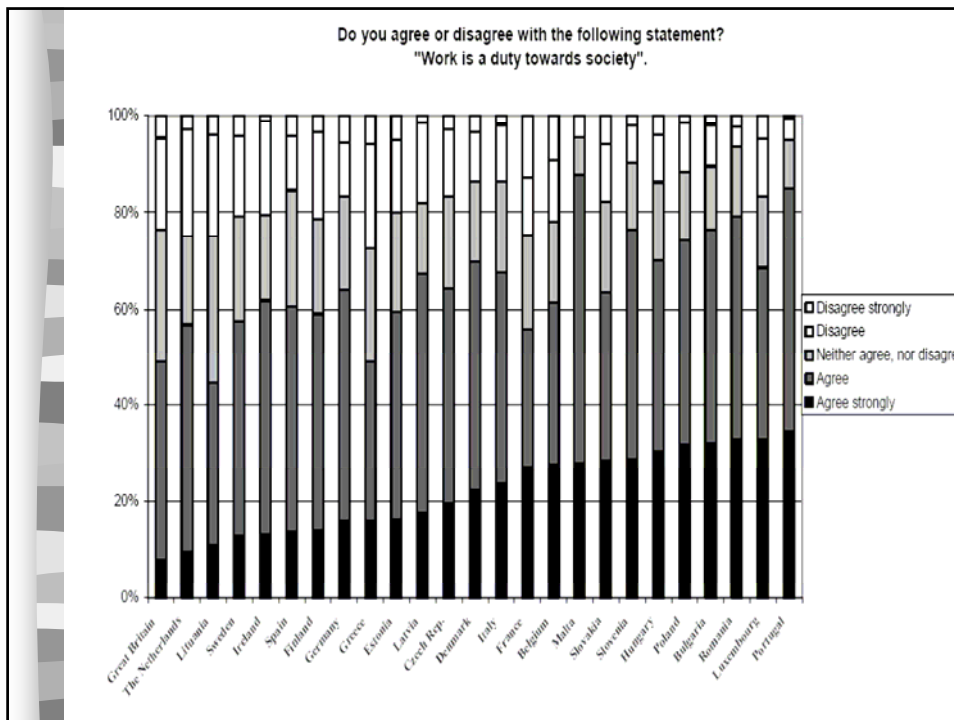
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- a simple effect of composition (but, even taking the different effects of the composition of the population into account, differences from country to country remain significant);
  - cultural differences are not enough ;
  - work seems less important in many protestant countries (Denmark, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Finland) and more important in catholic countries (France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria) ;
  - There is a link between the level of national wealth (GDP per capita) and a weaker relationship to work, except in France where a lot of people say that work is very important ;
  - Unemployment rate is positively linked with the importance attached to work

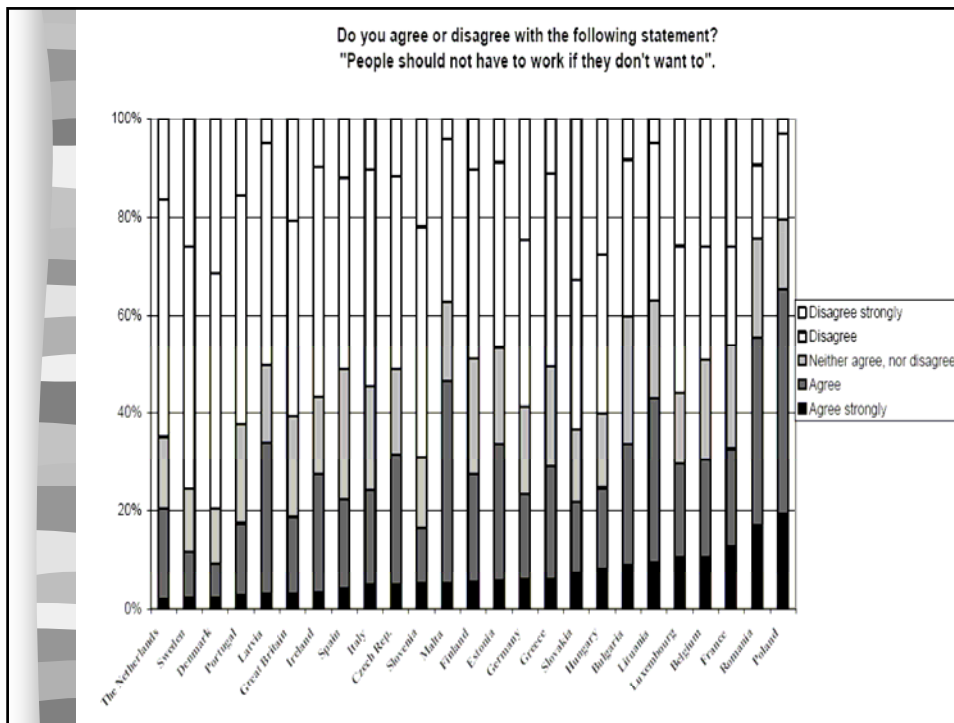


What is the meaning of this expression « work is important », how people understand it, what is the dimension of work that they point out when they say that work is very important for them ?

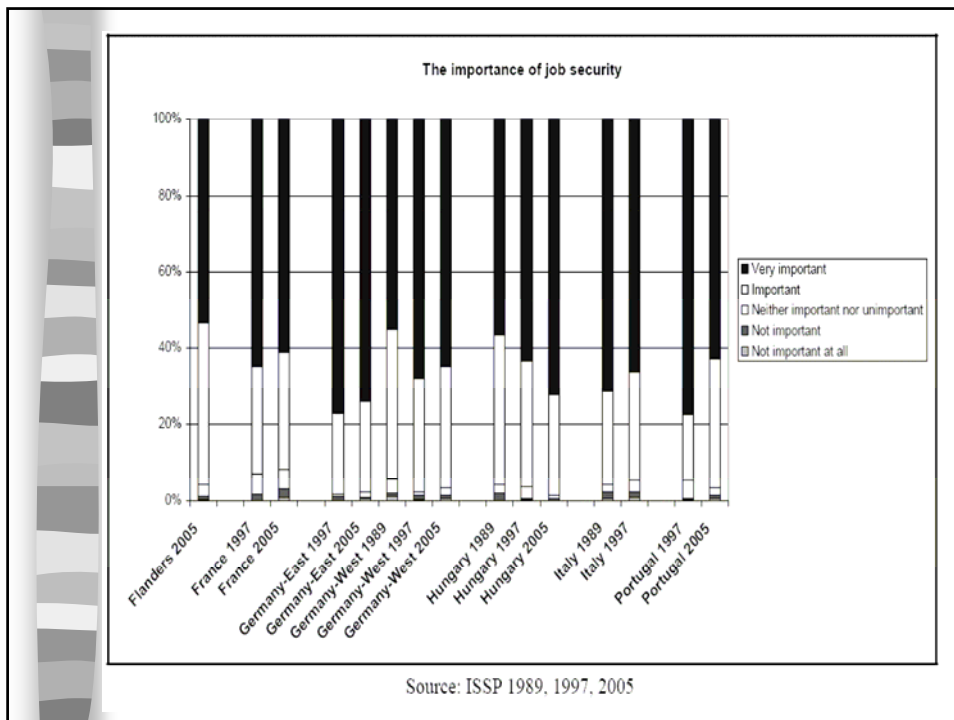
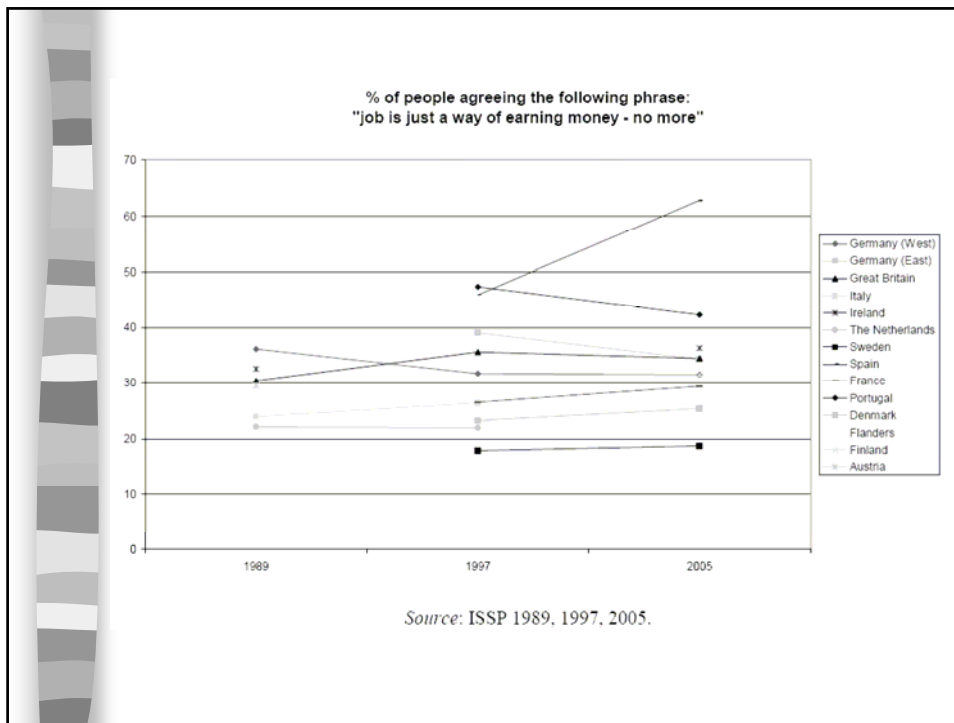
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- The feeling that work is a duty to be accomplished is still largely held and shared by more than half of all Europeans but this dimension is weaker than the others ; Anglo-Saxon people are at odds with this idea;
  - Work is still considered as a means of earning a living (pragmatic or materialist dimension) but this dimension is less important than others and it's the feeling of people with a low level of education ;
  - In the six countries, we observe a increase of the post-materialistic values and a rise of the expectations toward work as a means of personal fulfilment and as a means of relationship. These both dimensions (materialistic and post-materialistic) are mixed (the thesis of a double relationship to work, Pragmatic versus Expressive, remains valid) but the national reports converge in suggesting the predominance of expressive orientations to work. This dimension is more frequent by people who have a high level of education. That could be explained by the rise of the levels of education in Europe.

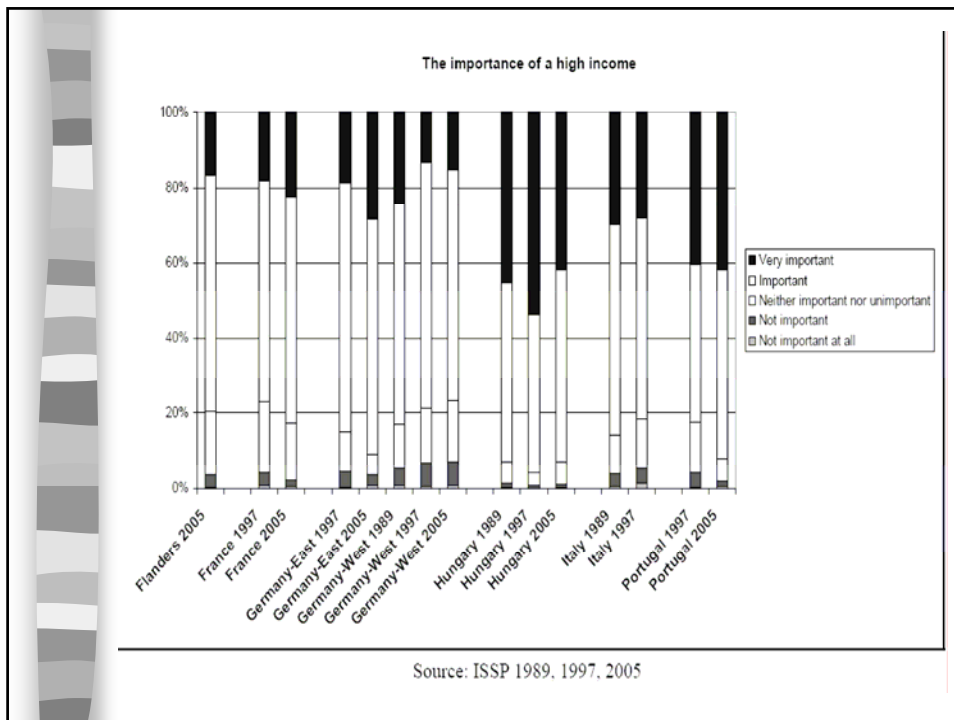
If French and Belgian people say more than the others that « work is very important », they are more numerous too saying that people should not have to work if they don't want to. They are at odds, like Portuguese people, with the idea that work should always come first, even if it means less spare time. On the contrary, Hungarian people are 80% to agree with this idea.



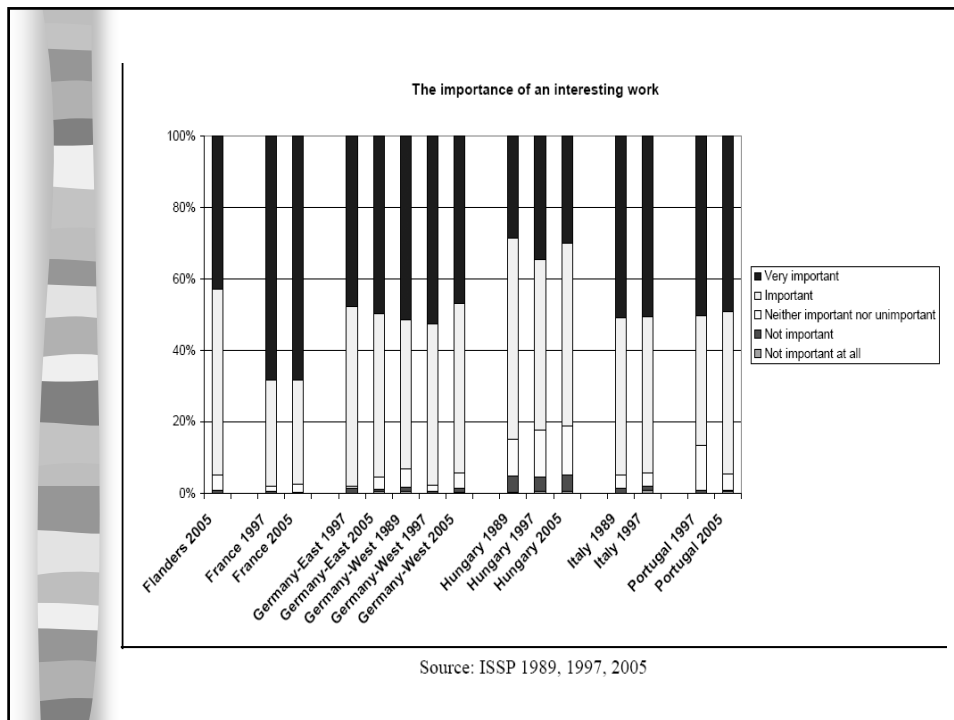


Most European countries are in odds with the idea that work is just a means of earning a living but they say regardless that job security is important and that income is as well an important dimension : income is considered not only as a materialistic factor but as a means of recognition : “money is a measure of one’s worth, an objective sign of recognition and esteem, a symbol of emancipation.”







- In most of studied European countries people say that the most important is to have a interesting job

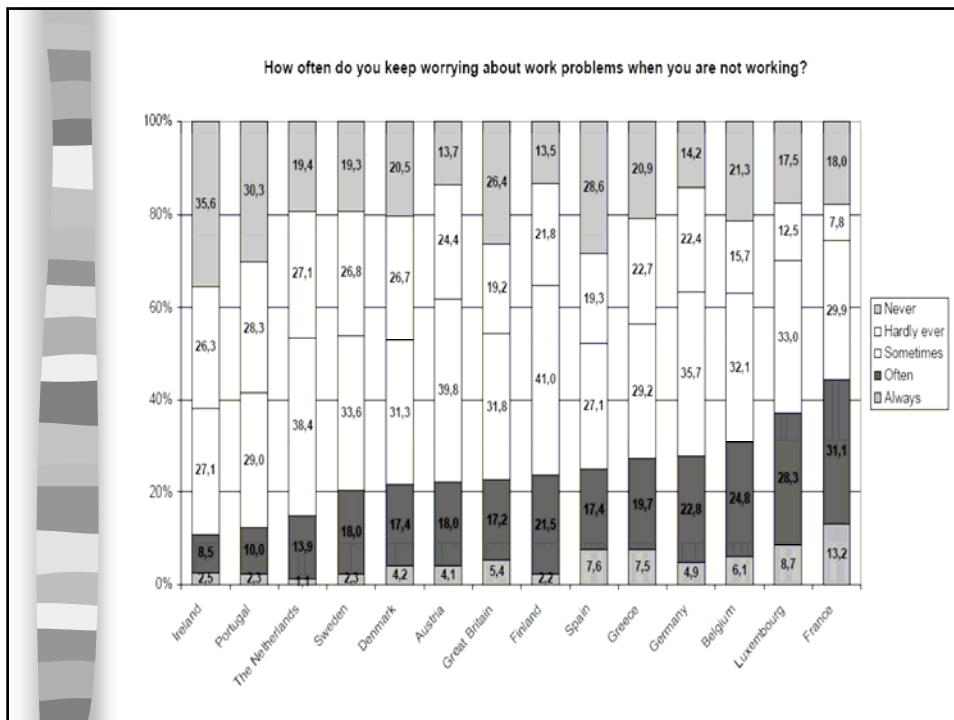



- By the international surveys, France is the country where people are most numerous to say that have a interesting job is very important but the narrative interviews show that it is the same thing in the five other countries ;
- The post-materialistic or expressive dimension of work means two different kinds of expectations : that work are able to allow fulfilment and personal expression (work as an opportunity for self-expression and self-development); the quality of relations at work that the person express himself in the work ;
- One of the finding of our study is the importance of relational motive it means the way of expressing our need of being part of a collective. Less than the importance attached to a social identity (belonging to a certain professional group) the importance of inter-personal relations in the work place as a form of maintaining a person linked to it, motivated to continue in the function, and interested in going to the workplace everyday of the week seems to be stronger. More than the need of being part of a social group of societal resonance, what we seem to find is the need to be part of a small network of people that meet everyday or at least regularly.


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- In addition to the pragmatic and the expressive relation to work, a third type of relations has appeared through the narrative interviews : the « career », which is a very important dimension.
  - While *work* refers to the content aspect taken synchronically, the notion of *career* includes the same ideas but projected to a future: it implies a vision of the future, and includes the dimensions of active choice and selection among possible working paths, and therefore also the notion of progress and transformation in time

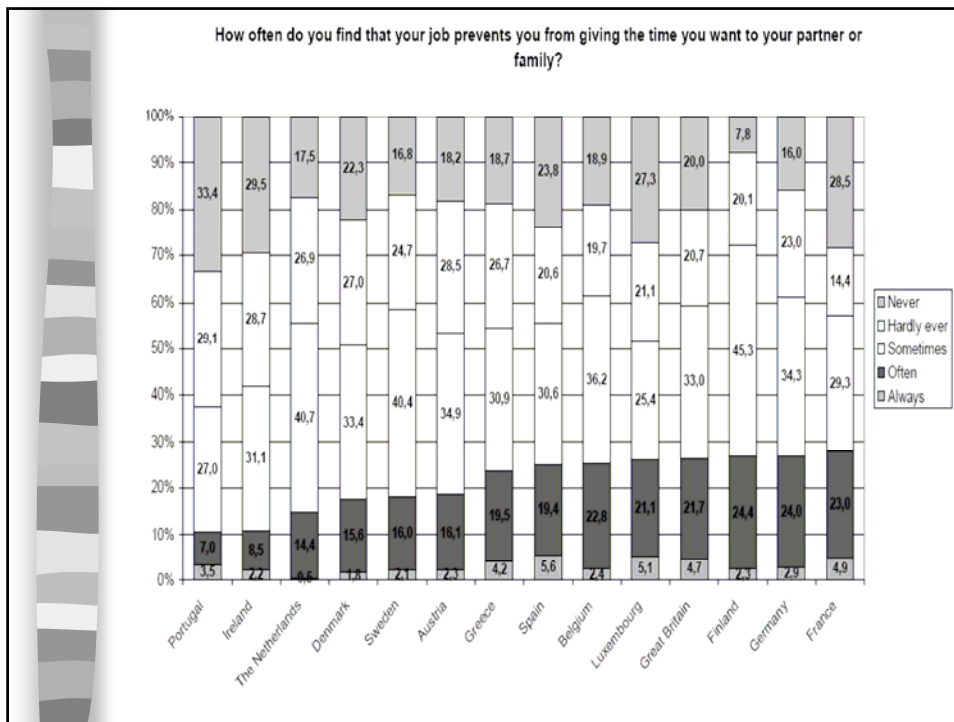
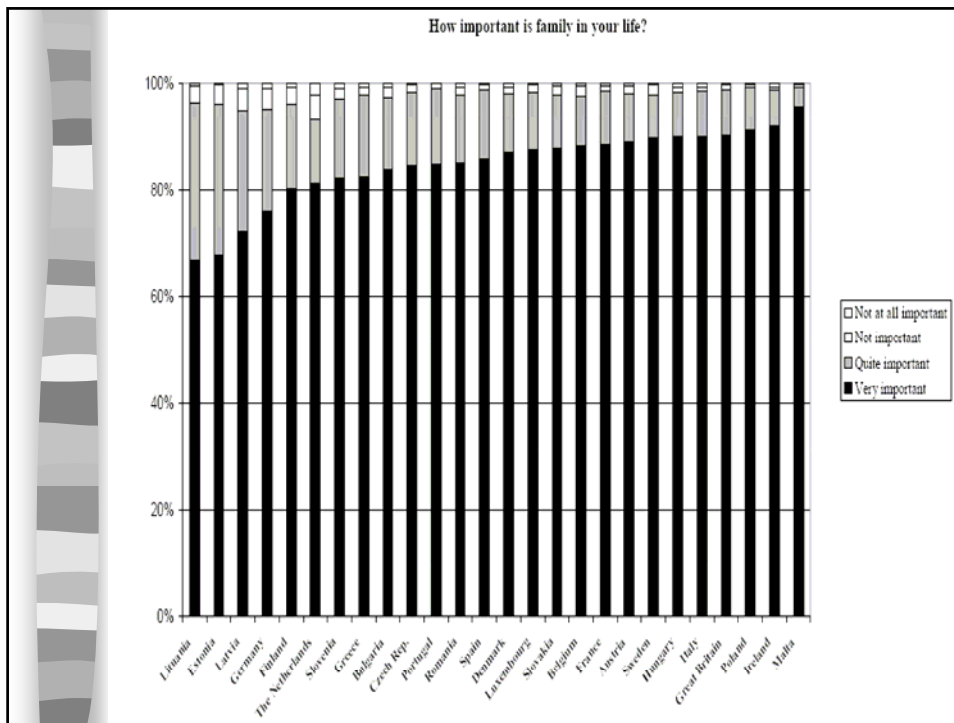
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- In one extreme case, career supplants concerns with the content of work. The person is more focused on the dimensions of projecting a future and choosing among available options than with the content of what he is doing, or with the specific competences and knowledge of his area. Prestige and revenue of the future functions that are anticipated and targeted are the ultimate goals of his relation to work.
  - This dimension is particularly strong in Portugal, in several countries by young women and by young men in Germany.

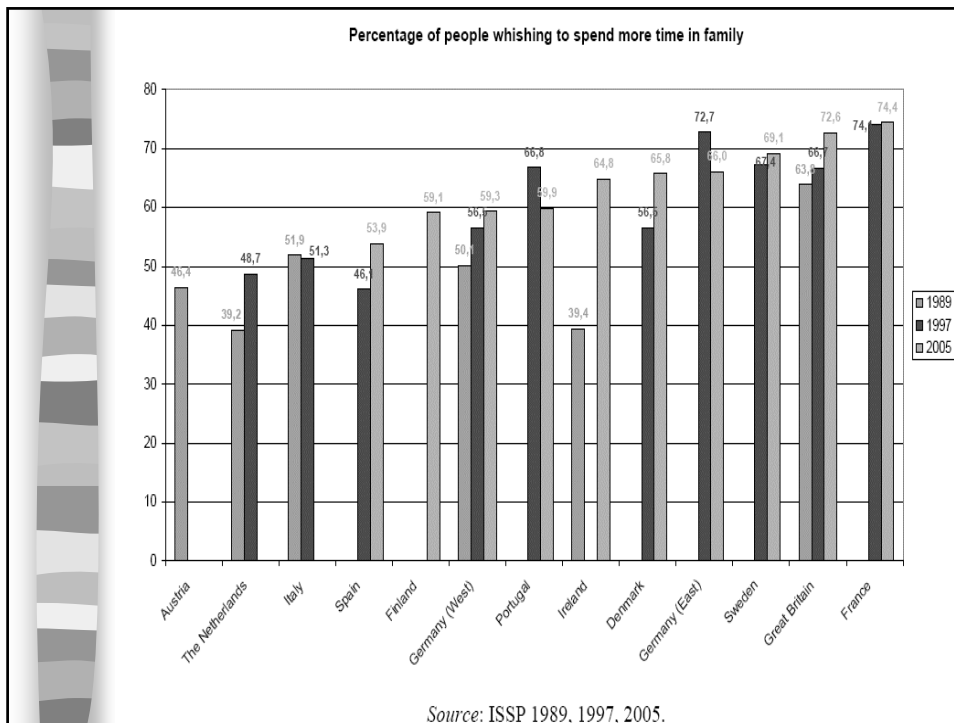
- In France and Belgium many people say that decreasing work importance in life would be a good thing ;
- In France, bad relations between management and employees at the workplace, bad conditions of work, weak satisfaction regarding the wage this position ;
- In France and Belgium, the feeling that work takes too much place, that it's difficult to combine professional and family life and wish to give more time to the family could as well explain this position.




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- In most of concerned countries, men and women without young children have the same relationship to work perhaps with a little predominance of the expressive relation by women ;
  - In all the concerned countries, relationship to work is different for women with young children because they are in charge of care et because their career can be interrupted or slowed for this reason

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- In all concerned countries, family is considered as very important ;
  - Work and family are not only two values but two activities which need time : women have to share their time between these two activities ;
  - In certain countries, people don't mentioned difficulties for combine family and professional life it could be because children are less numerous (Italy) or because family give help to take care of children (Portugal). In other countries, young women who work and seem to accord a very strong importance to work could be bad considered when they have young children (Germany) or when they have not children and prefer to have a career (Hungary). In France and Belgium, the permanent increase of employment by women until seventies and the strong attachment to work and to family leads to strong difficulties to combine family and professional life.





**Young people: a particular relationship to work?**



## A high level of expectations

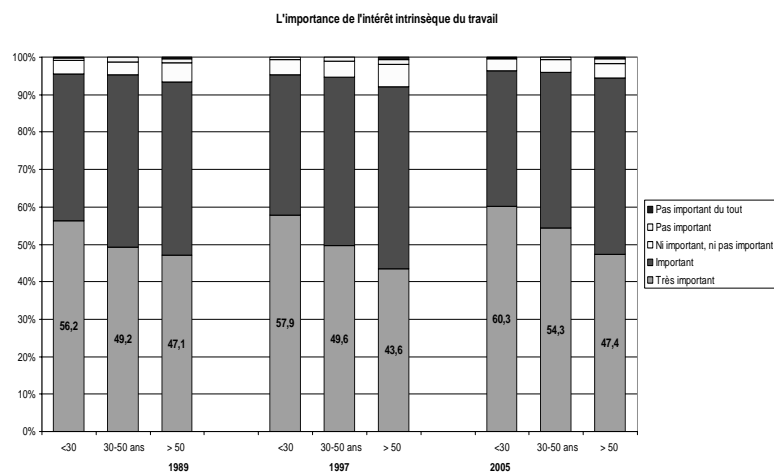
- When employees are asked to rank the factors for appreciating a job, young people are clearly more inclined to rank the criteria they were proposed as 'vital'
- This high level of expectations door on both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work



## Extrinsic aspects of work

- Young people grant a slightly higher importance to wage than other age groups :
  - 83% of young people
  - 81% of people between 30 and 50 years
  - 77% of people over 50 years...Consider "wages" as "important" or "very important"
- Job security is considered by young people even more important than wages :
  - 94% of young people
  - 91% of people between 30 and 50 years
  - 91% of people over 50 years..... Consider "job security" as "important" or « Very important »

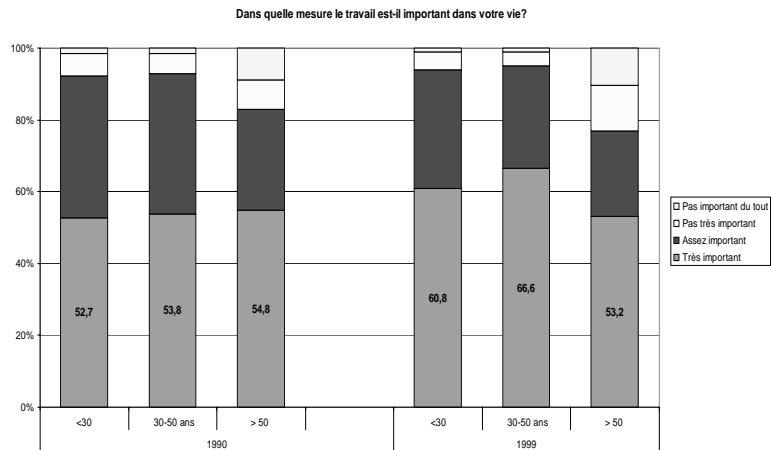
## Intrinsic aspects of work



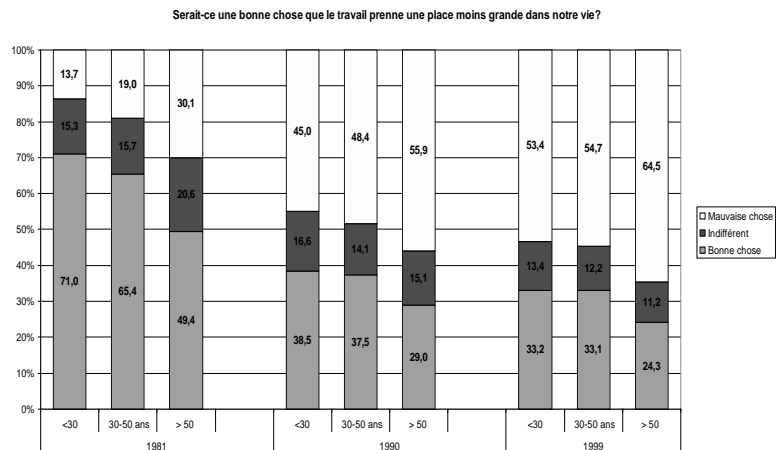
Young people value more than their elders:

- Opportunities for learning and development (78% against 68%)
- Interest of the work (96% against 91%)
- Quality and density of the social environment and relationships of their activity (73% against 71%)

## A large importance granted to work...



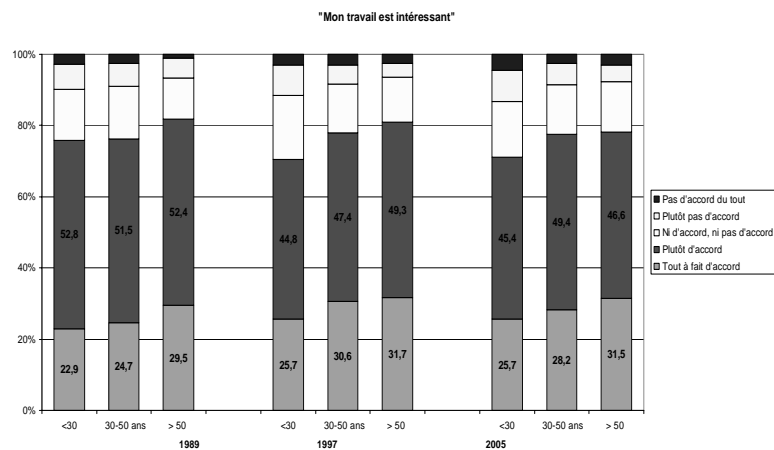
## ... Which is combined with a will, more pronounced among young people, limiting the place of work in life



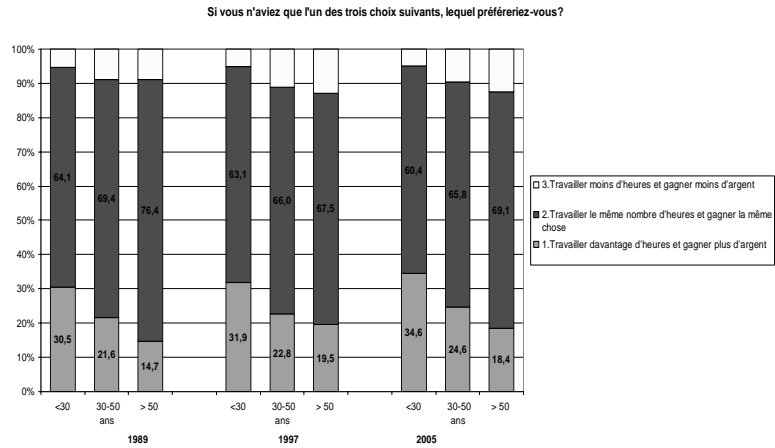
## How to explain this challenge to a hegemonic place of work?

- A higher level of education
- A greater willingness among young men, compared with their older counterparts, limiting the impact of labour with the arrival of a first child
- The refusal to reproduce a model parental focused exclusively on work
- Disillusionment phenomena related to decommissioning

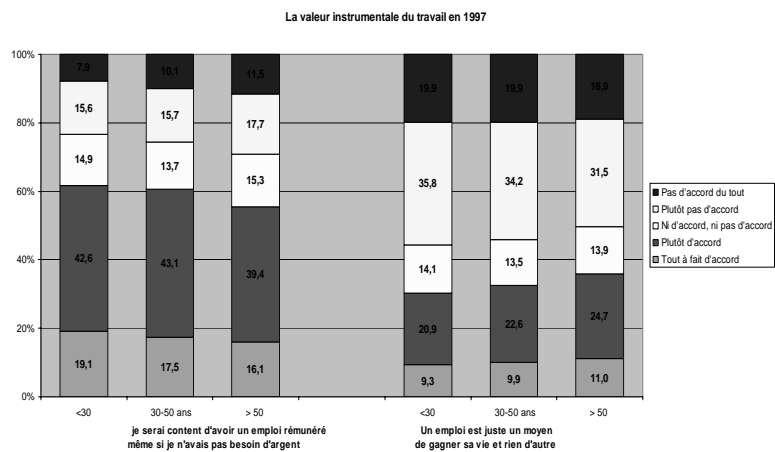
## A gap between an initially high level of expectations and the observation post from low job satisfaction




## "Working more to earn more": a claim more pronounced among young people



## A more instrumental relationship... not with the work





... But with the company

- Young people are indeed much more likely than other age groups to consider, as a scenario quite likely, to change their organization in the short or medium term (60% against 25%)