

Degrowth Conference, 2014 – Leipzig, Germany

Special session «Working hours reduction as part of degrowth agenda»

Approach: participatory modeling

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The amount of working hours is in absolute terms driven by two main processes: **Consumption growth** and **Production growth**. The more people want to produce, the more they have to work and the more they work, the more goods and services they produce. Higher production level leads to a higher **environmental pollution**. Then the more one works, the more his/her relative income is, and consequently, the affordability of goods and services for him/her rises. Such situation causes an increase of demand on goods, which drives even more production. The factor which reduces working hours is **technological development** that helps to produce the same amount of goods using less amount of time. Stably high working hours also helps maintain the stability of social sector.

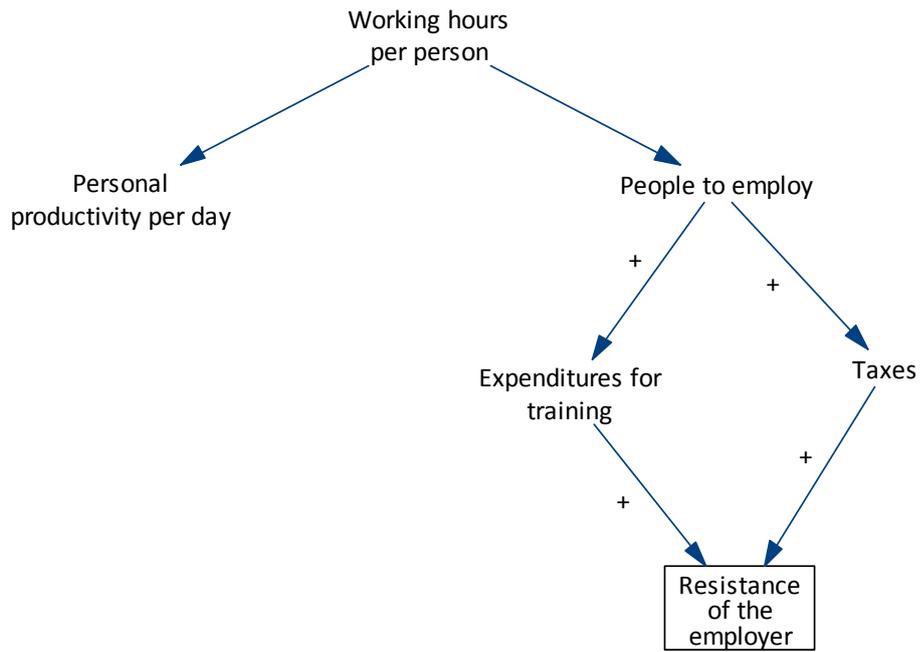
But then **work-life balance** issue comes in. The less one works, the more free time he/she has for family and personal development as well as for unpaid work such as voluntary activities for local communities etc. All in all these factors add to **perceived quality of life**.

Additionally more free time gives an opportunity to re-think the values connected with economic growth and consumerism paradigm. In turn it might increase **environmentally and socially conscious** behavior and it can lead to less consumption and less environmental pollution.

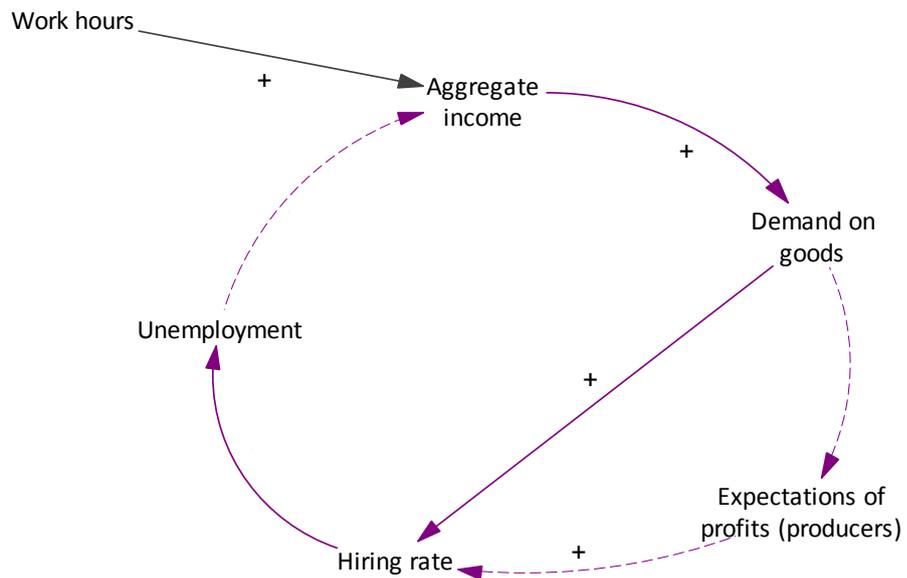
Insights from the workshop contributing to the topic:

1. The issue of working hours reduction can be connected with much in-depth ideas of purpose of life as well as loneliness in life. For instance, one might like to work more, because of having no one to share his/her free time with, while working place is a mean of communication with others. So loneliness in particular cases might drive increase in working hours on a personal level (see **Purpose of life** and **Loneliness** variables).
2. The idea of more free time doesn't automatically lead to less consumption or less pollution. For instance, there might be such kind of leisure activities which have negative influence on environment (e.g. travelling by plane). On the other hand if we think of transition to degrowth then probably some shift in thinking about 'less harmful' free time will occur. It can alleviate this controversial issue regarding free time. (see **dotted connection** between Free time and Demand on goods and services).
3. The connection between Work hours and Stability of social security sector is partly arguable, because on the other hand the more people work, the more health problems they might have. This in turn will increase **expenditures on healthcare** and negatively influence the stability of social security sector.
4. The issue of connection between the unemployment and number of working hours stayed undecided, because the answer is mostly dependent on whether the work is distributed equally or not (see **Equality of work distribution**).

5. During the discussion on labour market possible employers' perspective was depicted. See below.



6. One more insight on how working hours reduction can influence the unemployment was depicted (as we called it during the workshop 'Keynesian perspective'). See below.



NB: dotted lines were added by Elena.