

Job Quality in Europe: the North-South Divide

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Abstract

This paper examines the job quality in Europe. It is based on the results of the Fourth European Foundation Survey on working conditions covering different dimensions including work organisation, job content, autonomy at work, aspects of worker dignity, working time and work-life balance, working conditions and safety in the workplace. The results point to the existence of great diversity in the job quality across Europe and the north-south divide. The job quality differences are related to the variety of social and institutional contexts. The countries of Southern Europe, with their social and institutional contexts falling within the scope of the Mediterranean model, generally present indicators below the European average contrasting Nordic countries having the best job quality indicators.

Key-words: Job Quality, North and South European Countries, Social and Institutional Context.

JEL classification: J28, J81, I31, M54

Introduction ²

The growing diversification in employment legislation, the worsening of social and economic inequalities and the spread of precarious employment practices to many countries in the last two decades, and against a backdrop of productive restructuring processes and the intensification of global economic competition, has placed employment quality high on both the research and political agendas. However, contradictory positions are held as to the ongoing change in labour and employment patterns. While the techno-optimists announce growing opportunities for all in what they terms good quality employment due to

² This text counted on input from GEP-MTSS whom we thank for their cooperation in data base processing and management.

the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the free market and flexibility, critical approaches draw attention to the negative aspects of these changes. In particular, they refer to the "informalisation" and "de-institutionalisation of employment", the dualisation and aggravation of social inequalities between those attaining relatively strong labour market positions with good jobs, and those with low quality jobs, who may be contracted, made redundant and easily replaced by machines or workers from other regions in accordance with needs to adapt to market fluctuations (Grupo de Lisboa, 1994; Petrella, 1994; Castel, 1995; Castells, 1998; Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Beck, 2000; Galini, 2002; Kovács, 2002; Castillo, 2005).

In 1999, in the light of risks posed by these ongoing transformations, the ILO launched the 'Decent Work' concept, defined as the "exercise of a productive professional activity in conditions of freedom, equity, safety and dignity". In the following year, the EU European Council, at the Lisbon Summit (March 2000), took quality of employment as a key benchmark within the scope of the modernisation processes of employment and the European social model. Correspondingly, the objective was defined as transforming Europe into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world and able to generate lasting growth accompanied by a quantitative and qualitative improvement in employment and greater social cohesion. At the end of the same year, quality of employment was included within the European Social Policy Agenda and became one of the three objectives set out in the European Employment Strategy for 2003-2005 (Nice Summit, December 2000) in conjunction with full employment and social cohesion: "promoting full employment through the creation not only of more but also of better jobs". One year later, at the Laeken Summit, a set of employment quality indicators was approved so as to foster coherence between employment quality and objectives and policies within the context of the European Employment Strategy and simultaneously evaluate national performances in terms of employment quality (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

Both institutional definitions currently structure the debate in comparative international studies on employment quality. The relative positions of countries differ in the results generated according to the concepts adopted. For example, while studies based on the "decent work" concept attribute Portugal and Italy 13th and 15th place respectively in a global classification of 22 countries analysed by the OECD (Ghai, 2003: 152) and ahead of countries such as Ireland (19th position) and France (20th position), studies based on the Laeken definition rank the countries as experiencing the lowest level of employment quality in the EU15 member states along with the other Mediterranean countries, Spain and Greece (Davoine, Erhel & Guergoat-Lariviere, 2008).

These results diverge due not only to the multiplicity of factors involved but also as quality of employment is an ambiguous and difficult to define concept. The same aspect may take on different meanings in accordance

with the prevailing social and institutional context. Take for example employment flexibility (part time employment, fixed term contracts, etc.), while in countries with good social policies, this may be interpreted as an indicator of quality given that it fosters individual options and greater company adaptability to market demands, in states with weak social policies it tends to result in job instability and social inequality. In latter cases, flexibility is not a flag for quality but rather of low quality employment.

The survey into working conditions carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EFILWC) every five years since the beginning of the 1990s represents an important data source for analysis of employment quality in the European context. The most recent survey, undertaken in 2005, involved the direct interview of around 30 thousand people in 31 countries: Norway and Switzerland, the 27 European Union member states and the two new candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia). Hence, as regards other sources, there is the advantage of providing comparable data on both objective dimensions (working organisation, training, duration and organisation of working times, employment statutes, etc.) and subjective dimensions of employment quality (levels of satisfaction regarding working conditions in general and certain particular aspects) across a fairly large number of countries (Parent-Thirion, Macías, Huerley & Vermeylen, 2007). In this article, we examine the quality of employment in South European countries within the context of the 31 states covered by the survey through the selection and analysis of certain dimensions.

Approaches to job and employment quality

In the 1970s, the improvement in working conditions or raising quality of working life represented objectives for governmental programs, particularly for the states of northern Europe and international programs³. These were inspired by the "socio-technical" perspective set out by researchers of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and the "quality of working life" approach developed in the USA⁴ that associated the concept of quality of employment and labour to the development of pre-requisites such as employee participation in decisions, redesigning employment tasks, the reorganisation of work into autonomous groups, an innovative system of remuneration and a safe and healthy working environment (Emery & Thorsrud, 1976; Thorsrud, 1975; Cummings & Molly, 1977; Davis, 1975; Nadler & Lawler, 1983). Consequently, in the

3 Under the auspices of the then EEC, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions was set up in 1975 in Dublin. The ILO launched the International Program for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT) in 1976.

4 Particularly in the 1960s, these programs were implemented so as to simultaneously improve workplace quality of life and productivity.

approaches inspired by the socio-technical perspective, quality of employment extended beyond physical working conditions (hygiene and safety) and to psycho-social conditions (inter-personal relationships and leadership styles) as well as the organisation of work and employment relations.

Currently, decent work is a core benchmark concept launched by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) General Director, Juan Somavia (ILO, 1999) and incorporates qualitative and quantitative parameters for economic and social development (examples include: rates of child mortality, malnutrition, illiteracy, availability of clean drinking water and secondary school education levels). The design of these parameters was based on the objective of evaluating and promoting quality of work and employment in countries with highly heterogeneous economic and social realities including developed, underdeveloped and developing countries (ILO, 1999). As Ghai (2003) concludes, the concept includes some ten dimensions related to employment, social protection, employee rights and social dialogue to summarise, in a clearly understandable fashion, the totality of the sharply diverse facets of employment in contemporary societies.

The Laeken indicators present another institutional definition of employment quality. The European Commission defines it as a pluri-dimensional concept dependent on a range of interacting factors (Commission of European Communities, 2003). These relate to the intrinsic characteristics of work, that is, those facets of labour that generate employee satisfaction and are compatible with perspectives on wages and benefits on the one hand and the prevailing context on the other. Hence, these are the employment conditions and characteristics functioning within the labour market. The paper "Improving quality in work: a review of recent progress" set out ten dimensions and related indicators: intrinsic job quality; skills, life long learning and career development; gender equality; health and safety at work; flexibility and security; inclusion and access to the labour market; work organisation and work-life balance; social dialogue and employee involvement; diversity and non-discrimination; overall employment performance and productivity. The two first dimensions concern the characteristics of the job itself, while the other eight dimensions concern the work and wider labour market context (Commission of European Communities, 2001).

Analysis based on the Laeken indicators portrays contrasts across Europe in the field of employment quality. According to analysis of clusters undertaken by Davoine, Erhel & Guergoat-Lariviere (2008), Portugal, Italy, Spain and Greece form the cluster with lowest employment quality in the EU15.

With the objective of evaluating and promoting quality of work in European Union member states, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions also set out an analytical matrix involving four core dimensions relating to career and job security,

employee health and wellbeing, the development of knowledge and skills and the reconciliation of employment and social/family life (EFILWC, 2002, 2005, 2007).

As expressed above, some dimensions and indicators are transversal to all institutional definitions and, with the exception of the Laeken indicators that includes a subjective indicator on job satisfaction, they all evaluate employment quality through adopting only tangible and hence objective indicators. From our perspective objective and subjective approaches complement and interrelate with each other. As various studies have found, individual satisfaction is sensitive to numerous material aspects, particularly salary (Fremigacci & L'Horty, 2005; Vieira, Menezes & Gabriel, 2005), job security (Clark, 2005) and the length of the working timetable (Rose, 2005). Hence, this paper explores in addition to objective data, the subjective appreciation of various components of employment based on the results of the European Foundation 4th Survey into working conditions. This study incorporated only full-time contracted employees (corresponding to 24,427 respondents and 82.3% valid response rate) so as to obtain greater homogeneity as regards the professional situation of respondents. Hence, based on this micro data, this analysis focuses especially on Southern Europe and seeks to complement studies undertaken based on the 'Decent Work' and Laeken approach macro level indicators.

In the light of recent academic literature, in particular in the fields of economics and sociology, we set the hypothesis that there are close bonds between national institutions and the various dimensions to quality of employment. In accordance with the most important typologies, quality of employment is closely tied to industrial relations system types and the level of collective negotiation in effect (see Calmfors & Driffill, 1988; Bassamini & Duval, 2006), social protection models, the management of employment transitional periods and the education and training systems (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Ebbinghaus, 1999; Gallie & Paugham, 2000; Schmid, 2002; Schmid & Gazier, 2002; Ditch & Roberts, 2002; Vielle & Walthery, 2003; Maloutas, 2007) or also employment models (Auer & Gazier, 2002; Auer, 2005, 2007), the type of capitalism (Lane, 1989; Amable, 2003) as well as the models of production and work organisation (Piore & Sabel, 1984; Boyer & Durand, 1993). From our perspective, this is the most appropriate perspective for understanding the evolution of labour and employment within the context of rising recourse to ICTs, globalisation and technical-organisational change.

As raised above, while determinist perspectives announce a single trend ushering in a new era and the generalisation of intelligent work from a techno-optimist perspective, critics point to the growth in precarious working practices. In our approach, there is no single trend pointing to any new era. On the contrary, the trend is towards rising diversification and heterogeneity in jobs and employment resulting from a range of factors prominent among which are: the economic structure, social

policies, educational and training systems, company strategies for competitiveness and labour management, labour relationship type and hence in summary, the prevailing social model.

We would further question the neo-liberal thesis advocating labour market deregulation and the dismantling of the welfare state as the means to boost economic growth and achieve full employment. As various studies have concluded, as well as statistical data on labour markets, it is countries with a universalistic type welfare system (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland) and centralised collective bargaining that are among those achieving the highest rates of employment participation and the corresponding lowest unemployment rates, particularly for the long term while also ensuring that atypical employment is protected.

The Danish experience, which has gained significant profile in recent years within the European political over flexi-security, blends a flexible labour market (transitional) with high levels of social protection (Madsen, 1999; Schmid & Gazier, 2002; Cerdeira, 2007). In countries that have undertaken a partial or limited deregulation of their labour markets, there are higher rates of both unemployment and atypical employment that impact especially on the more vulnerable categories such as the young and low skilled workers. This deregulation is partial and limited given that it leaves the rights of the more qualified workers practically unaffected while simultaneously hindering the access of younger workers to those same rights.

As López Calle and Castillo state: "the traditional worker does not 'directly' his/her acquired rights and is compensated for their loss where there are no collective bargaining structures able to ensure that through exceptional means of contracting new recruits their own rights are quarantined" (López Calle & Castillo 2004: 12). This type of deregulation characterises Mediterranean countries (Esping-Andersen & Regini, 2000; Barbieri, 2007; Auer, 2005 and 2007; Zambarloukou, 2007). The continental welfare model provides fewer social security payments compared with the social-democrat model and rather fosters a greater de-mercantilisation of work than the liberal regimes characterised by high rates of poverty (Boeri, 2005).

In the meantime, while some specialists stress the diversity of models (economic, society, employment, etc.), others point to the convergence of various European countries around the neo-liberal model, that is, the Americanisation of Europe due to the strong pressures wielded by the international context defined by the prevalence of the neo-liberal ideology and subsequent practices. This trend involves dismantling the welfare state, destroying distinctive features rendering Europe different to the United States, that is, its economic and social citizenship and a strong public field. Flexibility and deregulation as the prescription for raising European levels of competitiveness result in the erosion of the norms and values underpinning the European social model (Vos, 2005; Wickham,

2005). Furthermore, some academics consider that welfare capitalism has given way to market capitalism as practiced since the mid-1970s (Lane, 1989).

A brief characterisation of employment quality in Southern Europe

As previously mentioned, this analysis of employment quality is based on the results of the 4th European Foundation Survey. This survey, despite some limitations as regards other data sources, does have the advantage of providing comparative data on a fairly broad range employment quality factors for a fairly high number of European states, 31 in total.

The measurement of employment quality in each country was carried out in accordance with a method already applied in similar studies involving the generation of composite indicators through the pondered average⁵ of the constituent simple indicators (or components). The overall index, is the pondered average of the following composite indicators: learning organisation; workplace communication/participation; job content; autonomy in work; work intensity, violence, harassment and discrimination at work; physical risk factors; ergonomic risks factors; job satisfaction; integration in the enterprise; working hours and the work-life balance; job security and health and safety in work.

In order to provide a clear description of the position of North and South European states within the set of 31 European countries, the indicators are presented in Figures along two axes. The interchange between the axes corresponds to the average for the 31 states (E31) and when carrying out the ranking of countries, this takes place in descending order, hence, 1st position is attributed to the country with the highest result level (best quality) and the 31st to the country with the lowest value (worst quality).

a) The work organisation

Ongoing changes in the work organisation seek to bring about greater functional flexibility so as to mobilise the know-how of employees so as to meet the demands posed by reduction of costs, greater flexibility, quality and innovation. Leading among the main means deployed is further horizontal and vertical integration of tasks, self-organisation and self-control.

Workers have to be creative, take initiative and develop skills appropriate for more complex tasks. In accordance with studies carried out since the

5 Equal weight is allocated to each component or indicator.

1980s, and contrary to the aforementioned deterministic perspectives, change processes are complex and ambiguous. They may imply both the reinforcement and renovation of Taylorist organisation forms due to the high level of investment in centralised and rigid technologies as is the case with New Forms of Work Organisation (NFWO), resulting from both investments in new technology and organisational innovation. Terminology such as "high performance", "qualified" or simply "new" organisations serves to express new organisational configurations.

Nevertheless, these new configurations are ambiguous and may drive different logics of organisational innovation. The high road of organisation innovation, that is humanised flexibility, aims not only to achieve high levels of productivity and product and service quality but also high salaries and qualification levels as well as high levels of quality of working life. In turn, flexibility focused on efficiency represents the low road of organisational innovation with the objective of reducing costs and short term adaptation (Oeij & Wieser, 2002; Kovács, 2006). High performance work organisational forms are based on flexible techniques, multi-skills, autonomy at work, team working, job rotation, participation in decision making, etc. and are frequently presented as best practices generating positive results in terms of motivation, performance, identity and satisfaction (Capelli & Rogovski, 1998).

However, other studies underline that the gains in terms of autonomy are greatly exceeded by the intensification of work, insecurity and stress (Ramsay, Scholarios & Harley, 2000). In other words, employment practices that impose high levels of demand and simultaneously low levels of employee autonomy may undermine employment quality. However, this does not happen when those high demands are combined with high levels of autonomy, communication and participation in decision making processes by employees across various levels (Karasek, 1979; Barker, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Godard, 2001; Bauer, 2004).

Team working, for example, brings very different implications when focused on people (the socio-technical and anthropocentric models) and when focused on efficiency (lean production or reengineering) (Berggren, 1992; Shaiken, Lopez & Mankita, 1997; Kovács & Castillo, 1998; European Commission, 2007). The spread of team working in itself does not mean rising working autonomy. Team working can foster rather different levels of individual and team autonomy. In the Scandinavian model, there is broad autonomy at the team level and this is connected with a voluntary internal division of labour. In turn, in the case of team working within the scope of the lean production model, autonomy is more restricted and associated with high working intensity and time pressures.

There is no consensus as to the spread of new organisational working practices in the EU. Studies carried out reach different and even contradictory results. For example, a study made at the end of the 1990s concluded that only in 10 % of European workplaces were there high performance working systems (Business Decision Limited, 1999). Other

studies also pointed to the slow spread of these organisational working practices (Sisson, 2000, Savage, 2001). In accordance with the rhetoric of the European Commission, the adoption of NFWO is inevitable given the universal application of its principles (European Commission, 1997). However, reality is sharply different.

In the majority of workplaces, not even the more elementary NFWO practices are in effect (Sisson, 2000). The Confederation of German Employers Association (Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, BDA), in its comments on the Green Book, criticised the Commission for using a "simplistic conception" of new work organisation which assumes a general shift from a Tayloristic system of work organisation with a high division of labour towards a flexible team-based work organisation. According to the Confederation, there is no there is "no general turning away from Taylorism". On the contrary, following the spread of lean production principles as from the early 1990s, the "pendulum is currently swinging in the opposite direction" with many companies are reintroducing more Tayloristic work concepts (Schulten, 1999).

Consequently, the work organisation is a core dimension to employment quality. Hence, we begin by analysing these new forms of work organisation. At the European level, among these new forms team working predominates (62.8%) followed by task rotation (48.7%). However, as already mentioned, these forms may easily fall into either a neo-Taylorist logic or into that of a learning organisation. Given the ambiguity of these forms, it is not possible to consider them as employment quality components. As an indicator of employment quality, we resort to a learning organisation demonstrating the following components: rotation of tasks demanding different skills, decision making by the employees themselves over the division of rotating tasks, decision making by team members on the division of tasks, election of the leader by team members and work related training.

In accordance with results from the Fourth Survey, there are few incidences of work organisations displaying high levels of autonomy, namely the division of tasks carried out by those individuals involved in their rotation (24%) or by the teams themselves (33.2%) or the choice of team leader by members (17.6%). Simultaneously, the percentage experiencing work related training is also very low (22.9%)⁶.

As presented in Figure 1, only a low proportion of employees (28.3%) work in learning work organisations to the European level⁷. Beyond

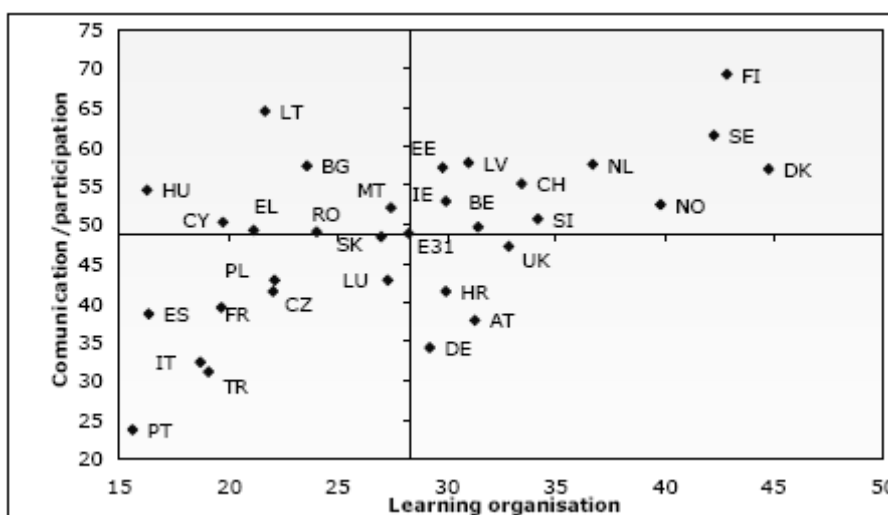
⁶ Although the European average is also very low as regards training (22.9%), the Southern European countries are particularly low (Greece 13.9%, Italy 13.1%, Spain 13% and Portugal 11.9%). Outside of the Nordic countries, Switzerland and Austria, it is Eastern Europe where there is most training. The best results belong to Finland (39.2%), Switzerland (35.9%) and Sweden (34.8%).

⁷ According to a study based on the 3rd European Foundation Survey, over a third (39%) of employees worked under a discretionary learning model: high level of

Turkey and Eastern European states, it is Southern Europe (Portugal 15.6%, Spain 15.6%, Italy 18.7% and Greece 21.2%) that feature among the lowest ranked indicators. In turn, Northern Europe (Denmark 44.7%, Finland 42.8%, Sweden 42.2%, Norway 39.8%) turn in the highest indicators.

Work related participation and communication is strictly connected with the work organisation model. In accordance with the survey, the following aspects came in for consideration: discussion with superiors as to employee performance, on work related issues, consultation on changes to the work organisation and finally discussion of work related problems with an employee representative. With levels below the European average (48.9%), the countries of Southern Europe, with the exception of Greece (49.3%), prop up the national rankings (Spain 38.6%, Italy 32.3% Portugal 23.8%), which are closely accompanied by France (39.4%), Austria (37.8%) and Germany (34.2%). The best results are to be found in Finland (69.3%) and Sweden (61.4%). Previous studies of direct and indirect employee participation revealed similar trends (Wallace 1990; OECD, 1999 and 2004). Beyond the Nordic countries, there is also greater participation in some Eastern European countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Bulgaria). Figure 1 sets out the positioning of European countries regarding employment learning organizations and labour participation/ communication.

Figure 1 Learning Organisation and Communication/participation (%)



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

autonomy in relation to working methods and sequence of activities, complex tasks and high level of learning (Lorenz, Lundwall and Valeyre, 2004).

b) Work content and autonomy

The content of work and autonomy are employment quality facets sharing a close mutual interrelationship as well as both relating tightly to work organisation. The type of work organisation is fundamental given it defines the degree of autonomy at individual and group level. In Taylorist type organisations, only "clandestine" or "hidden" participation is possible (Borzeix, 1988) as an autonomous regulator that enables the company to function, overcome shortcomings and find solutions to unforeseen situations.

The new forms of work organisation, to a greater or lesser extent, enable employee participation with the objective of capitalising on their tacit knowledge to achieve better functional performance and increase company competitiveness. Hence, work content tends to become more varied and more complex simultaneous to workers taking on greater responsibility for the results.

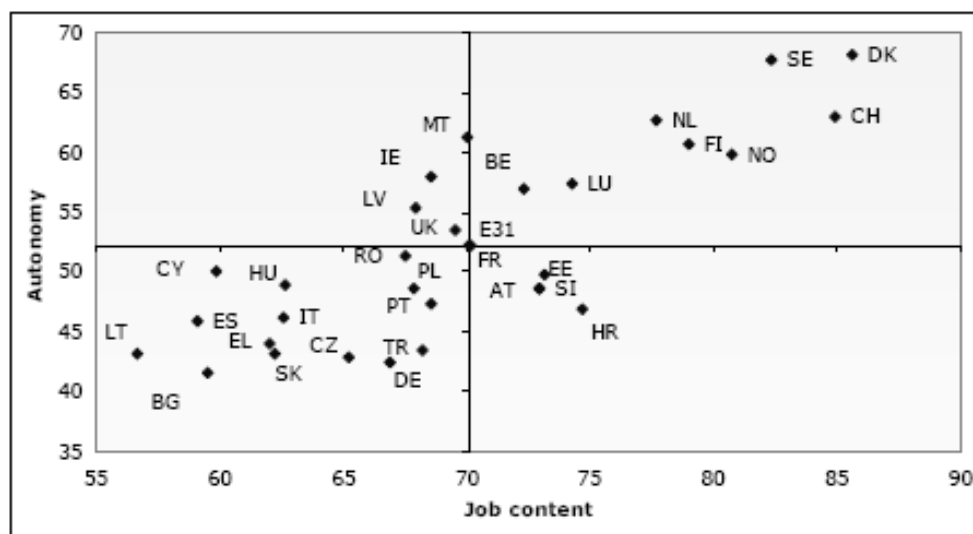
Job content is analysed based on the following factors: carrying out complex tasks, learning new things, resolution of unforeseen problems and self-evaluation of work quality. Around 70% of survey respondents consider their work to contain fairly enriched content even if in South European countries, the rating is substantially lower (59.1% in Spain, 62% in Greece, 62.6 % in Italy and 68.6% in Portugal) than in Scandinavian countries (85.6% in Denmark, 82.3% in Sweden, 80.8 % in Norway, 79.0 in Finland). It should be noted that in addition to Southern Europe, countries from Eastern Europe (Poland (67.8%), Hungary (62.7%) as well as Germany (66.9%) also present indicators below the European average (Figure 2).

Currently, autonomy is perceived as essential to the efficient management of disturbances and breakdowns in complex productive systems, to obtain high performance levels and to mobilise the competences required for such purposes. Within the scope of autonomy, the following aspects were taken into consideration: capacity to decide on the ordering of tasks, working methodologies and the speed or intensity of work, influence over the choice of working colleagues and the opportunities to take a break from work, freedom in deciding on vacation periods, to engage in whatever they know how best to do and to put their own ideas into practice in the workplace. At the European level, slightly over half of survey participants (52.2%) consider they enjoy workplace autonomy. Employees have greatest scope to alter the speed or intensity of work (68.1%), working methods (64.6%), the ordering of tasks (61.8%) and decide on their vacation periods (43.9%) with least influence over the choice of working colleagues (19.1%) and less over when to take a break (39.6%).

Nordic countries once again turn in the best set of indicators (Denmark 68.1%, Sweden 67.7 %, Finland 60.7% and Norway 59.8%). Below the European average comes the majority of Eastern European countries with

the lowest indicators belonging to Southern Europe (Portugal 47.3%, Italy 46.2%, Spain 45.9 %, Greece 44%), as may be seen in Figure 2. Of note is the positioning of Germany, identical to that of Southern member states that confirms the aforementioned criticism from the German Confederation as well as conclusions referring to lags in the organisation of working practices across German industry highlighted by Schumann (1999). Turkey displays high indicators even if the greater autonomy in this country stems not from new forms of working organisations as in the Nordic countries but in simple, pre-Taylorist working structures.

Figure 2 Job content and autonomy composite indicators (%)



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

c) Intensity of work and worker's dignity

For over half a century, sociologists, psychologists and company doctors among others have warned of the dangers to employee health caused by Taylorist-Fordist organisational working principles based on the horizontal and vertical fragmentation of tasks and high repetition rates (specifically, Friedmann & Naville (1962); Linhart, 1978). Recent studies have shown that contrary to what might have been expected, work has actually intensified in the last twenty years due to the intensification of competition globally and the weak position of the labour force largely resulting from high unemployment rates and weak trade unions (Clark, 2005; Gollac & Volkoff, 2000). The prevailing logic of competition drives a permanent reorganisation of the company with the constant objective of improving the efficient use of resources in production processes.

Among the multiple methods deployed by companies are such practices falling within the scope of just-in-time production principles, that is, the lean production model as well as reengineering processes and making

labour more flexible. Correspondingly, the ideal company is that able to produce a continuous flow of goods and services in accordance with market demand with a minimum level of stock, raw materials and labour.

As previously analysed, just-in-time organisations have frequently been associated with extended production chains of purely Taylorist inspiration and hence contain a repetitive chain of operations carried out by a poorly qualified and mutually interchangeable workforce. However, the intensification of work has taken on many diverse forms in accordance with the company models of production and the competitive strategies adopted. The European Foundation Survey included three questions directly related with this intensification: high intensity rates, highly rigid and short deadlines, precise quality norms and a limited time available for job completion.

Our composite indicator for workplace intensity is made up of the average percentage of employees whose work never or almost never involves high frequency rates and highly rigid and short deadlines ⁸, does not demand precise quality norms ⁹ and there is always or almost always enough time to complete the job ¹⁰.

The results show that at the European level, less than half of workers (42.2%) consider they have been little or not affected by intense labour practices (Figure 3). In comparing national results, the best indicators are achieved by Eastern European countries (Bulgaria (56.1%) and Hungary (55.6)) with Norway (32.2%), Austria (33.5%) Denmark (34.3%), Switzerland (36.3%) and Finland (36.7%) registering the lowest indicators. In this case, South European countries present very different positions. While Portugal (44.5%), Italy (43.8%) and Spain (43.1%) turn in values above the average, Greece (41.2%), Malta (39.3%) and Cyprus (38.2%) fall below that average with Turkey (31.1%) propping up the table.

The harmful nature of such labour depends not only on the extent of liberty attributed to the employee for the regulation of their working speeds but in how that speed of work interacts with other members and for example workplace health and safety, physical and ergonomic labour conditions and the respect shown for the employee's personal dignity. As regards this latter aspect, the survey questionnaire provided information on various aspects related to the worker's dignity: threats of physical violence of various types, intimidation, sexual harassment and various

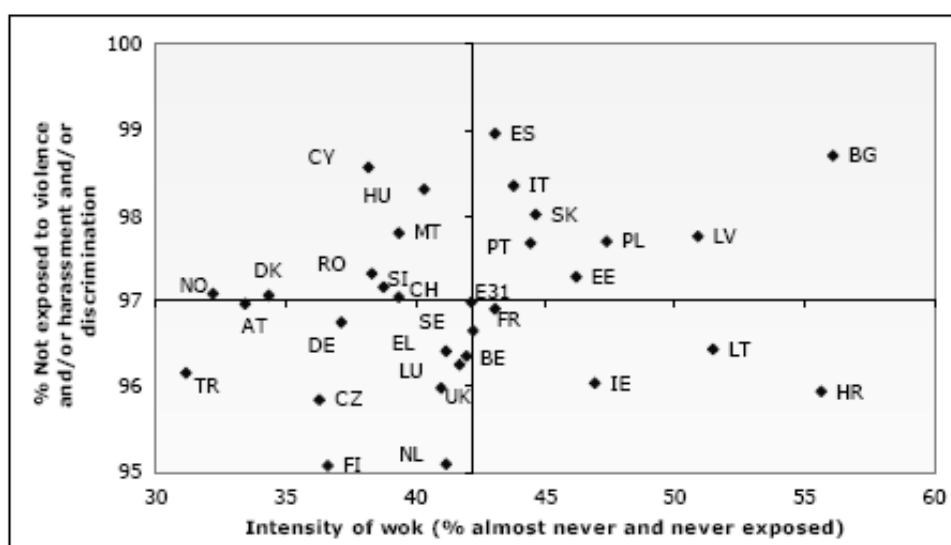
8 Both questions are answered on a scale of 1 to 9 corresponding to the following variations: implies all of the time, almost all of the time, around three quarters of the time, around half of the time, around a quarter of the time, almost never, never, do not know and do not respond. There was particular incidence in the quantity of almost never and never answers.

9 The question provides only for binary responses, hence, yes or no.

10 The question is answered on a scale of 1 to 7: almost always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, almost never, do not know and do not respond. We did not consider almost always and frequently answers.

types of discrimination (sexual, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, incapacity and age). As is shown in Figure 3, indicators lower than the European average are held by Finland (95.1%), the Netherlands (95.1%) and Switzerland (95.8%). Spain (99%) is the country with the best indicator, located above the average (97%) of most of the Mediterranean countries: Cyprus (98.6%), Italy (98.4%), Malta (97.8%) and Portugal (97.7%). Also below the average are Greece (96.4%) and Turkey (96.2%), occupying 22nd and 25th position, respectively.

Figure 3 Work intensity and worker’s dignity composite indicators



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

d) Physical risks and health/ safety at work

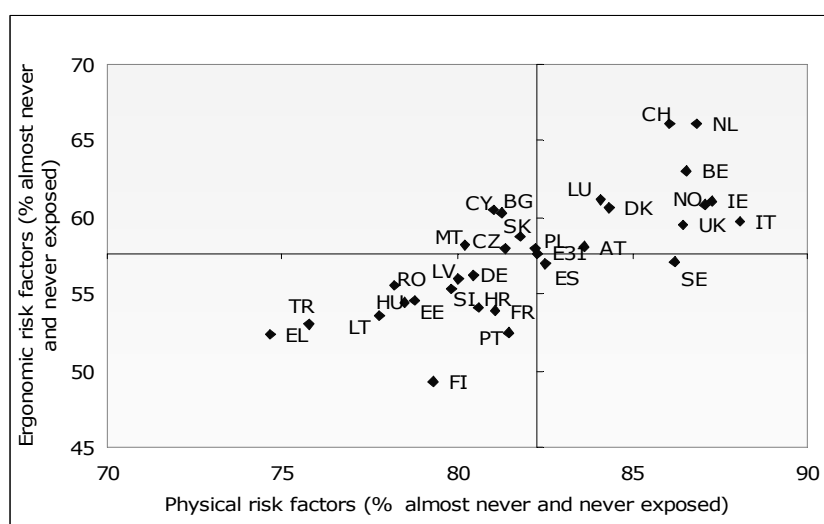
As Gollac & Volkoff (2000) stress, working conditions are social constructions in which processes, whether of scientific objectivity or any other type, lead to the isolation of certain job characteristics deemed prejudicial to health. The European Foundation Survey enabled an understanding of such aspects of the physical conditions of work. We have organised these into two composite indicators: physical conditions inherent to the working environment and the ergonomic conditions. The former corresponds to responses stating “never” or “almost never” to ten questions relating to the following facets: vibrations caused by working instruments or machinery, high noise levels, high and/or low temperatures, surroundings polluted with air-borne chemicals, dust or tobacco, radiation, handling or direct contact with chemical substances, which may include those able to transmit infectious disease¹¹.

11 The questions required responses on a scale of 1 to 9 in accordance with the following: all of the time, almost all of the time, around three quarters of the time, around half of the time, around a quarter of the time, almost never, never, do

In a similar approach, the second composite indicator takes into consideration "never" or "almost never" answers but here to six questions related to the following working facets: tiring or painful positions, transporting or moving people, transporting or moving heavy loads, working on foot or while walking, repetitive hand or arm movements and the use of personal protective clothing or equipment¹².

Around 82% and 58% of employees from 31 countries replied that they had never or almost never been exposed to the listed physical restrictions as regards the working and ergonomic environment. Nevertheless, the high positive correlation coefficient (0.788, on a scale of -1 to 1) shows that employees are never (or almost never) exposed to restrictions in their working environment and correspondingly also do not face ergonomic limitations. Despite this, the relative position of countries differs significantly from one indicator to another. In the case of the first composite indicator (physical working environment) the best indicators are attained by Italy (88.1%) and Ireland (87.3%) and the worst by Greece (74.6%) and Turkey (75.8%). Whereas in the case of the latter (ergonomic conditions) up in the top positions are Switzerland and the Netherlands (both on 66.2%) while the lowest places go to Finland (49.3%), Greece (52.4%), Portugal (52.5%) and Turkey (53%) (Figure 4). Of Southern Europe, only the Italy indicator makes it above the average for the 31 states. Cyprus and Malta turn in indicators above the average as regards the ergonomic dimension with Spain also managing that in terms of the physical working environment. The results for the remaining are all below average.

Figure 4 Physical and ergonomic risks factors composite indicators



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

not know and do not respond. There was particular incidence in the quantity of almost never and never answers.

12 Idem

The restrictions analysed bear consequences for the health and safety of employees. Thus, another indicator subject to analysis was the quality of employment in terms of health and safety. In order to calculate this composite indicator, negative answers to three survey questions were included the following aspects: whether health and safety were jeopardised due to the job, whether work had affected health over the previous 12 months and where the employee had been absent from work over the previous 12 months due to ill-health. The average for the 31 participating states stands at 66% with the best indicators registered by the United Kingdom (78.6%) and Ireland (75.7%) and the worst by Latvia (53.6%) and Slovenia (54.1%). In Southern Europe, only Portugal (74.2%), Spain (73.1%), Cyprus (68.6%) and Italy (67.4%) climbed above the 31 country average. Greece held 29th position on 55.2%, Malta 26th on 58.2% and Turkey 22nd on 55.2%.

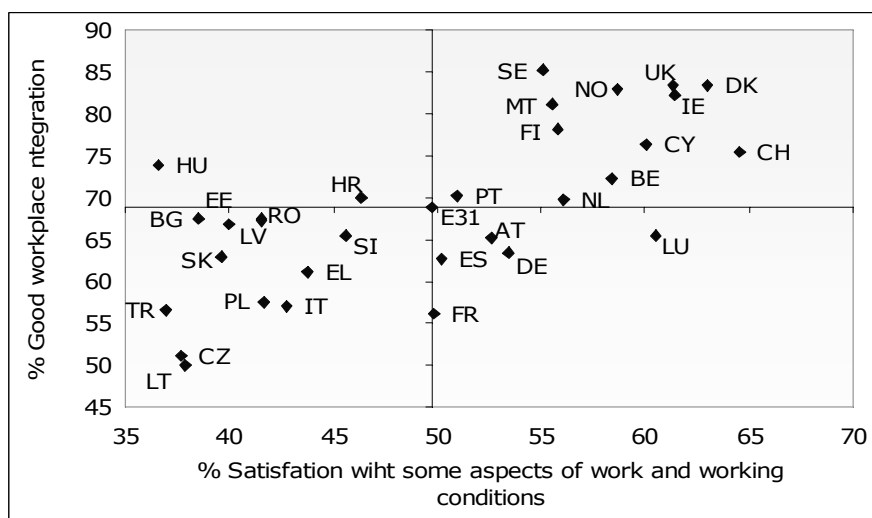
e) Job satisfaction and workplace integration

The job satisfaction composite indicator represents the average proportion of workers who stated they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” at their general working conditions and with the following specific facets of employment: remuneration, career perspectives and opportunities for learning and development. Around a half of workers across the 31 countries (49.7%) express satisfaction or high satisfaction at the categories under analysis (Figure 5). The best result belongs to Switzerland (64.6%) and the worst to Hungary (36.5%).

As regards the workplace integration composite indicator, this incorporates the following two questions: identification with the company and relations with colleagues. The highest values are broadly attained by countries from the North of Europe with the weakest found across Southern and Eastern Europe. It should be noted that there is a strong positive correlation between the two indicators (0.703 on a scale of -1 to 1).

In Southern Europe, Cyprus (60.1%), Malta (55.5%) and Portugal (51%) turn in above average results for both composite indicators while Spain exceeds the European average as regards satisfaction but does not for the workplace integration category. The remaining countries (Greece, Italy and Turkey) are below the averages for both indicators.

Figure 5 Job satisfaction and workplace integration composite indicators



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

f) Working time, work-life balance and job security

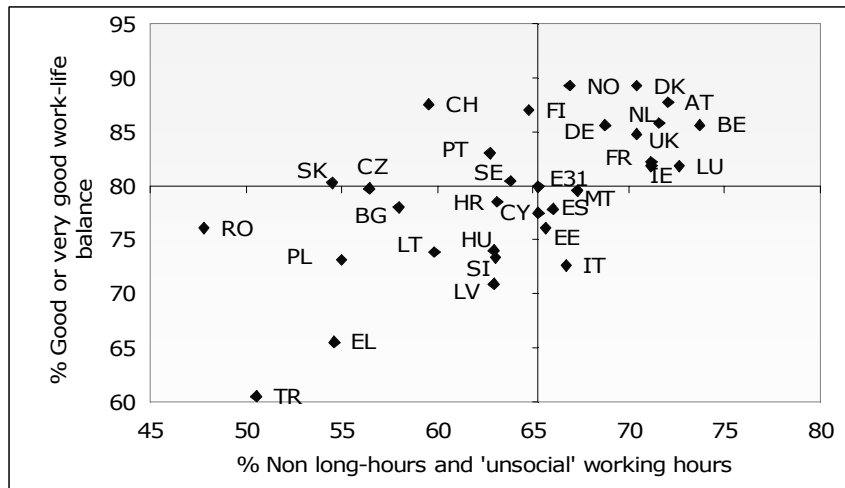
The length and organisation of working timetables are crucial aspects to employment quality and conciliating professional and personal lives. Sparks, Cooper, Fried & Shirom (1997) found a significant correlation between working hours and the degree of physical and psychological wellbeing. It is also known that nocturnal timetables and shift working raise cardiovascular and gastrointestinal risks as well as those of stress and depression (Gospel, 2003). The unsocial timetables (evening, night and weekend working) bring implications for social wellbeing and conciliating working and social lives. This composite indicator took into consideration answers as to whether timetables exceeded 40 hours per week in the core job, satisfaction with part-time working timetables, and the incidence of unsocial timetables, overnight (10pm – 5am), evening/beginning of the night (8pm – 10pm), weekends (Saturday and Sunday) and over 10h/day.

Figure 7 reports the results for the composite working hour and simple good or very good work-life balance indicators. There is a significantly positive correlation between both variables (0.620). However, it should be noted that the three Mediterranean countries (Malta, Italy and Spain) with better than average organisation and hours worked indicators (65.3%) only register below average indicators as regards the balance between professional and private lives.

Only Portugal appears in an inverse position. Turkey gains the second worst indicator (50.5%) for hours worked along with the worst indicator (60.6%) for work-life balance. Greece is also found among the countries

with the lowest indicators in both categories. The countries with the best results in terms of the organisation of working timetables are Belgium (73.7%) and Luxembourg (72.6%) with both Norway and Denmark, both on 89.3%, topping the table for the balance between working and family/social lives with good results found in the majority of countries.

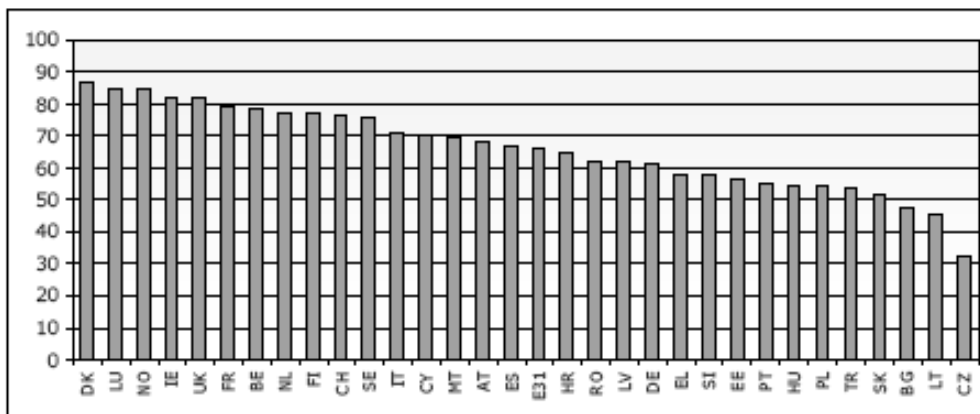
Figure 6 Working time and work-life balance composite indicators



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

Another component to quality of work is the perception of job security. Within a context involving instability, threat of unemployment and insecurity, the perception employees hold as to job security takes on particular importance. As may be seen from Figure 7, slightly over half of respondents felt that (54.7%) their employment post was relatively safe. Denmark (86.5%), Norway (84.5%), United Kingdom (78.6%) and Ireland (81.9%) are the countries where workers feel the greatest degree of security while Eastern European countries, Portugal (54.6%) and Greece (58%) are where there is the highest level of insecurity

Figure 7 Job security (%)



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

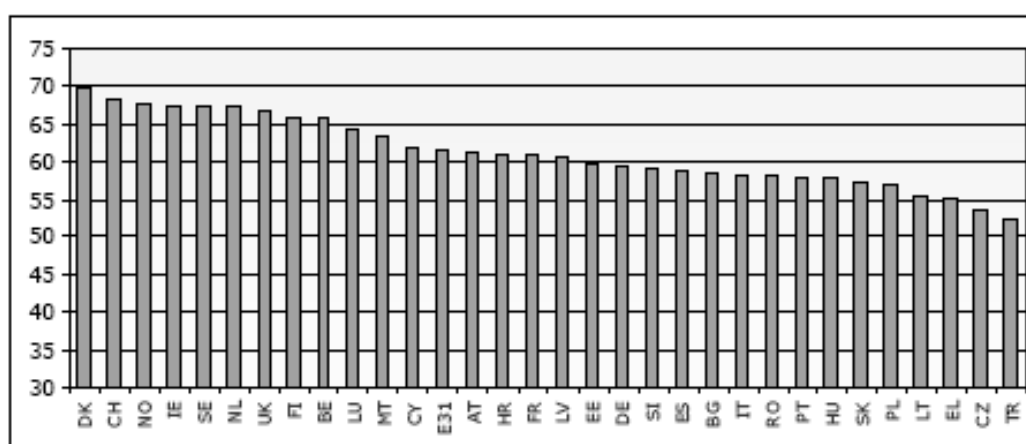
f) The position of North and South European countries in the overall ranking

As clearly derives from the analysis carried out and as set out in Figure 8, the majority of South European countries, with the exceptions of Malta and Cyprus, display indicators below the average (61.5%) for the 31 countries subject to study. The most critical dimensions to quality of employment relate to the prevalence in these countries of traditional organisational and management models. Correspondingly, these countries have lowest indicators report to learning organisation, participation/communication, job content and workplace autonomy. With the exception of Malta, which registers above average results in two indicators, all other countries are positioned below the averages for all indicators involved. Hence, South European countries share the lowest indicators with participants from Eastern Europe.

Turkey (52.4%) is the country with the weakest employment quality. Inversely, Denmark (69.7%) gains the highest quality of employment followed by Norway (67.6%) and Switzerland (68.1%). Ireland and the United Kingdom and other Scandinavian countries along with the Netherlands (67.2%) join the aforementioned in the group of countries with the highest employment quality indicators.

Western European countries hover around the 31 country average (61.5%) with Luxembourg (64.4%) and Belgium (65.8%) ranking above average and Austria (61.2%), France (60.8%), and Germany (59.3%) coming in below the average.

Figure 8 Job quality (Global indicator)



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.

Conclusions

The results confirm the tight relationship between employment quality and the institutional context of the various countries. The social-democrat model prevailing in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Sweden) provides not only the best macro level indicators (highest rates of job market participation as well as lowest rates of atypical employment) but also the best job quality indicators.

This model is characterised by the following core specific facets: a coordinated socio-economic and institutional market context, universal welfare, strong trade unions, a labour relations system based on centralised collective bargaining, dialogue and participation guided towards negotiated flexibility, flexible forms of protected employment, active employment policies and the smoothing of job market transitional periods and the promotion of equality.

In turn, the Mediterranean model in effect in South European countries is characterised by conflict labour relations, weak trade unions, collective negotiation focused on traditional contents ignoring any consideration of new problems, partial labour market flexibility generating unequal protection (poor protection of the more vulnerable) and greater social inequality relating not only to the worse macro level indicators (lower job market participation rates as well as higher atypical employment rates) but also worse employment quality indicators.

A set of Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Germany) operating the continental model occupies an intermediate position. The United Kingdom and Ireland provide both good employment and job market indicators. These countries fit into the Anglo-Saxon model that represents a mixture of the neo-liberal/individualist model with the continental and social-democrat model and are defined by job market flexibility, low protection for all employees and high rates of poverty. In turn, the majority of Eastern European countries, with highly flexible and unregulated labour market, individualised employment relationships and high insecurity, employment quality across almost all dimensions register significantly below the European average.

The institutional context of Nordic countries provides them with advantages as regards promoting flexibility without incurring insecurity. However, the absence of that type of institutional context in South European countries hinders or prevents them following the good examples set by Denmark or the Netherlands. Greater homogeneity in employment quality indicators across the various European countries requires an approximation of social models or, alternatively expressed, greater social cohesion at the European level.

The current recessionary context is leading to rising unemployment and tends to foster employment policies designed to bring about

competitiveness, that is, focusing on the needs of employers resulting in the destabilisation of employment and deterioration in job quality where market capitalism and its underlying neo-liberal logic prevails and strengthens. Furthermore, the normative policies of the European Commission push right towards convergence around the neo-liberal model.

A good example of this European Union pressure is the efforts to apply the principle of country of origin in the Services Directive. Protests by social actors blocked measures designed to prevent social dumping and approval was granted for the destination country principle and hence service companies are subject to the laws and labour norms in the destination country rather than the country of origin.

National and European programs are essential to promoting quality of working life in conjunction with forms of working organisation particularly adapted to the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. Such improvements require not only occasional programs to enable (re)entry or flexibility but also the development of a societal-institutional model able to guarantee decent working conditions and social protection to diverse employment sectors. This requires normative policies and the strengthening of regulation at the European level able to foster the convergence of models around the "welfare capitalism" or social-democrat model on the one hand and appropriate national policies on the other.

The search for solutions to the serious challenge posed by the prevailing economic environment provides the European Union with an opportunity to head in a new direction and break off with its current neo-liberal orientation. Should there emerge the greater convergence of European countries around the neo-liberal model (in its American version), there is the corresponding risk of lower employment quality and rising national and international inequalities.

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