

THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE POST-COVID-19 DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract: *This study examines current legislation and practices concerning working time in the world and proposes an assessment of the current situation of health crisis, particularly in developing and transition countries such as Tunisia. Then, we analyze the tendencies of employees that are emerging with regard to already classic questions - excessive hours of work, shift work, rest periods too short - but also new issues related to the themes of teleworking, the Quality of Life, reduction of working hours, equality between men and women and the informal economy. Despite all the progress made over the last century in reducing working time, it is clear that the gap between industrialized and developing countries is still considerable in this area. Finally, we propose some solutions to remedy this situation of crisis.*

Keywords: Teleworking, Working Time, Covid-19, Quality of Life, Tunisia

JEL Classification: D10, J13, J22

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) called the Covid-19 epidemic, which has infected more than 110,000 people worldwide since the end of December 2019, a "pandemic", but assured that the Coronavirus could "be brought under control". Indeed, measures have been taken around the world to reduce the spread of the virus by reducing working hours and teleworking.

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Around the world, work schedules are becoming more and more atypical and unpredictable, as required by a global economy that is ever more connected, more reactive and more constraining. Hence, the rapid obsolescence in industrialized countries of the notion of work-life balance. A new ILO publication, *Decent Working Times: New Trends*, brings together the studies of some of the international researchers who have conducted the most in-depth reflections on this issue and proposes to examine the changes in the nature of the problem facing the working time, indeed, in the nature of the work itself. The American writer Jennifer Monroe shares her thoughts (ILO, 2019).

We propose in this article a perspective on the specificities of the Tunisian context in terms of working time and its various upheavals following the health crisis. Emphasis will also be placed on the value Tunisian gives to work and to the job, and the differences that may exist depending on the type, category of occupation or occupational category. We also propose to take stock of the specificities of the Tunisian context in terms of work and time given to work and out of work in Tunisia and to compare them with international data.

Since 1910, the question of working time and its regulation has continued to motivate the Tunisian Government. In 2012, the Prime Ministry launched a public consultation aimed at reviewing working time in Tunisian administrations for a better balance between spheres of life. Completed in June 2012, this public consultation aimed to study the best proposals for adjusting the work schedule. It was crowned by the proposal of two days of weekly rest Saturday and Sunday instead of a single day of rest already in force in the Tunisian administrations Law of 14 September 2012. However, the Decree No. 2020-153 of March 17, 2020, which is part of the plan against the spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) in Tunisia, makes it possible to reduce working hours for pregnant women as well as people suffering

from certain pathologies. This new law to establish a single 5-hour session divided into two different time slots to unclog public transport.

2. Research Methodology

Based on basic research that correlated Tunisian companies with a high quality of life for employees and improved business performance, this empirical study sought to answer the following question: What professional behaviors lead to a high Quality of Life?

The data was collected from the World Values Survey. All participants completed the Work-related Quality of Life Scale WRQoL, which is a 23-item psychometric analysis to assess the perceived Quality of Life of employees as measured by six psychosocial subfactors (Sultan & al., 2015).

3. Working time in Tunisia

The Tunisian context is characterized by its singularity compared to other countries of the world. Indeed, there are two time slots: the winter schedule from September 1 to June 30 40 hours per week and the summer schedule with the single session during the months of July and August 31.5 hours per week. week and during the month of Ramadan 30 hours a week which can take place during the winter or summer period or straddle between the two 2. Established by the Protectorate because of heat wave, the single session was attested by the first independent government in April 1956 (Zghal, 2009). For the public service, it is more of a custom maintained by the state even though it is more and more controversial. Moreover, in the private sector, it remains dependent on collective or sectoral agreements. Since it has been shown to negatively affect the productivity of the Tunisian employee (Ben Salem, 2000). Thus, in the absence of a specific legal framework, private sector companies may choose to adjust their working time according to their activity and according to their collective agree-

ment. But other companies whose activities are closely linked internationally are increasingly likely to keep the same schedule throughout the year when their collective or sectoral agreement allows it.

According to a CRES study published in 2012, the average number of working days is estimated at 23.97 days, in April 2011. This average duration is quite differentiated between men and women, and according to professional status. Indeed, men seem to work more than women whether they are employees of the public, private, boss or freelance. These differences are all the more glaring for the function of boss, where there is a difference in working time between men and women that exceeds 3 hours. However, public sector employees seem to work the least with 5H29min per day for men and 4H11min for women see figure 1 below. Comparing this working time by sector of activity, we note that employees belonging to the ICT sector, are the ones who spend the most time at work with 8H26min per day (CRES, 2012).

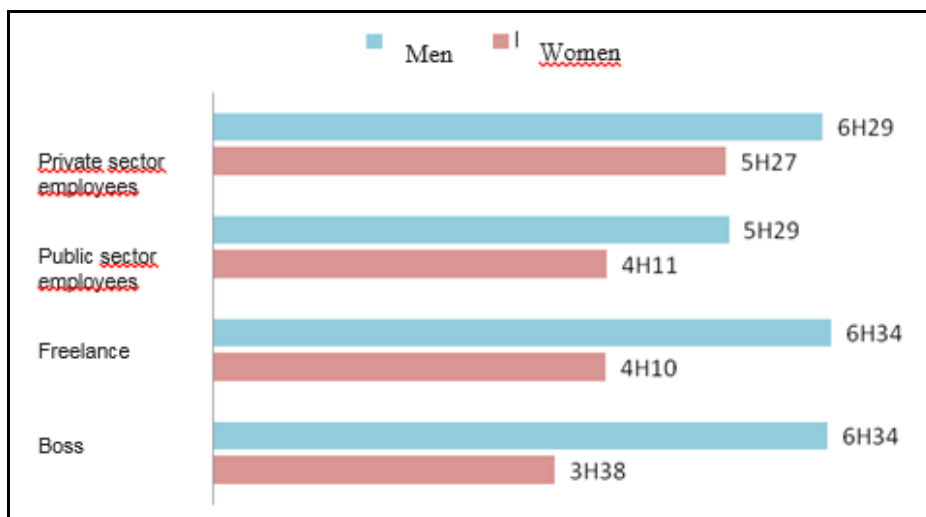


Figure 1. Working hours by sector

Source: Exploitation of the data from the Mahfoudh Draoui et al. Survey, MAF, 2011

4. The reduction of working hours

In recent years, in several countries, including Tunisia, public authorities have begun to realize the importance of reconciling private and professional life. They have taken steps to allow employees to better reconcile work and non-work. These measures include measures to reduce working hours (Draoui, 2011). In 1950, the annual working hours were well over 2000 hours per year. But this figure has declined sharply in half a century, as shown in Figure 2 below:

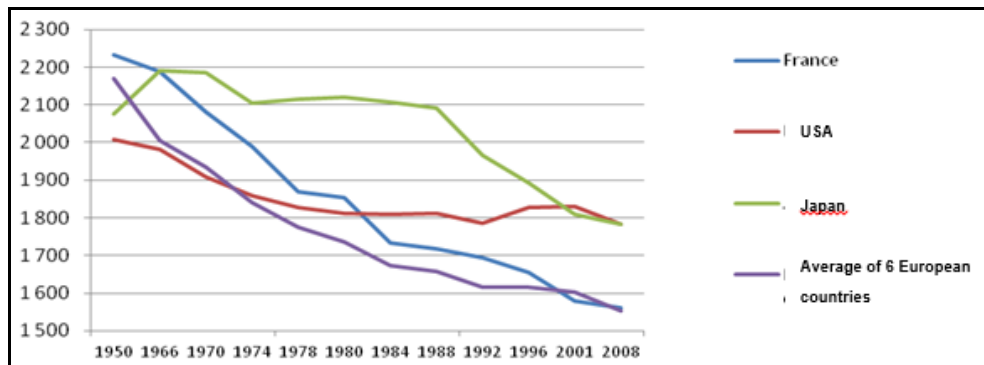


Figure 2. Historical evolution of annual working hours in hours per year

Source: Bouvier and Diallo 2010, Groningen Growth Development Center Database GGDC

We note that France today displays the lowest figure with 1559 hours of annual work. It is also noted that the United States, which had the lowest number of hours in 1950, is in 2008 among the developed countries with the longest hours of annual work. But Tunisia is well above these figures with an effective annual working time between 2,000 and 2,400 hours of work.

By comparing weekly working hours in Tunisia and around the world see figure 3, we can see that Tunisians benefit from the largest number of holidays. He is entitled to 15 holidays a year while the European average does not reach 13 days, with 8 days only for English. Regarding the number

of hours worked per week, the French work the least with only 35 hours per week (Bouvier & al., 2010).

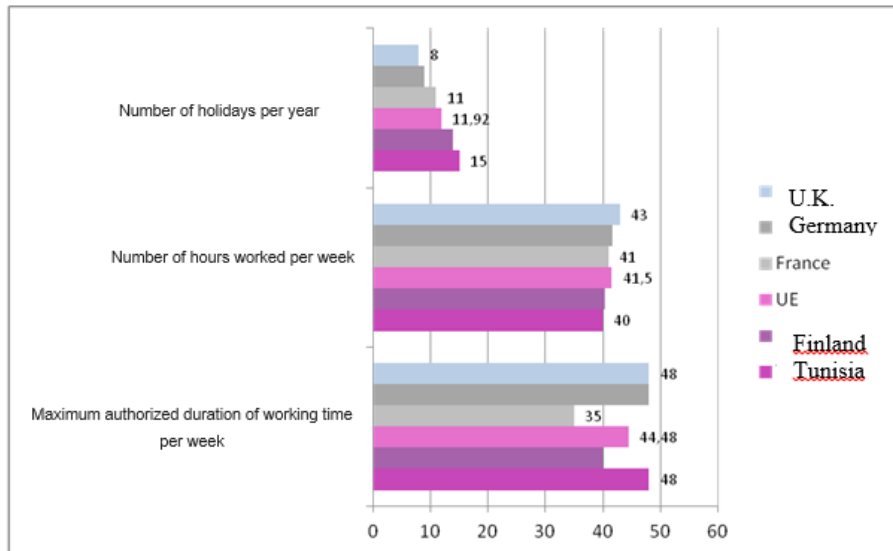


Figure 3. International comparison of weekly working hours and number of holidays per year

Source: Eurostat, Clesdusocial.com, 2012

Tunisian legislation on working time has continued to evolve offering employees the opportunity to better reconcile their working time and their time off work. This is evidenced by the continuing movement of shorter working hours and the many laws that have organized working time and the right to rest since the beginning of the last century. Indeed, A new government decree establishing exceptional provisions concerning the work of state personnel, local authorities, public establishments of an administrative nature and public bodies, establishments and enterprises has just seen the light of day.

Decree No. 2020-153 of March 17, 2020, which is part of the plan against the spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) in Tunisia, makes it possible to reduce working hours and teleworking for pregnant women as well as people suffering from certain pathologies. However, this reduction concerns diabetics, people suffering from chronic respiratory diseases like asthma, cardiovascular diseases, renal or hepatic insufficiency or even suffering from cancer. The person in question must provide a request accompanied by proof of their illness. In exceptional cases, these people may not go to their places of work. see Table 1 below. Thus, in 1985 the half-time work system with half of the wage is introduced in Tunisia. Then, in 2006, part-time work is introduced for mothers with children under sixteen, receiving two-thirds of the salary. But these last two regimes have not had the expected enthusiasm (Eurostat, 2012). This may be due in particular to deficiencies in the law. Indeed, no financial incentive for companies is provided contrary to the European countries that have accompanied this measure by economic and social incentives for companies that use this formula Labor code, 2019. Similarly, the Tunisian legislator has not provided guarantees or compensation mechanisms for employees willing to work part-time, to eliminate or neutralize the negative implications for their rights, particularly in social security (Mzid, 2009).

Table 1. Chronology of the main laws on work and working time in Tunisia

Dates	Main events
June 1910	Regulation of the work of male children under the age of 16 in the underground work of mines and quarries.
April 1921	Institution of weekly rest in industrial and commercial establishments.
August 1936	Establishment of the 40-hour week in industrial and commercial establishments.
September 1943	Establishment of paid holidays in the agricultural sector.
July 1946	Regulation of Overtime Pay.

Dates	Main events
July 1946	Regulation of paid holidays in industrial and commercial establishments and the liberal professions.
April 1950	Regulation of women's and children's work in commercial, industrial and professional establishments.
April 1956	Establishment of the single session during the summer period and the month of Ramadan already in force under the protectorate.
February 1954	Regulation of women's and children's work in agriculture.
December 1960	Retirement age set at 60, which can in some cases be lowered to 55 or extended to 65 years.
December 1963	Fixing of paid and non-working holidays.
December 1983	Organization of paid annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, exceptional leave and unpaid leave.
June 1985	Establishment of part-time work arrangements in public establishments.
July 1996	Establishment of the minimum age of admission to work at 16 except special exemptions.
March 2003	Institution of the creation leave.
March 2006	Provision of creative leave for public sector workers and introduction of part-time work for mothers with two-thirds of salary.
March 2011	Re fixing holidays 15 days.
September 2012	Redeployment of work schedules in the public sector 5-day week with flexibility of time.
March 2020	Decree No. 2020-153 of March 17, 2020

Source: Synthesis based on the Labor Code and the Official Journal of the Republic of Tunisia

Another finding was also revealed by this study. This is the growing number of long-term sick leave cases whose causes are generally related to psychological diseases 93% of cases according to the report of the Prime Ministry. In 2011, women accounted for 64% of the total number of beneficiaries of these leaves (Prime Ministry, 2012). This alarming number of long-term holidays, which continues to grow from one year to the next, feeds the debate on the balance between working time and non-working time in Tunisia.

Table no. 11 below gives an overview of the evolution of the number of these long-term sick leaves.

Table 2. Evolution of the number of long-term sick leave

Year	Number of beneficiaries	Days of sick leave
2009	7200	1 Million and 200 thousand days
2010	7438	1 Million, 328 miles and 878 days

Source: Report of the Prime Ministry 2012

5. Work, a very important value for the Tunisian

According to the survey of the World Values Survey 2010-2014, and in response to the question: "For each of the following things, say if, in your life, is it very important, somewhat important, not important or not important at all? 87% of Tunisians said they considered work "very important" in their lives, ranking fourth among the most professional countries among the 59 countries surveyed by the World Values Survey. They are far ahead of their Egyptian neighbors in particular with 61%. This places labor third in the order of importance of Tunisians, after family and religion, and well after friends, hobbies, or politics see Figure 4 below.

Regarding the importance given to the family, it is very similar from one country to another more than 90% of respondents say that the family is very important in their lives. Tunisians, from this point of view, do not depart from the rule with a rate of 98%. In other words, family, religion and work are considered to be the most important activities for Tunisians (Afriat, 1997).

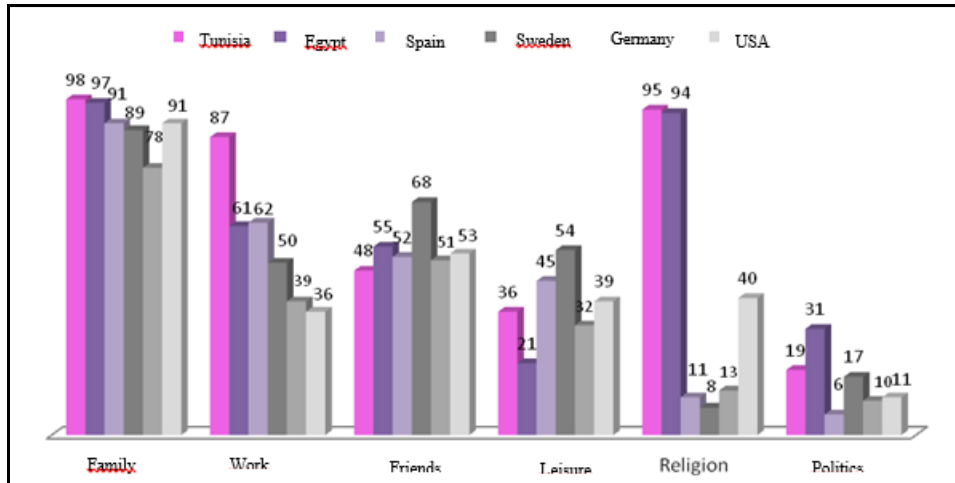


Figure 4. Importance given to each activity international comparison in%

Source : Exploitation of data from the World Values Survey 2010-2014

In addition, particular importance is given to religion in Muslim countries compared to European and Anglo-Saxon countries. Indeed, we note a very large gap between the value given to religion in Muslim countries such as Tunisia and Egypt around 94% and the European and Anglo-Saxon countries not exceeding 40% . On the other hand, in these countries, particular attention is paid to social ties and friendly relations more than 50%. The importance given to work compared to leisure perceived in Tunisia is also noted in Egypt and Spain. But this result is not universal. In Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries such as Sweden, Great Britain and the United States, leisure and free time are considered more important than professional life.

The figures from the World Values Survey also reveal interesting differences between Tunisian women and men. Figure 5 below shows differences between men and women in terms of the importance given to work, friends and leisure, but they remain equal in the value given to the family (Garner & al., 2006).

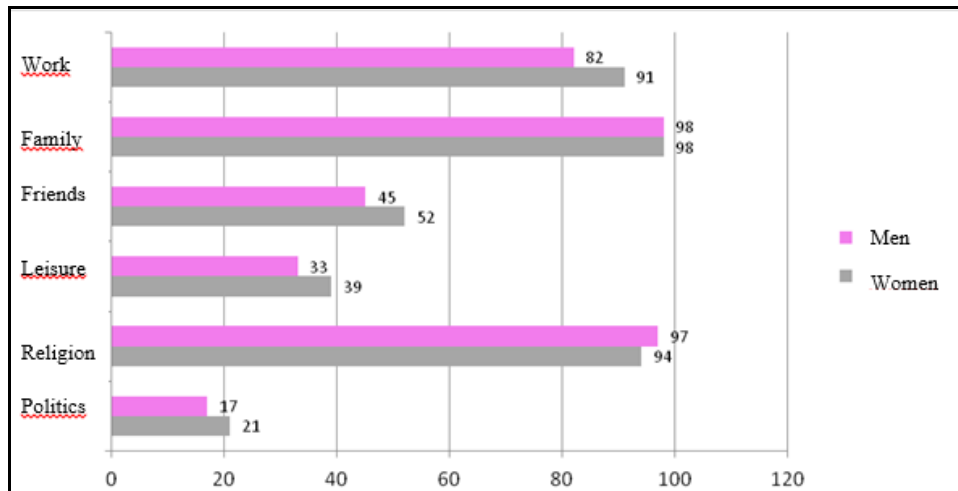


Figure 5. Importance given to each activity by gender

Source: Exploitation of data from the World Values Survey 2010-2014

Certainly, the Tunisian gives more importance to the work than the Egyptian, the European or the American but this rate is not the same according to the category of occupation. Indeed, Graph 5 below reveals a certain divergence in the importance given to work by workers, employees or self-employed and other categories of occupation. Unemployment and precariousness thus seem decisive in the value given to work whatever the country of origin. The value given to work is higher among employees or self-employed, as work represents one of the essential components of their identity and a vehicle for personal fulfillment and accomplishment. But this is much less relevant for the unemployed and pensioners for whom the value given to work declines significantly regardless of the country of origin (Alis & al., 2003).

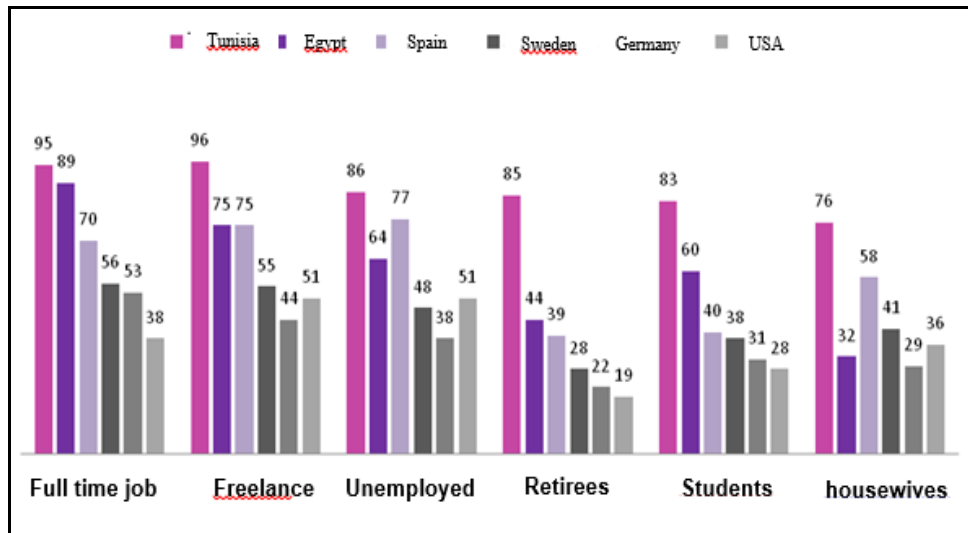


Figure 6. Work Importance by Occupational Category

Source: Exploitation of data from the World Values Survey 2010-2014

Regarding the distribution of daily time by occupational category, Figure 6 shows that managers have the longest working hours and spend less time on leisure and social activities. Manager, a man, works almost two hours longer than other categories of occupations while women, whatever profession they occupy, spend less time on work and leisure than men. But against any part regardless of their professional category, the Tunisian woman spends more than 3 hours on household chores. Figure 7 (U.S. Department of State, 2004).

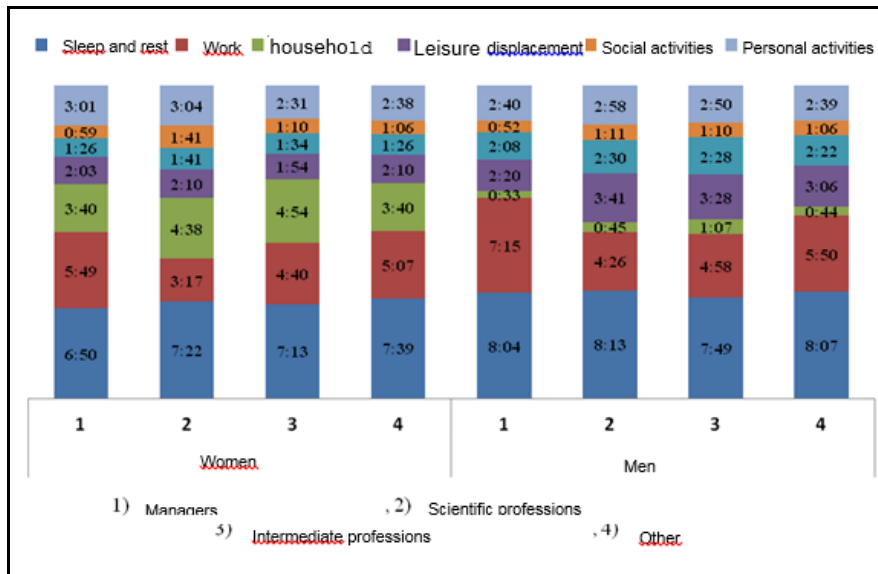


Figure 7. Budget time of men and women by occupational category

Source: Exploitation of the data from the survey of Mahfoudh Draoui et al., MAF, 2011

6. Decomposition of time off work

According to a survey conducted in 2011 by the Ministry of Women's Affairs MAF, the average Tunisian spends 4h26 min on leisure and associative and social activities. Watching television is clearly the most popular leisure activity in Tunisia 2h07min. Secondly, social contacts come second, representing 30% of this free time, namely 1h16min, which illustrates the importance of interpersonal contacts and sociability in the daily life of Tunisians. These results are similar to those of our European neighbors for whom the first two positions in terms of free time and leisure are devoted to television and social activities. Third, coffee occupies a prominent place in Tunisian with an average of 20 minutes per day. Coffee is thus a central space in the daily life of Tunisians (Ouannès, 2010).

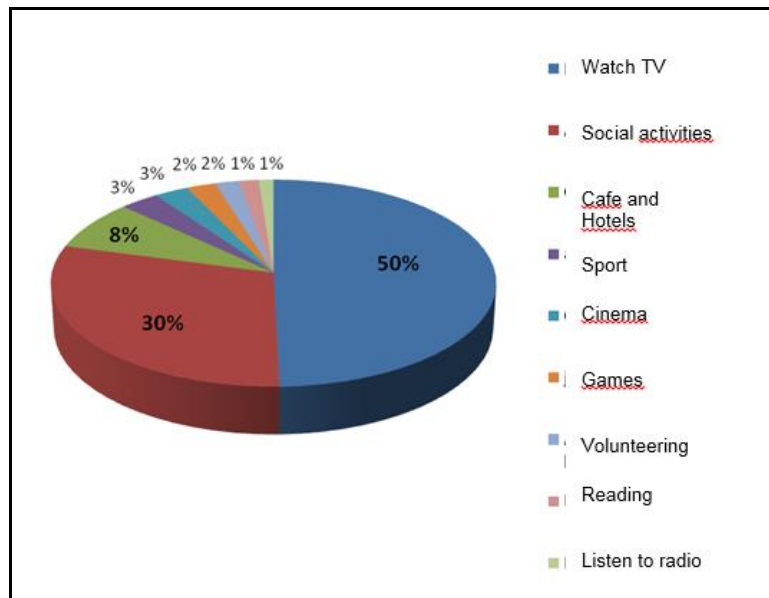


Figure 8. Distribution of free time and leisure time in Tunisian

Source: Exploitation of the data from the survey of Mahfoudh Draoui et al., MAF, 2011

A comparison of the time distribution of active Tunisians with Europeans deserves to be made. Several inequalities can be highlighted. Indeed, the most striking difference between Tunisian and European remains in the time devoted to household chores. The Tunisian man gives only 38 minutes to household chores while the European devotes 3 times more time. On the other hand, the Tunisian woman is the one who dedicates the most time to the domestic work 4h18minutes whereas it has at least 50 minutes less free time and leises 3h12minutes that the Tunisian man and the European one. She also has less time for sleep: 7h53minutes 6. In addition, the Tunisian spends almost an hour more traveling than the European: 2h06 minutes against 1h18 minutes. According to the Gallup survey, this travel time significantly decreases work engagement, which may explain the low engagement rate among Tunisians (Gallup survey, 2019).

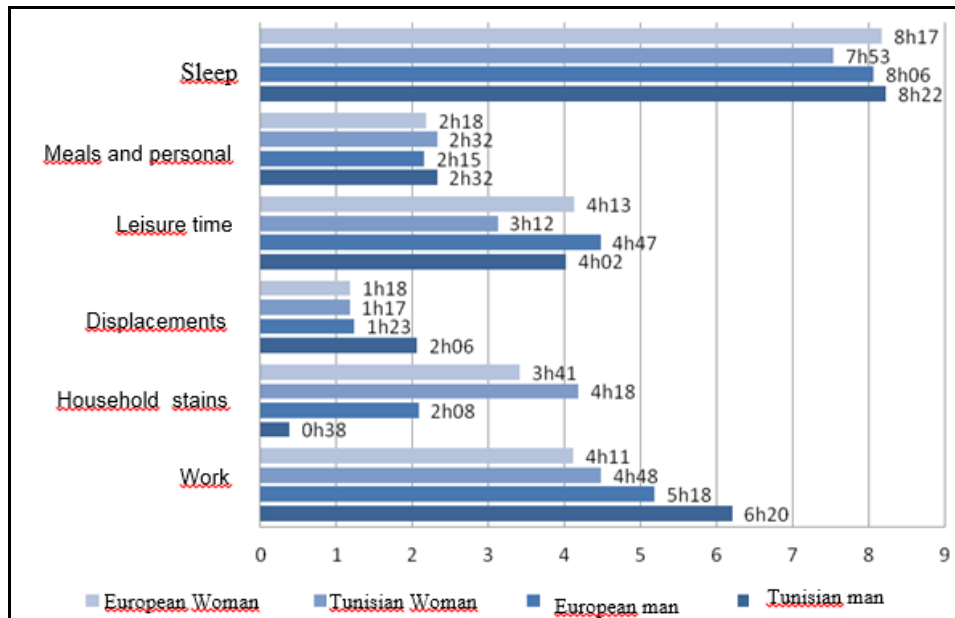


Figure 9. Comparison between Tunisian and European assets in terms of time distribution

Source: Exploitation of the data from the survey of Mahfoudh Draoui et al., MAF, 2011

7. Conclusion

As far as Covid-19 is concerned, nobody yet knows exactly what awaits us in the medium and long term. What is certain is that this is testing us in many ways. The damage caused to certain sectors and certain companies is already significant. The reduction in working hours can to some extent mitigate them.

Labor law issues are a challenge for everyone involved. The recovery of overtime as well as the flexibility of working time can, if necessary and provided that they have been agreed in advance – be used for a certain time (as far as this is justified). Some trades make it possible in part to work from home (telework). When these measures are not possible or have been ex-

hausted, the employer and the employees will have to find acceptable solutions. These will likely change depending on the severity of the situation.

However, these areas of life are not only important in everyone's life, but also to a greater or lesser degree to the identity of individuals. They are also and above all "activities" that consume a great deal of time and individuals - and particularly women - are forced to reconcile and arbitrate the articulation of these different temporalities, all becoming a complex game of the different logics that can come into conflict. It is for this reason that the study of the articulation of social times among Tunisian managers becomes a major issue.

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