

# Changes in the importance of work-related values in Central and Eastern Europe: Slovenia and Hungary against the trend?

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## ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen significant political, economic and social changes in several Central and Eastern European countries. The reasons for the most important transformation processes were the EU membership and the global recession of the late 2000's. Our study focuses on the effects of these circumstances on people's work-related values and attitudes. This comparative analysis is based on the results of the European Values Study of 1999/2000 and 2008/2009. Our aim is to detect the priorities that determine employees' attitudes to work in ten CEE countries of the EU. Slovenia and Hungary will be paid special attention since these two countries seem not to be following the main direction of changes found in the CEE region.

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## 1. Introduction

The Central and Eastern European (CEE) region has undergone considerable transformation since the mid 1980's. Despite the differences these nations show in their historical and economic past, political structure, religion, language, ethnic composition and cultural identity, CEE countries are often regarded as one bloc. Before the transition to capitalist economy and democracy, CEE countries were administered under the auspices of the Soviet Union and Comecon, as a result of which their national economies and institutions were established on similar grounds (Bakacsi et al. 2002, Edwards, 2003).

The process of transition showed similarities in the CEE region: it was complete, non-violent, and took place at a relatively high speed under peaceful circumstances (Kornai, 2006: 217). However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and later that of Yugoslavia brought destructive conflicts to the surface (Promitzer, 2012). The intensive independence endeavours, dramatic ethnic conflicts and nationalist movements led to the Yugoslav wars, which seriously affected the region. The histories of Hungary and Slovenia – the two countries in the focus of our study – meet at several points, but the early 1990's saw different events. While Hungary experienced a peaceful change of regime, Slovenia gained political, ideological and economic freedom only when it left Yugoslavia in 1991. Hungary was more profoundly affected by the fall of the Soviet Union than Slovenia, since the latter had looser ties to the USSR. However, the changes in both countries were comprehensive, radical and complex, and meant deviation from the past in many respects (Simon & Davies 1995). The long period of dependence on a centralised regime and socialist ideals connects all the countries of the CEE region, and encourages research on present trends.

The period of 2000-2010, marked by accessions to the European Union and the beginning of the global financial crisis, caused further changes in the lives of many CEE citizens. CEE countries joined the EU in two waves: in 2004 and in 2007. The turning point did not come with the dates of accession: the process preceding the integration of CEE countries had already triggered significant changes by setting a new framework to implement commitments and to exploit new opportunities. The harmonisation of laws, the introduction of democratic institutions or the adoption of the four freedoms (free movement of goods, services, people and capital) can be regarded as the main pillars of the new socio-economic and political framework. In the course of these developments the effects of the financial crisis of 2007-2008 were starting to impact on CEE countries, speeding up unfavourable economic and social trends. The housing bubble, the fall of domestic demand and the contraction of economies have affected many people's livelihoods in these countries (Egedy, 2012).

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The scope of this research focuses on economic and social changes between 2000 and 2010 and discusses their long term effect on work-related values and attitudes in EU member states situated in the CEE region. The following questions are raised:

1. Considering the past ten years, what changes can be detected in people's attitude to work-related aspects?
2. What aspects of work are held important in these CEE countries in 2010?
3. Do the changes follow the same tendency in the countries observed?

## 2. Methodology

The analysis greatly relies on the database of the European Values Study (EVS)<sup>1</sup> published in 2010. The data collection was conducted in the CEE region between 2008 and 2009 in 47 European countries<sup>2</sup>. This analysis covers only those CEE countries that are now EU members and were also involved in the EVS survey of 1999/2000 as well. These countries are Bulgaria (BG), the Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU) Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK) and Slovenia (SI). Interviews were conducted in the CEE region in the second half of 2008 and in the first half of 2009, when the negative effects of the financial crisis could already be felt. At relevant points of our study, corresponding data of the World Values Survey (WVS)<sup>3</sup> will be referred to and comparisons will be made with the results of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Project (GLOBE),<sup>4</sup>

The findings discussed in this paper are the results of cross-cultural etic research. In the case of etic investigations like EVS or WVS, researchers develop questionnaires that tend to represent their views on values. Etic investigations have therefore often been subject to criticism. Inglehart, for instance, claims that conducting a cross-national survey is a challenging task in social sciences: the differences in cultural and social contexts, language, political acceptability and survey instrumentation can influence the findings (Inglehart et al. 2000: xxi). Further distortion in value research can originate from respondents' misinterpretation of concepts (e.g. desired vs. real values), the intercultural differences in response styles (Harzing 2006) and the heterogeneity of values within a nation (Roe & Ester 1999, Tung & Verbeke 2010).

Taking the above mentioned weaknesses into account, we still believe that quantitative value surveys are capable of detecting the main tendencies in value change across cultures and can be applied to answer the questions raised in introduction.

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<sup>1</sup>The EVS is a comprehensive and longitudinal research project on fundamental human values in Europe. The constructs of EVS measure the importance of human values, i.e. people's basic preferences, desires and attitudes. The almost 350 questions address the importance of various spheres of life (e.g. family, work, religion), social questions, politics, environmental awareness of society, and other questions of morality. They also examine the attitude towards other groups, such as immigrants and ethnic minorities, within the given society. The responses cover the full spectrum of economic, political and cultural variations. The surveys are conducted by field workers using standardized questionnaires among representative multi-stage or stratified random samples of all adult citizens aged 18 years and older. The study itself was initiated by researchers at Tilburg University and Leuven Catholic University at the end of the 1970's with the aim of finding out whether Europe was at that time still culturally united regarding the presence of common Christian values. An empirical investigation was made to define the main fundamental value patterns of Europeans. In 1981 the first wave of surveys took place in the European member states of that time. (Arts et al., 2003; Halman, 2001).

<sup>2</sup>Up to now four waves can be differentiated: 1981 (16 countries), 1990/1993 (29 countries), 1999/2001 (33 countries) and 2008/2010 (47 countries). Our study compares the results of the third and fourth waves. Because of its longitudinal scope EVS provides a good starting-point to explore trends in time. The number of those surveyed in each country is 1,000-2,000. The sources of data are the European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2008 Method Report, Archive-Study-No. ZA4800, DOI:10.4232/1.10059, and GESIS Technical Reports 2010/10. The data can be downloaded for research purposes at [www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu](http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu).

<sup>3</sup>The World Values Survey grew out of the same study as EVS did, namely of the study launched by the European Values Study Group (EVSSG) under the leadership of Jean Kerkhofs and Ruud de Moor. Ronald Inglehart organised the surveys in non-European countries. (Inglehart, et al. 2000). WVS uses the same methodology as EVS does. As many CEE countries were investigated first within WVS, some authors use the database of WVS when analysing CEE trends.

<sup>4</sup>It was Robert House who initiated the GLOBE research project (House 1998). The project has a worldwide scope today, and it investigates different cultures at national and corporate levels based on Hofstede's dimensions. The perceived and desired values of the respondents are in the focus of study (House et al. 2002).

### **3. Values and attitudes**

Since our analysis centres on the investigation of values and attitudes, the two concepts need to be defined. Several definitions of value (Rokeach 1973, Hofstede 1980) can be found in the corresponding literature. Values are shared abstract ideas in societies about what is desirable, good or bad, important or unimportant. Schwartz (1994: 20) emphasizes that values guide people's behaviour and become part of one's identity:

"A value is a belief pertaining to desirable end states or modes of conduct that transcends specific situations, guides selection or evaluation of behavior, people, and events, and is ordered by importance relative to other values to form a system of value priorities. Values can be seen as abstract concepts or lasting beliefs or ideas concerning a person's goals and serve as guiding standards in his or her life. In other words, they describe what is fundamentally important to a person and therefore form a main part of an individual's identity."

Roe and Ester (1999) also underline that values tend to influence people's behaviour indirectly, because values set up common norms and shared goals. The investigation of work-related values can thus help us understand workers' preferences and behaviour. Geert Hofstede (1980) believes that work-related values can be interpreted as the extent to which people assign importance to several general job characteristics. Matic regards work values as "those qualities that people desire from their work which reflect a correspondence between a need and satisfaction." (Matic 2008: 95). Roe and Ester state that work values are usually considered as basic, underlying values in modern societies and tend to correlate with general values (Roe & Ester 1999).

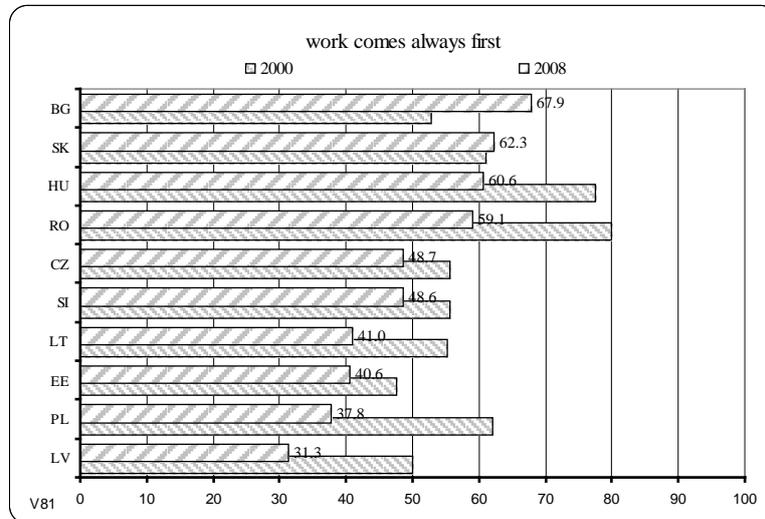
Attitudes should be distinguished from values. Allport (1954) refers to attitudes as learned predispositions that determine how we think, feel and behave towards a person (or object) in a particular way. Attitudes thus represent psychological tendencies to evaluate a particular entity with favour or disfavour, while values are lasting beliefs or ideals about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Both values and attitudes tend to change over time and are affected by the given social, political and economic conditions. As has been pointed out by Alas and Edwards (2013), economic and ideological systems can have a very strong influence in this respect.

### **4. Findings**

Our first research question investigates the changes that can be identified in people's attitude to work-related aspects. To answer this, we need to detect whether there is a change in the evaluation of work and spare time in general. The question was formulated as follows in the questionnaire: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Work should always come first, even if it means less spare time.*

Figure 1 shows the rate of those agreeing with the statement that *work should come first even if it means less spare time*. A general decrease can be observed in the importance of work in most CEE countries. With the exception of one country, Bulgaria, the priority of work over spare time seems to be weakening. Romania, Poland, Hungary and Latvia are the countries where this change is the largest.

**Figure 1:** The importance of work in CEE



*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: work should always come first, even if it means less spare time?*

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

In the Baltic countries, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia less than 50% of those questioned believed that work should come first. Spare time was seen as an important factor in these countries. In contrast, most Bulgarians, Slovaks, Hungarians and Romanians supported the overall priority of work. Work was still perceived to have a determining role, which then influenced other spheres of life, such as family, spare time or friends. Nevertheless, with the exception of Bulgaria, even in these nations the importance of work was shown to have diminished since 1999/2000. The question whether this trend implies a general decline in the importance of work-related values will be discussed by comparing the ratios of those finding them important at the times of the two surveys.

Respondents in EVS were given a list of several work-related aspects and they had to mention those that they held important: *Here are some aspects of a job that people say are important. Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job.* The percentages used in our study are defined as the proportion of those agreeing with the content of the given question or in the case of the various aspects the percentage of those saying “important”. The following 13 benefits of work and workplace are considered (in order of appearance on the questionnaire): 1. good pay, 2. not too much pressure, 3. good job security, 4. good hours, 5. opportunity to use initiative, 6. generous holidays, 7. a job in which you can achieve something, 8. a responsible job, 9. an interesting job, 10. a job that meets one’s abilities, 11. pleasant people, 12. a job useful for society, 13. meeting people.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that the EVS of 2008/2009 involved further four aspects: *learning new skills, family-friendly workplace, having a say in important decisions, people should be treated equally.* Since these questions were not raised in the EVS of 1999/2000, they are not part of this longitudinal analysis. Further two aspects of work had to be excluded because they were not involved in the EVS 2008/2009: *respected job, good chances for promotion.*

**Table 1:** The average ranking of work-related values in CEE countries

|     | %    | EVS 1999/2000                |     | %    | EVS 2008/2009                |
|-----|------|------------------------------|-----|------|------------------------------|
| 1.  | 87.3 | <i>Good pay</i>              | 1.  | 90.5 | <i>Good pay</i>              |
| 2.  | 71.2 | <i>Job security</i>          | 2.  | 74.6 | <i>Job security</i>          |
| 3.  | 66.7 | <i>Pleasant people</i>       | 3.  | 73.2 | <i>Pleasant people</i>       |
| 4.  | 65.6 | <i>Meeting abilities</i>     | 4.  | 71.9 | <i>Interesting job</i>       |
| 5.  | 65.5 | <i>Interesting job</i>       | 5.  | 64.7 | <i>Meeting abilities</i>     |
| 6.  | 56.6 | <i>Achieving something</i>   | 6.  | 60.4 | <i>Achieving something</i>   |
| 7.  | 49.4 | <i>Good hours</i>            | 7.  | 57.3 | <i>Good hours</i>            |
| 8.  | 48.7 | <i>Meeting people</i>        | 8.  | 49.6 | <i>Meeting people</i>        |
| 9.  | 45.9 | <i>Useful for society</i>    | 9.  | 46.3 | <i>Not too much pressure</i> |
| 10. | 44.6 | <i>Use initiative</i>        | 10. | 46.2 | <i>Responsible job</i>       |
| 11. | 40.2 | <i>Responsible job</i>       | 11. | 46.1 | <i>Use initiative</i>        |
| 12. | 38.5 | <i>Not too much pressure</i> | 12. | 42.4 | <i>Useful for society</i>    |
| 13. | 30.1 | <i>Generous holidays</i>     | 13. | 38.0 | <i>Generous holidays</i>     |

Table 1 presents the 13 variables under discussion. The top priorities – *good pay*, *job security* and *working with pleasant people* – kept their leading position and even gained in importance by 2008. Considering other work-related aspects, a general moderate increase can be observed. Looking at the ranks, upward movements can be seen in the case of *an interesting job* (5 → 4), *a responsible job* (11 → 10) and *not too much pressure* (12 → 9), while *a job that meets one’s abilities* (4 → 5), *a job useful for society* (9 → 12), *an opportunity to use one’s initiative* (10 → 11) show downward trends. Ranks, however, in themselves are not absolutely reliable sources of analysis since, for example, the aspect of *using one’s initiative* had a lower rank in 2008 than in 2000, while strengthening by 1.5 percentage points.

It is more helpful to group the variables into categories and examine the changes in percentage point differences. Following de Witte et al.’s (2004) categorization we suggest applying the dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic work orientation. Intrinsic work orientation involves aspects of work connected to inner motivation: the aim of work is in the work itself (de Witte et al., 2004). The employees with intrinsic orientation see work as a way of self-development: they like taking their initiative, would like to achieve something via work, and are ready to take responsibility. They prefer interesting tasks and since they are aware of their abilities, they expect to be given jobs that best fit their knowledge. Extrinsic work orientation emphasises work as an instrument, a means of achieving goals outside work (de Witte et al., 2004). Such goals can include having a reasonable income, job security and favourable working conditions. Along these two dimensions, ten EVS variables were categorized by de Witte et al. (2004) in their analysis of 1999/2000 EVS data:

- (1) intrinsic: *use one’s initiative, achieve something, responsible job, interesting job, meeting abilities*
- (2) extrinsic: *good pay, job security, not too much pressure, good hours, generous holidays*

We introduce the category of (3) social orientation, which covers the aspects of *pleasant colleagues, meeting people*, and *a job useful for society*. Employees with social orientation hold social relations, communication and social goals important both at the micro level of the workplace and at the macro level of society.

**Table 2:** Changes in importance of work-related values in CEE between 1999/2000 and 2008/2009

| Extrinsic orientation        | pp*          | Intrinsic orientation    | pp*          | Social orientation        | pp*          |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Good pay</i>              | + 3.2        | <i>Use initiative</i>    | + 1.5        | <i>Pleasant people</i>    | + 6.5        |
| <i>Job security</i>          | + 3.4        | <i>Achieve something</i> | + 3.8        | <i>Meeting people</i>     | + 0.9        |
| <i>Not too much pressure</i> | + 3.9        | <i>Responsible job</i>   | + 6.0        | <i>Useful for society</i> | - 3.5        |
| <i>Good hours</i>            | + 7.9        | <i>Interesting job</i>   | + 6.4        |                           |              |
| <i>Generous holidays</i>     | + 7.9        | <i>Meeting abilities</i> | - 0.9        |                           |              |
| <b>Average change</b>        | <b>+ 5.3</b> | <b>Average change</b>    | <b>+ 3.4</b> | <b>Average change</b>     | <b>+ 1.3</b> |

\*Change expressed in percentage points

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

As can be seen in Table 2, the changes in all the three categories were below 10 percentage points in the CEE region, which reflects a rather stable value system. The most significant average change is in the case of the

extrinsic aspects of work: especially *good hours* and *generous holidays* gained more importance. This suggests that in spite of the general cost-of-living difficulties in CEE countries, the need for an advantageous working hour schedule or getting generous holidays strengthened more than the aspects fulfilling basic, self-sustaining needs.

The figures represent a moderately increasing trend regarding the aspects connected to intrinsic work orientation as well. It is a reassuring sign that these aspects of work became more important after 1999/2000. The increasing need to be willing to use one's initiative, to make and be responsible for constructive decisions reflects a balanced and creative way of thinking. This trend is also in line with the individualisation process: personal autonomy and self-development are getting more emphasis nowadays (de Witte et al., 2004).

The aspects connected to social orientation strengthened very modestly on average and show great variation. While the importance of *working with pleasant people* rose by 6.5 percentage points, *doing a job useful for society* decreased in its importance. This gives the impression that social relations are still important at a micro level, but are weakening when it comes to the interest of society as a whole. This is a sign of individualisation: people are looking for social relations that can produce direct benefits for them.

To summarize the findings in the CEE region, we can state that there was a general increase in value attached to the analysed aspects of work between 2000 and 2008. On average, a growing trend for both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects could be observed, while social aspects at macro level seem to be weakening. The growth is the largest in the case of comfortable circumstances at work (good hours and generous holidays), working with pleasant people, doing an interesting job and taking responsibility. It can be concluded that most work-related values gained in or stayed at around the same level of importance in CEE countries, which implies a positive trend in general. If employees see work as a means to achieve self-fulfilment, social benefits and social relations, and their needs go beyond mere subsistence, the society they live in is based on a refined and meticulous value-system.

## 5. Slovenia and Hungary: against the trend

It is worth looking at the average changes from the point of view of individual countries as well. Having analysed the changes in the importance of work-related values in ten CEE countries, we have found that Bulgaria and Romania were those countries which attached the largest importance to these aspects. The Baltic countries, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were those where the extent of positive changes was the biggest on average. However, no specific clusters could be defined since there were few similarities between countries: different attitudes or different directions of attitude change were typical.

There were, however, two countries that went in an opposite direction to that followed by the CEE region as a whole: Hungary and Slovenia. In almost all the aspects of work, these two countries showed declining trends in 2008/2009. What makes the parallel between Hungary and Slovenia even more convincing is that at the time of the 1999/2000 survey these were the two CEE countries that attached the most importance to almost all work-related values and attitudes in the region (Borgulya & Hahn, 2008). Given that both countries had very promising financial and economic prospects at that time, their top position in the list of work-related values and attitudes in 1999/2000 is not surprising. By the 1990's the two countries had reached more or less the same level of economic development, though Slovenia preceded Hungary in some fields (e.g. GDP per capita figures) (Nyitrai, 1998: 463). Among the transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe, in 1999 Slovenia and Hungary were the top-performing countries with their real GDP growth rates of 4.9% and 4.5% respectively (IMF, World Economic Output, 2000: 140). Both countries had a balanced work-related value structure at that time. In the case of Hungary, all the work-related values in question were deemed important by the majority of the respondents, and 9 values out of the 13 were considered important by more than 70% of Hungarians. Slovenia showed a very similar tendency: 10 values were found important by more than 70% of those questioned. Both countries were above the CEE average figures in 1999/2000 and, as it will be shown in the following sections, in 2008 both went against the general increase in the importance of work-related values in this region. Thus, the two countries seemed to move in the same direction in terms of value change.

The parallel between the two countries needs explanation. Similar historical, social and economic influences might have been responsible for shaping people's way of thinking in a similar way in these countries. Both Hungary and Slovenia belonged to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and experienced a unique type of socialism (Mihelič&Lipičnik, 2010). Hungary was said to be the happiest barrack of the era, because it enjoyed the benefits of a less strict socialist system, while Slovenia was the most westernized part of socialist Yugoslavia. They shared common features in the terms of attitudes to religion and atheism (Smrke, 1998). In 2005, after Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia were the two CEE countries with the highest rate of discretionary learning organizations<sup>6</sup> (Valeyre et al., 2009). However, deeper analysis would be needed to identify the background triggers of the similar direction of value changes in the two countries which show considerable differences in GDP figures and standards of living. The case of Slovenia and Hungary seems to strengthen the finding of Borgulya (2012) that there is not always a clear correlation between attitudes towards work and GDP figures. The following sections discuss the socio-economic reasons we believe to be responsible for the weakening of work-related values in the two countries.

### *5.1. Slovenia*

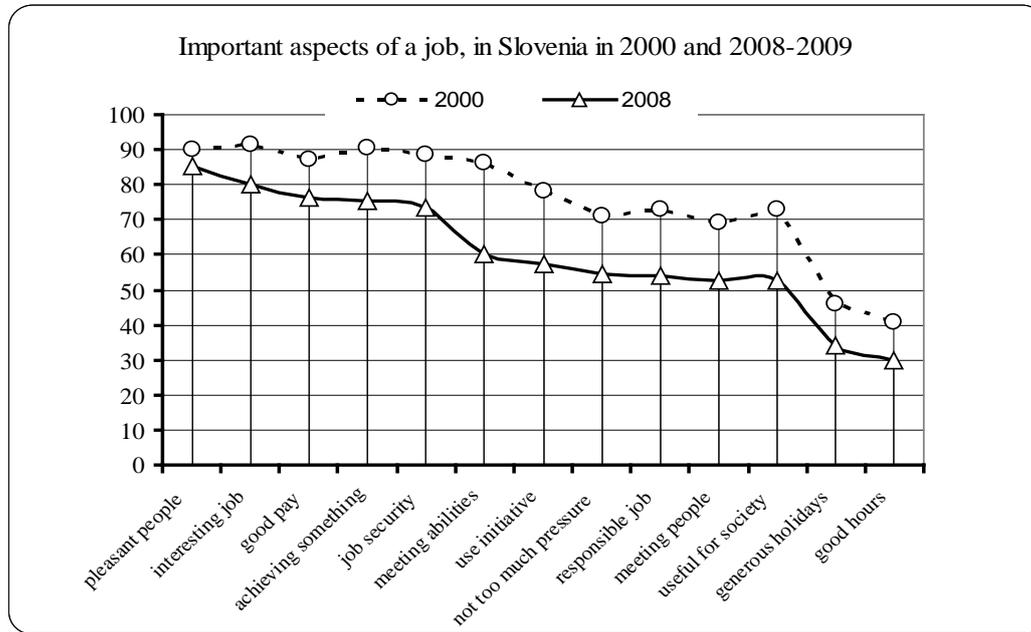
Mihelič and Lipičnik (2010) characterize Slovenia as a country that behaves differently from ex-communist countries in certain aspects because it shows more similarity with Western Europe in terms of hierarchy and affective or intellectual autonomy values. Instead of a communist regime, Slovenia had a socialist one, which influenced habits, lifestyles, principles and rules of conduct (Mihelič&Lipičnik, 2010). Slovenia was the first CEE country to adopt the euro (on 1 January, 2007). At present, it has the highest GDP per capita in the region and its first years of EU membership were characterized by economic success and stability. The financial crisis reached the country in 2009, when private consumption started to decline and industrial production fell back. The first signs of recession could be felt in the fourth quarter of 2008, but the impetus of economic growth (resulting in 1.4% GDP growth in 2010) lasted till 2011 (Somai 2012: 50). At the time of the second survey the country was more stable from a macroeconomic point of view than other transition economies. According to the data published by the European Commission's Eurostat, its 2008 GDP per capita was 91% of the EU average, compared to other CEE countries with much lower rates, such as Latvia 56%, Bulgaria 44% and Romania 47%.

As can be seen in Figure 2, in 2008/2009 the two most important work-related values were working together with *pleasant people* and having an *interesting job*. Unlike ex-communist countries that tended to be extremely materialist, Slovenia seemed to put an emphasis on post-materialist values. This was also underlined by the results of the World Value Survey (2005): the rate of materialists and post materialists in Slovenia is similar to that found in the USA, France, Germany and the Netherlands (Kmetty, 2010). It should be noted, however, that in 2008/2009 the third most important aspect for Slovenians was *good pay*, which indicates a moderate move towards materialist values: good pay ranked only fifth in 1999/2000.

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<sup>6</sup>Discretionary learning organizations are workplaces that support autonomy, learning, problem-solving and innovation (Valeyre et al., 2009).

Figure 2: The importance of work-related values in Slovenia



Here are some aspects of a job that people say are important. Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job?

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

Table 3: Changes in importance of work-related values in Slovenia between 1999/2000 and 2008/2009

| Extrinsic orientation | pp*          | Intrinsic orientation | pp*          | Social orientation    | pp*          |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Good pay              | -10.7        | Use initiative        | -21.1        | Pleasant people       | -4.7         |
| Job security          | -14.8        | Achieve something     | -14.9        | Meeting people        | -21.3        |
| Not too much pressure | -16.6        | Responsible job       | -18.6        | Useful for society    | -20.4        |
| Good hours            | -10.6        | Interesting job       | -11.7        |                       |              |
| Generous holidays     | -11.8        | Meeting abilities     | -26.4        |                       |              |
| <b>Average change</b> | <b>-12.9</b> | <b>Average change</b> | <b>-18.5</b> | <b>Average change</b> | <b>-15.5</b> |

\*Change expressed in percentage points

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

Table 3 shows the changes in importance in the three groups of variables. *Working with pleasant people* seems to be the most stable work-related aspect for Slovenians, while *a job that meets one's abilities, using one's initiative* and *doing a job that is useful for society* are the aspects that weakened the most significantly. It should be emphasized, however, that the weakening trend affected all the work-related aspects, and with the exception of *pleasant people*, there is a balanced decline in all spheres of orientation.

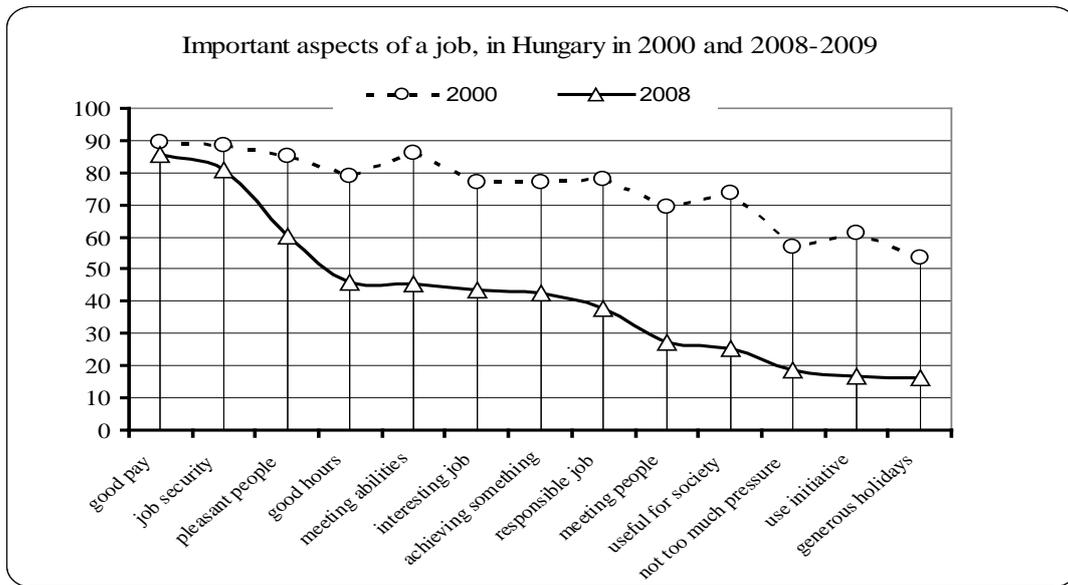
Concerning the changes in the assessment of work-related values, during the period in question, Slovenia did not behave like other ex-socialist countries where these aspects strengthened in general. Instead, Slovenia's reaction was similar to that of Hungary, where the importance of work-related values was weakening. The difference is in the extent of the decrease. While the decrease in the importance of values in Slovenia was moderate, the fall in the case of Hungary was dramatic, which can be explained by the gap between the two countries' economic situation in 2008/2009. The GDP per capita figures (PPP) in 2009, for instance, were much higher in Slovenia (\$27,600) than in Hungary (\$18,600) (Source: www.indexmundi.com). In the next section, Hungary's situation will be examined in detail, seeking reasons for the negative processes.

5.2. Hungary

By 2009 the effects of the financial crisis could already be felt in Hungary. Unemployment had risen above 10% by 2009 due to mass dismissals caused by the economic crisis<sup>7</sup>. According to the data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office<sup>8</sup>, the consumer price index rose 6% in 2008 and 4% in 2009 compared to the previous year's figures. In August 2009 there were already 32,000 mortgage borrowers with foreign currency-denominated loans who were more than 90 days behind on their monthly instalments<sup>9</sup>. There were more and more families in which the increased repayment obligation, the loss of employment and consequently of a regular income culminated in a desperate situation (Fazekas & Molnár, 2010).

The results of 2008/2009 EVS seem to reflect the negative tendencies. A general loss in the weight of importance attached to work-related values is evident (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The importance of work-related values in Hungary



Here are some aspects of a job that people say are important. Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job?

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

In 2000 there were four aspects at the top of the list, each with a rate of over 80%: *good pay*, *a secure job*, *a job that meets one's abilities* and *having pleasant colleagues*. In 2009 only two aspects remained that can be characterized with similar figures: *good pay* and *a secure job*. The top priorities thus were the same as in 2000: financial aspects and security. Although the rate of those attaching importance to these two aspects did not rise between 2000 and 2009, the high figures are still maintained in the second survey.

Results of the 2005 World Value Survey (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>) indicate that Hungarians are indeed more materialistic than Slovenians and Western European countries, but less so than some CEE countries (Kmetty, 2010). Out of the 57 countries involved in the research, the least materialist nations are Canada and Sweden, while the most materialists are Russia and Bulgaria. Hungary ranks 37<sup>th</sup> on the list, behind all the Western European countries with strong post-materialist values and before most CEE nations with a dominantly materialist orientation (e.g. Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria). Slovenia ranks 16<sup>th</sup>, with scores very close to that of the US and Germany (Kmetty, 2010: 353). Another evidence for the materialist orientation is that there is a positive correlation between the level of paid income and Hungarian workers' satisfaction (Szlávicz, 2010: 94), but pay is just one of the factors resulting in satisfaction at the workplace. Hungarian workers also appreciate good leadership style, career development, open communication,

<sup>7</sup>Source of data: National Employment Service, [www.employmentpolicy.hu](http://www.employmentpolicy.hu)

<sup>8</sup>KSH-GKI, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, <http://www.gki.hu/hu/individual/yearforecasts>

<sup>9</sup>Source of data: [www.bankweb.hu](http://www.bankweb.hu).

interpersonal relations and team-work (Szlávicz, 2010: 111). The fact that the financial aspects of a job were given more weight in EVS 2008/2009 is a clear reflection of the country's weak level of economic stability.

**Table 4:** Changes in importance of work-related values in Hungary between 1999/2000 and 2008/2009

| Extrinsic orientation        | pp*          | Intrinsic orientation    | pp*          | Social orientation        | pp*          |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Good pay</i>              | - 4.1        | <i>Use initiative</i>    | -44.9        | <i>Pleasant people</i>    | -24.8        |
| <i>Job security</i>          | - 7.7        | <i>Achieve something</i> | -34.4        | <i>Meeting people</i>     | -42.1        |
| <i>Not too much pressure</i> | -38.3        | <i>Responsible job</i>   | -40.1        | <i>Useful for society</i> | -48.6        |
| <i>Good hours</i>            | -33.4        | <i>Interesting job</i>   | -32.6        |                           |              |
| <i>Generous holidays</i>     | -37.5        | <i>Meeting abilities</i> | -40.8        |                           |              |
| <b>Average change</b>        | <b>-24.2</b> | <b>Average change</b>    | <b>-38.6</b> | <b>Average change</b>     | <b>-38.5</b> |

\*Change expressed in percentage points

Source of data: European Values Study and GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, EVS 2000, 2008

With the exception of the two priorities, i.e. *good pay* and *job security*, all the other factors seem to have lost considerable weight in importance (Table 4). The changes are most considerable in the case of the aspects connected to intrinsic and social orientation. Even within the category of extrinsic aspects, only *good pay* and *job security* remained relatively stable. This suggests that work is merely seen as a means of sustenance, a must that ensures subsistence. Low wages and a high rate of unemployment are the two basic factors that explain why Hungarians prioritize in this way. Anxiety over loss of employment can also be a sign of low uncertainty tolerance according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2008).

Other extrinsic work-related values were considered far less important. *No pressure* and *generous holidays* came at the bottom of the list both in 2000 and in 2009, but with much lower percentages in the case of holidays. Hungarians did not insist on going on long holidays any more in 2009, while in 1999/2000 Hungary ranked first in the CEE region regarding the importance of generous holidays (Borgulya& Hahn, 2008). Considering stress-free jobs, Hungary was also among the top four CEE countries in EVS 1999/2000. These aspects were devalued by 2009 because they represent a higher level of needs that are usually desired if financial and social needs are already met.

Intrinsic work orientation also showed a considerable decline in Hungary over the period in question. People were not motivated by the *opportunity of using their initiative, taking responsibility or having a job that meets their abilities*. They did not really want to *achieve anything via work* and were not really motivated by *having responsibility*. Of those questioned only 38% (61% in 1999/2000) attached importance to having a responsible position at the workplace. *Taking the initiative* was supported by only 16% of the respondents. The low ranks of responsibility and initiative among work-related values suggest that few Hungarians showed evidence of an entrepreneurial spirit.

Among social aspects, the strongest proved to be *working with pleasant colleagues*. In 2009 more than 60% of the respondents found it essential to have good relations at work. This figure accords with the results of other qualitative surveys (Szalay, 2002; Danis&Parkhe, 2002; Hofmeister-Tóth&Kainzbauer, 2005) that characterize Hungarians as strongly person/relationship oriented rather than task-oriented. The importance of working together with pleasant people may also be explained by the fact that Hungarians tend to avoid conflicts (Borgulya 2003; Hofmeister-Tóth&Kainzbauer, 2005) and voice criticism in an indirect way (Fink &Mayrhofer, 2009).

The three aspects that lost most in importance since 2000 were the following: *a job useful for society, taking the initiative, meeting people, a job that matches one's abilities and a responsible job*. This is in line with the findings that the so-called postmodern values that comprise trust and tolerance towards others, risk-taking and responsibility could not find root in Hungary: the Hungarian way of thinking is often characterized as closed and introverted (Keller, 2010). It is also interesting to note that not counting good pay and job security, the importance of *working together with pleasant people* was the most consistent aspect over time in Hungary. In Slovenia, with much better economic figures than Hungary, the very same aspect proved to be the most permanent. Both Hungarians and Slovenians are thus strongly relationship-oriented, but Hungarians are more materialist than Slovenians and less open to postmodern values as defined by Inglehart 1997 (cited by Keller, 2010: 43).

On the basis of the EVS findings it can be concluded that Hungary has undergone a general loss of work-related values. This negative trend is closely associated with the effects of the global crisis that hit Hungary, together with the country-specific austerity measures and recessive processes.

## **6. Conclusion and comments**

This paper has given an account of the results of 2008/2009 EVS in ten CEE countries and the changes in work-related values since the previous survey of 1999/2000. The fact that aspects of work in general have become important in the CEE region indicates that in spite of the economic crisis most of these countries could benefit from the advantages provided by the EU. The strengthening of intrinsic and social aspects of work reflects individuals' growing need to regard work beyond its basic function.

On the basis of other factors (cultural similarities, geographical closeness, religion) no stable clusters can be defined in which changes in value would follow the same direction. Hungary and Slovenia, however, seemed to follow the same direction of value change. In 2000 both countries scored highly in almost all work-related attitudes and values, and their behaviour in 2009 went against the main trend in the CEE region. Slovenia's results showed a slight decline, while with its very low figures, Hungary was usually at the bottom of the list: the value-loss was dramatic compared to other countries. The economic crisis and its consequences contributed to the worsening of the country's already bad economic situation, which is probably the main reason for the people's negative perceptions as reflected in the survey.

There is a clear parallel between the reactions of Slovenia and Hungary to the economic downturn. The degree of decline was different, but the direction of change was the same. We suggest that besides socio-economic triggers there are deeper connections between the two countries that demand further investigation.

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