

Press Release

£6 Million Research Grants for Time-use Research in Oxford.

27 November 2013

The Centre for Time Use Research (CTUR) in Oxford University's Sociology Department has won two major research grants, from the European Research Council (ERC) and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Centre is internationally recognized for research using surveys of individuals', households' and societies' patterns of time-use, and supplies data and other resources to the international research community. It is the home of the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS), the largest collection of harmonised time-use data in the world, including 65 surveys, and more than three-quarters of a million diary-days, for 21 countries, covering the last 50 years.

The ERC has awarded an 'Advanced Grant' of €2.5 million which will pay the salaries of the Centre's Director Jonathan Gershuny, its Deputy Director Oriel Sullivan (recently appointed as the University's first Professor of the Sociology of Gender), Dr Kimberly Fisher, the manager of the MTUS, as well as post-doctoral research fellows and doctoral students. The 5 year grant supports research into historical changes in work and leisure, and social stratification and inequality in the distribution of time. Do we now work less, go out, or exercise more? The CTUR team will investigate questions such as whether valuing unpaid work alongside paid in the National Accounts alters measures of change in National Product, whether people now spend more time alone, share work more fairly at home, do more or less in the wider community. The diaries also provide evidence of whether or not the population's enjoyment of daily activities changes in parallel with, or contrary to, GNP.

The £3.7 million ESRC grant supports a major new UK time use diary study, the first for more than a decade, and further development of CTUR's international comparative work. It funds innovations in time-use data collection, using miniature cameras continuously recording the activities of experimental volunteer diarists, as well as the use of accelerometers, GPS devices and 'smart' energy use meters in homes, to validate and calibrate the diary records. How much of the 'obesity epidemic' relates to increasingly sedentary lifestyles? Does the emergence of a '24/7 Society' mean less sleep, or perhaps less regular rest patterns? Does growing use of the internet substitute for travel and reduce energy demand? CTUR is collaborating with the BHF Health Promotion Research Group - Oxford University's Nuffield Department of Population Health, its Centre for Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience and its Centre for the Environment, to answer questions such as these.

Professor Gershuny comments "The two new grants, together with support from other research funders in the UK and North America (such as the US National Institutes of Health), consolidate the Centre's position as the leading international source of expertise in the analysis, collection and distribution of large scale time use data. Behind the historical

changes and cross-national contrasts in social and economic structure and behaviour, lie differences in how individuals and populations spend the 1440 minutes of their days. CTUR's collection of records of how representative national samples spend time provides unique evidence of the changing balances among paid work, unpaid work, consumption and leisure. It shows how all the disparate activities of the day fit together, both in the lives of individuals, and across whole societies. These data, as yet rather under-exploited, are of great potential value, not just to sociologists and economists, but also to health scientists interested in topics such as exercise, sedentary activity and sleep, and to environmental researchers working on the sources of energy demand."

For FURTHER DETAILS of the research programmes visit www.timeuse.org

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