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Reflections on the function and form of spending free time in the era of information technology and social media

Rozważania nad funkcją i formą spędzania czasu wolnego w dobie rozwoju technologii informacyjnej i portali społecznościowych

Key words: rest, free time, values, physical activity, social media, Internet.

Summary. Leisure time plays a very important role in human life. It is usually associated with rest, but people depending on various factors e.g. age, habits, pressures of the environment, use it in different ways. Unfortunately, the forms of leisure are not always optimal for our mental and physical health. Every person is different, so his expectations for the forms of rest he does are different, but the most important thing is that after him a person feels physically and mentally better.

Słowa kluczowe: odpoczynek, czas wolny, wartości, aktywność ruchowa, media, portale społecznościowe, internet.

Streszczenie. Czas wolny odgrywa bardzo ważną rolę w życiu człowieka. Zwykle kojarzony jest z wypoczynkiem, jednak ludzie w zależności od różnych czynników, np.: wieku, nawyków, presji otoczenia, wykorzystują go na różne sposoby. Niestety nie zawsze formy spędzania wolnego czasu są optymalne dla naszego zdrowia psychicznego i fizycznego. Każdy człowiek jest inny, inne są więc jego oczekiwania wobec form odpoczynku, jaki uprawia. Najważniejsze jest jednak to, by po nim człowiek czuł się fizycznie i psychicznie lepiej.

Introduction. People have been familiar with relaxation after work since the dawn of time. Nowadays, its time is one of the primary values in our lives. Dynamic development of the civilisation, mainly as a consequence of the progressive scientific

and technological revolution, lets us suppose that the role of leisure time will still increase. Leisure time may play a crucial role in a balanced life of a contemporary world citizen. It is a symptom of changes, an expression of searching for new ways to improve health of a society. One of the ingredients of a healthy lifestyle is physical activity which integrates the element of healthy lifestyle.

We live in the culture for which time has become deficient goods. We adjust habits, customs, ways of spending time to its shortage: we communicate via e-mails and text messages, we shorten meetings, meals and conversations¹. The issue of leisure time has been considered seriously since 1950s. Future generations were predicted to be technically called a leisure time society.

The term leisure time has various definitions and, with time, it has become a general idea although not everybody can define it. So, it is an interdisciplinary issue explored by experts from a wide range of scientific fields². Leisure time has been a preoccupation of numerous renowned thinkers. Aristotle believed that free time (*schola*) was not relaxation or the end of work. However, work (*ascholia*) was to indicate the culmination of free time. In other words, a person who works did not have free time, could not manage themselves, was not happy. According to Aristotle, a human being should devote free time to philosophy, art and science. Denis Diderot held another view claiming that the history of leisure time was the crucial part of our life³. Joffre Dumazedier, a French sociologist, defines free time as any activity that an individual can enjoy for a variety of reasons, that is: entertainment, to gain new experience, for selfless education or voluntary participation in social life different from professional, family and social duties⁴. It is worth mentioning that people are granted free time as a result of scientific and technological changes. This time should be filled with attempts at spiritual and moral development⁵. Yet, the question of utilising leisure time does not convey an individual character only. Far and foremost, it is a general, social issue since it determines new forms of human coexistence, conditions their behaviours and influences definite social and moral attitudes⁶. Leisure time activities are frequently connected with shaping human personality as well as future social attitudes. Such activities may often create active attitudes, teach to overcome difficulties and also level fears of undertaking mental and physical effort. Didactic consequences of active participation in various walking marathons or just a “Sunday walk” along a trail can contribute to acquiring desired pro-social attitudes, increase self-esteem and confidence in one’s possibilities, develop the sense of responsibility for oneself and others in teamwork, reduce stress and anxiety

¹ S. Klein, *Czas. Przewodnik użytkownika*, Warszawa 2009, s. 4.

² M. Dutkowski M. (red.), *Problemy turystyki i rekreacji*, Tom 2, IN PULS, Szczecin 2009, s. 75.

³ W. Woronowicz, D. Apanel (red.), *Opieka-wychowanie-kształcenie. Moduły edukacyjne*, Impuls, Kraków 2010, s. 17.

⁴ W. Woronowicz, D. Apanel (red.), *Opieka-wychowanie-kształcenie. Moduły edukacyjne*, Impuls, Kraków 2010, s. 20

⁵ W. Gaworecki, *Turystyka*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2010, s. 97.

⁶ P. Hanyga-Janczak, *Czas wolny studentów. Komponenty i zagospodarowanie*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego, Kielce 2011, s. 11.

levels, improve mood, develop self-discipline, shape character traits such as ambition, regularity, responsibility, discipline and acceptance of other people⁷. All in all, leisure time activities considered from pedagogical, psychological and sociological points of view constitute a major area of human activity. Free time fulfils vital educational and pedagogical tasks, primarily prepares an individual to work which requires abilities and education, work which engages one's personality, allows acquiring the ability to utilise free time efficiently. Leisure time is determined not only by undertaken activities and fostering personal values but it is also a value in itself⁸.

In numerous pedagogic publications leisure time was discussed in the category of a vital life need and an integral factor which increases work efficiency of a society and enriches the quality of life⁹.

The concept of leisure time. In a colloquial language leisure time is understood as relaxation, respite, rest, holidays, summer and winter school breaks, summer time, fun, sport, tourism, etc. Some of these notions convey indirectly the idea of leisure time while others name specific activities connected with actions taken in this time.

For a student (the youth) leisure time is the time which is left after they have completed school and household duties when they can perform activities they like and which correspond to their psychological and social needs. Rationally, leisure time is spent on relaxation which provides pleasure, a social activity of voluntary and selfless character, development of interests and abilities through gaining knowledge and amateur artistic, sports or scientific activities.

Motion activity is part of the human evolution process, the main component of a healthy lifestyle. Without adequate activity it is impossible to maintain a proper and stable health condition. Children's and adolescents' being active is important as its insufficient amount may lead to health disorders development. It is also important that excessive, strenuous physical activity may cause a negative effect and many diseases. Sport allows mind and body regeneration, provides pleasure and reduces the stress level while performing daily duties. Physical activity during the stage of adolescence may develop strong will and reveal new values. Being active, a child shapes patterns of healthy lifestyle and participation in physical culture. Thanks to such an approach to motion activity a young person is less susceptible to risky behaviours which may result from inappropriate ways of spending free time.

Devoting free time to practising sport has a number of advantages which, among others, develop personality, teach values, priorities and taking care of one's health as well as encourage persistence. Nowadays sport has become a means of gaining a build of

⁷ D. Puciato, T. Szczebak, *Wybrane aspekty zagospodarowania czasu wolnego u młodzieży z różnych środowisk*, Zeszyty Naukowe Małopolskiej Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Tarnowie, t. 18, nr 1, 2011, s. 85–86.

⁸ M. Napierała, R. Muszkieta, *Wstęp do teorii rekreacji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2011, s. 116.

⁹ K. Czajkowski, *Wychowanie do rekreacji*, Warszawa 1979, s. 17.

one's dream, often at the price of one's health. Adolescents are particularly susceptible as they struggle with many complexes and wish to follow trends¹⁰.

In human life leisure time is a range of various, interplaying functions. Its lack has strong and negative effect on health, attitude to other people and personal achievements. Leisure time wisely filled with appropriate pastimes has crucial and positive significance for the development of an individual's personality. One of the basic functions of leisure time is the recovery of a student's physical and mental strength. The second function of leisure time is entertainment. The aim of entertainment is to provide various experiences, joy and pleasure. Entertainment consists in compensating for daily monotony, family and school duties, boredom, daily routine. Developing interests is also an important function of leisure time.

Leisure time can be considered in various aspects: sociological, psychological and pedagogical. In the sociological aspect the focus of attention is directed to time spent with peers which leads to more efficient and persistent activities than individual actions. As for the psychological aspect, a young man is seen as a seeker of new sensations. The social function of leisure time relies on activating an individual, which is supposed to incorporate them into a life in a society and, as a result, form the ability to participate consciously in it.

Factors determining the amount of leisure time and the way it is spent. Basic factors determining the amount of leisure time and the way it is spent include:

- age,
- type of school / education,
- the amount of leisure time a student has and the possibility to benefit from it appropriately and creatively,
- the right arrangement of a student's activities at school and home, primarily a properly arranged weekly schedule of obligatory activities at school, home and leisure time activities,
- a current fashion which is copied and followed by young people,
- parents' (carers') material conditions, particularly a budget income, living conditions and wealth,
- the mass media a family has,
- education and the culture of parents' daily life, especially their professions, hobbies and a family's cultural conditions,
- the right forms and ways of spending leisure time by parents, older siblings and other adult people at weekdays and on holidays,
- traditions and habits for cultural, active pastimes which children and adults follow,

¹⁰ J. Fortuńska, *Sport jako forma spędzania czasu wolnego wśród młodzieży*. (w:) *Kultura czasu wolnego we współczesnym świecie*, Tanaś V., W. Welskop (red.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu i Nauk o Zdrowiu Łódź 2016, s. 65–67.

- local community (a small, medium town or a big city), leisure facilities situated in the neighbourhood, e.g. school and sports grounds, swimming pools, ice rinks, holiday resorts, etc.

Leisure time in children's lives. Leisure time plays a very important role in children's lives, among others forming their development, enabling acquiring habits which will accompany them all their lives.

It is usually the time which is left after they have completed school and household duties, activities connected with maintaining hygiene and health, it is the time which children can fill the way they like which most often result from their interests¹¹.

Time which is appropriately used by a child stimulates his overall development. A child decides how he wants to spend his leisure time. It is very important to teach a child to suitably choose ways of spending their free time so that it could bring mostly benefits for him. The ways children spend their leisure time result from many factors including the influence of natural, cultural and social environments. Contact with nature is very important for a child positively affecting his physical and mental condition. Yet, it is the social environment which has the biggest impact on the ways children spend their leisure time and it includes family, peers and institutions which professionally organise leisure time. A family establishes some patterns of using free time by children. Culture of a family home, parents' education and the character of spending leisure time has a vital influence on forming children's interests and habits.

A significant factor behind making a youngster prepared to utilise free time properly is the closest family. By means of intentional caring and pedagogical actions and personal patterns a family affects physical, mental and social aspects of a child's development. Parents should provide opportunities for their children to find entertainment, friends and acquaintances in a natural way. One of family duties is to cater for children's emotional needs, breaking negative dispositions and, at the same time, enrich their emotional lives and nurture positive dispositions. It happens that parents cannot organise their child's free time as they rarely arrange leisure time themselves so they do not create the desired patterns. That is the reason why accustoming children to individual relaxation forms belongs to the least intensively developed means of pedagogical activities. Children whose free time is not sufficiently organised tend to enter groups, tease, play truant, breach social coexistence rules. Youngsters must have their time organised the way it meets their needs. Whether leisure time is devoted to develop one's personality, relaxation, entertainment or is worthless for their development depends on the environment and conditions provided by a family, acquired habits and the system of values. A child at the early years of their school education is dependent, so filling their free time and, particularly, the way it is spent depends considerably on what their parents suggest¹²

¹¹ J. Izdebska, *Czas wolny dzieci miejskich i wiejskich*, Warszawa 1979, s. 24.

¹² A. Kowalczyk, *Rola nauczycieli i rodziców w organizacji czasu wolnego dzieci w wieku wczesnoszkolnym*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce”, nr 1/2015, s. 99–102.

Spending time with their peers children shape right attitudes, character features, for example friendliness. A child learns to cooperate and compete.

Leisure time spent with peers develops personality. What a child, an adolescent or an adult experiences is the need to cooperate, organise a common play, develop leadership and negotiation skills. Participating in social life extends the number of acquaintances, gives a chance to make new friends but also to compare oneself with others and sometimes creates competitive situations. Being with others leads to resigning from own, individual desires and needs for the sake of compromising. It is the moment when a community learns teamwork, socialising, devotion and finds a group of people with common interests, views and similar lifestyles.

Educational institutions are also responsible for teaching adequate attitudes towards leisure time. Arranging extracurricular activities properly the school can support and shape the right models of spending free time¹³.

It is worth noticing that another aspect is the media and the devices employed by information technology which more and more often fill a child's leisure time even during extracurricular activities.

Leisure time of adult society. Physical inactivity is a reason for untimely ageing. Human organism undergoes reactions which can be observed in people at the stage of senility. There are various ways adults can spend their leisure time. The healthiest form of using free time is motion activity as it allows maintaining good condition and improves well-being. Recreational sports and tourism are activities thanks to which the elderly can escape social isolation and maintain the right level of their agility and physical efficiency or which lead to recovery of recuperative powers. Tourism prevents mental and physical ageing since discovering new places develops the mind, makes the memory work, provides aesthetic and emotional sensations which, together with variably increased physical activity, let maintaining general agility for many years. Old-age pensioners should be encouraged to practise various forms of physical recreation and tourism regardless of the weather and season of the year.

Prolonging youthfulness by providing people with wider and wider variety of entertainment has become a domain of the 20th century. In rich countries in Western Europe and the United States more and more people over the age of 50 are trying to liken themselves to twenty-year-olds in terms of clothing, appearance, behaviour, lifestyle, they are trying to sing like them, flirt, hike, play sports and party games. Taking care of one's physical fitness, health, good mood, interest in the world, culture, advancements in science and technology is a much positive phenomenon bringing many successes for individuals and society¹⁴.

¹³ K. Szewczuk, *Formy spędzania czasu wolnego przez dzieci klas trzecich szkoły podstawowej: raport z badań*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce”, nr 1/2015, s. 52–53.

¹⁴ J. Pięta, *Pedagogika czasu wolnego*, Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki 2014, s. 58.

However, not everybody in the adult society prefers spending time actively and instead chooses to do it in a passive way. So, they prefer reading books or newspapers, watching television, sleeping or lazing in a hammock in the garden.

For each person the way of spending leisure time is an individual decision and is adjusted to one's needs and preferences.

Yet, active relaxation, improving one's mental, physical and intellectual condition is strongly preferred.

Role of the media and information technology in leisure time. In the social understanding leisure time is the time without duties intended for any activities. The time can be used for numerous forms of activity both active and passive ones.

Nowadays, modern technologies have been introduced in the field of leisure time just like of other aspects of human life. Entertainment, fun, social meetings, developing one's interests can actually take place anywhere. Without much effort we frequently reach for something, attractive in a way, something which is just for the taking, that is a device employing information technology such as a computer, a smartphone or a tablet. Each of these devices offers functions which enable using the Internet, thus giving access to a huge amount of information as well as various forms of virtual entertainment which can fill leisure time. It is fashionable to use social networks. These days people boast about everything they do, how they spend free time, what they look like. Active users are members of numerous social networks which are most often peer groups that spend their leisure time in a group of peers as it allows them to develop socially. There are also theme groups gathering people interested in a particular area of science of entertainment¹⁵.

Thanks to its being versatile and multimedia the Internet cyberspace is the indispensable medium utilised by generations for a variety of aspects ranging from professional ones to entertainment. Nowadays it would be difficult to exist without it. Lacking it makes a barrier or an obstacle. It allows fast communication thanks to writing text messages or voice and video conversations from practically any corner of the Earth. It enables gaining information on any subject. The Web through its multimedia devices significantly absorbs our attention. During an oral presentation about 20% of information is remembered, if aided by sight – around 30%, and with the visual and auditory perception – about 40%. The mechanism of extending the concentration span is vital as it helps a child devote more time to a certain problem or remember more information. These days, the cyberculture is present in children's and adolescents' lives almost from the very beginning. It fills free time to a considerable extent and childhood consists of:

- daily presence of the media such as the TV, computer and the Internet,
- a range of utilising the Web, for example time, frequency, a subject of the browsed material,

¹⁵ J. Elliott, M. Place, *Dzieci i młodzież w kłopotach – poradnik nie tylko dla psychologów*, Warszawa 2002, s. 141–142.

- how a child answers the media,
- the consequences of such a relation, for example feelings, experiences, assessments and motives for behaviour.

Using the Internet at home, school or in a library has caused a certain dependence in which the Web develops a user's skills and, consequently, is the product of their development. The interaction is so strong that lack of the Internet access may significantly reduce an individual's chances or even eliminate them¹⁶.

It must be remembered that granting a child the access to the Internet does not have to mean that they play games all day long or watch silly cartoons. Various applications which can be used on mobile devices are accessible, for example for composing music, drawing or writing, which can stimulate a child's imagination. However, before an application or a website is offered to a child first it needs to be checked since a child cannot assess its contents critically¹⁷.

On the one hand, we can see positive aspects of using the Internet and social networks because they help with education providing information we need instantly, on the other hand, instead of spending time actively outdoors a user frequently spends all days in front of a computer in the virtual world and forgets about the reality. The behaviour may lead to addiction. Internet addiction is officially recognised as a disease named Internet addiction disorder, so called IAD. Doctors and psychologists have chosen five symptoms of Internet addiction considering to what extent they indicate a threat to the health of juveniles¹⁸. The symptoms are questions which we can ask ourselves, namely if you have ever:

- not eaten or slept because of the Internet,
- unsuccessfully tried to spend less time in the Internet,
- felt uneasy when you could not be online,
- neglected your family, friends, school work or hobby because you spend time online, happened to surf in the Internet even when you were not particularly interested?

More and more users of social networks and the Internet answer these questions positively admitting they have become victims of the addiction and, unfortunately, most of them are young people and children. People addicted to social networks spend much time in them. They do not like anybody to mention that fact and try to reveal it even from themselves. It is typical of other addictions, for example gambling or alcohol addiction. The most dangerous symptom seems to be aggression caused by having no access to the Internet just like in case of drug withdrawal. Children are more susceptible to addictions as they are just

¹⁶ B. Zajęcka, *Internet – przyjaciel czy wróg współczesnej młodzieży?*, *Pedagogika* (red.) K. Rędziński, M. Łopot, *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie*, 2012, t. XXI, s. 213–215.

¹⁷ E. Brzyszczyk, *Internet w czasie wolnym dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym – ujęcie teoretyczne i empiryczne*, (w:) *Kultura czasu wolnego we współczesnym świecie*, Tanaś V., W. Welskop (red.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu i Nauk o Zdrowiu, Łódź 2016, s. 22–24.

¹⁸ M. Griffiths, *Technological addictions*, „Clinical Psychology Forum”, nr 76 /1995, s. 14–19.

adopting attitudes and learning what is good and bad. Children's and adolescents' brains still develop and easily become addicted. They find it easy to get used to some behaviours. They are more prone to this kind of disorder than any other age group. We should control the time devoted to using social networks to prevent the addiction. We should ask ourselves the diagnostic questions and be aware. Still, it is better to prevent the addiction than to treat it. The treatment process is complicated and requires psychological assistance and gradual withdrawal of the addictive factor. It is advisable to start with limiting the time spent online.

Summary. The above reflections consider the issues linked with leisure time in its social aspect. Leisure time is a crucial part of our everyday lives. Thanks to it we can function properly and no one can imagine living in a constant hurry without a moment of relaxation. The world is changing and so are our interests and habits. For many people access to information and communication via social networks are inseparable parts of their lives and something natural. A modern young man cannot imagine life without Internet access which is the basic source of information for them. Social networks have become a very attractive form of communication and entertainment and they have recorded a significant increase in the number of users for the last several years. However, they should be used wisely and in moderation. We should keep in mind that it is not the only source of information. Also, it is not the best and the safest way of spending leisure time.

To some extent leisure time accompanies us daily at various time. It depends on our age and whether or not we work professionally. Ways of spending free time are our personal decisions. Some people like spending time actively while others passively. Obviously, it would be the healthiest for our organisms to spend time actively, for example practising a sport. Yet, any form of relaxation is good as long as it distracts people from daily routine, tension, stress and uncomfortable work and provides relaxation and rest.

We need rest at any age, for example, in case of children it determines the proper development of interests, preferences and social life. As for mature people, it helps maintain the proper condition, slows down the ageing process and positively affects the mood.

On the whole, each of us should find a while for relaxation every day to function properly in life but its form should be adequately considered so as each area of our physical and mental condition benefits from it.

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