

Between Stagnation and Development. Models of Students' Leisure Time Activity During the Pandemic

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2021.65.3.11

Abstract

The aim of the presented research results was to diagnose changes in leisure time behaviours in the situation of the Covid-19 epidemic. The acquired knowledge about changing leisure time behaviour will be used to develop programmes to promote leisure time activity for students during and after the pandemic. The respondents used the Jay B. Nash model of leisure time, which indicates 4 levels of positive use of leisure time and also includes 2 negative levels, i.e. excesses and crime. We assume that the change in leisure time behaviours during the pandemic may consist in creating more valuable forms of activity, giving not so much pleasure but satisfaction (e.g. pursuing interests, creative activity). We also assume that as a result of these changes a sense of spending time in a valuable and meaningful way during the pandemic (building health, feeling satisfied) will be created, which may result in the permanence of the behavioural changes that have occurred, which may become new health and leisure time habits.

Keywords: *pandemic, Covid-19, students' leisure time, development*

Introduction

The time of the pandemic and the associated shift in university education to distance learning has caused significant turmoil in the student lifestyle. It is difficult to clearly determine whether there has been an increase in leisure time – however,

the amount of time spent at home during the week has certainly increased. In the normal course of implementing the curriculum, the student had to spend a significant part of his or her time at the university, and the breaks between classes were filled with conversations or simply being with friends. Sometimes commuting to the university or moving between university buildings took a long time. The amount of leisure time was rather rigidly limited. The situation changed dramatically during the pandemic. The experiencing of time and its management have changed. The authors of the *Daily Life During the Pandemic* report established in the course of their research that: “The change of local time regimes leads to an increase in the amount of leisure time, with the simultaneous inability to experience it with others and in the context of others (in a café, in a crowd, in cultural institutions). Thus, the entertainment activity has been largely limited to those closest to them, who rely solely on themselves and their own creativity in the ways of its organization. (Drozdowski R. & Co., 2020, p. 18).

In the remote learning mode, reserves of leisure time appeared, sometimes made up of short blocks, and could grow to a significant size within a week. Owing to the compulsory limitation of direct meetings (the so-called *partying*), free afternoons and evenings, and sometimes even nights, occurred. Leisure time has been one of the excesses experienced in the pandemic. At the same time, “the individual left on his or her own, must look for opportunities, talents, and determination to manage his or her time, in which he or she has been supported by the aforementioned „others” (Ibidem, p. 21).

It is, therefore, an obvious question whether, in addition to quantitative changes, there have been also qualitative changes in the leisure time activities of students during the pandemic. We devoted our attention to this problem in the research as part of a wider project, the partial results of which will be presented in the text below.

Theoretical assumptions of our own research

Leisure time activity can be considered from many perspectives and in many aspects. Below we present our leads, inspirations, and methodological considerations used in the course of the research.

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi claims that a preference for complexity was formed in the human nervous system in the course of evolution, because only thanks to this, could man survive in an unfavourable environment. Therefore, we feel joy and excitement when we undertake challenges that exceed our current competences,

and thanks to these challenges, these competences can develop (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, pp. 177–178). On the other hand, M. Csikszentmihalyi's research shows that a person usually does not undertake this activity that can lead to joy, because he or she simply does not want to. He or she succumbs to passive activities, such as surfing the Internet, window shopping in malls, watching TV, which make it possible for him or her to experience at most momentary excitement, which is quickly replaced by boredom. According to M. Csikszentmihalyi, this is because taking up an activity that consists in struggling with difficulties requires, as he writes, „activation energy”; it is necessary to go through the first pages of the book, to change into sports clothes and start exercising, to engage in an interesting conversation, etc. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 110).

Piazza P. proves that the experience of stress can be the source of this activation energy. Stress gives the individual the drive to start acting and to carry on despite difficulties. Attempts to overcome them are a permanent source of stress, which fuels activity again. In the period of an epidemic, the sense of health threat itself, but also the limitations imposed on everyday functioning, may be such a source of stress. In such a situation, an increase in the level of stress hormones, i.e. cortisol (released by the adrenal cortex) and dopamine (released from the nucleus accumbens in the brain) generally activates organism (cortisol) and supports the willingness to deal with difficulties and challenges (dopamine). The cortisol-dopamine mechanism determines the activation and maintenance of the body's activity and, colloquially speaking, it explains how the willingness to undertake and the need to continue more complex activities arises and is maintained (Piazza, 2019, pp. 97–100). Cortisol with dopamine could be described as a *hormonal developmental mix*, and it was metaphorically defined by P. Piazza as “endogenous cocaine that helps us act, reducing the negative effects of effort and hardship.” (ibidem, p. 112).

Józef Koźielecki's transgressive concept of man belongs to a similar trend of thinking about human behaviour and actions. He divided the actions of the individual into two categories, i.e. protective and transgressive. Protective actions are governed by the laws of adaptation and homeostasis. They are, therefore, adaptive in nature. Transgressive actions are aimed at crossing the current boundaries of the subject, they are transgressive even when they end up in failure and the individual does not achieve the assumed goal (Koźielecki, 1987, p. 44). The result of an action is not the criterion of the division into protective and transgressive actions, but, as Koźielecki writes, its (actions) antecedents, for example intentions, work, motivation system (ibidem).

As transgressive actions, expansive and creative, are undertaken, the “tension-relief” law ceases to decide, and the main role is played by the law of growth

(positive feedback, snowball, “appetite comes with eating”) (Koziellecki, 1987, p. 49). Therefore, while protective actions are accompanied by the fear of loss, the fear of making a mistake, it is positive feelings that begin to dominate in transgressive actions; Koziellecki talks about the hypothetical phenomenon of “affective shift” in which action is motivated by the hope of crossing borders, the joy of a challenge, the expectation of success, pride (Koziellecki, 1987, p. 56). “Affective shift”, as Koziellecki calls it, can be juxtaposed with the “flow” phenomenon described by Mihalya Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Protective actions take place in a reality that can be described in terms of cause-and-effect relationships, hence they are algorithmic in nature. Transgressive actions go beyond the limits of this predictable reality, hence they are heuristic in nature and are characterized by unreliability and uncertainty (Koziellecki, 1987, pp. 56, 75) and, therefore, failures and defeats are inscribed in transgressive actions.

Protective actions have homeostatic goals, i.e. it is all about reducing the tension associated with disturbing homeostasis and achieving relief. They are characterized by an intolerance to going astray because a mistake threatens homeostasis and increases tension. They are rooted in the past. It is in past experiences that one sees rules and methods of action to maintain the *status quo* Transgressive actions have allostatic goals, that is, they are aimed at increasing and maintaining tension (Piazza p. 111). They are future-orientated and characterized by tolerance to going astray. Motivation in transgressive actions is enhanced by the experiencing of pleasure resulting from curiosity, surprise, and struggling with challenges. On the other hand, in protective actions, motivation is stimulated by uncongenial emotions such as fear, a sense of threat, and by the expectation of relief (Koziellecki, 1987, pp. 147–149; 154–155).

The first type of behaviour, adaptive, is aimed at achieving almost immediately peace, relief, or sensual pleasure. The second type of behaviour, transgressive, leads to a state of tension, sometimes anxiety, and satisfaction or joy appear only after some time as a result of the assumed achievements (sometimes the achievements may be an accidental effect of actions). V. Piazza defines these two types of behaviour as contradictory to each other. Behaviours of the first type are aimed at experiencing the happiness which is the regaining of the state of balance (homeostatic goal). The goal of the second type of behaviours is to experience pleasure resulting from being thrown out of balance in connection with transgressive aspirations (allostatic goal) (Piazza, p. 166).

Jay B. Nash's Leisure Time Model, which indicates 4 levels of positive use of leisure time (moreover, it includes 2 negative levels, i.e. excesses and crime) was of key importance from the point of view of our research¹:

1. Running away from monotony, killing boredom (e.g. surfing the Internet)
2. Passive emotional participation (e.g. watching an absorbing film)
3. Active participation in action – role playing (e.g. playing cards, sports game)
4. Creative action – creating, improving skills, self-creation

Nash's model is hierarchical. The first level is the least valuable for the development of the individual. Activity is aimed only at reducing the tension associated with boredom. On the second level, the individual enjoys pleasant experiences related to passive participation (as a viewer) in culture, sports, as well as reading a book or talking (also with the use of the media). The third level is characterized by systematic active participation in some form of activity. The fourth level is related to creative activity, also with self-creation.

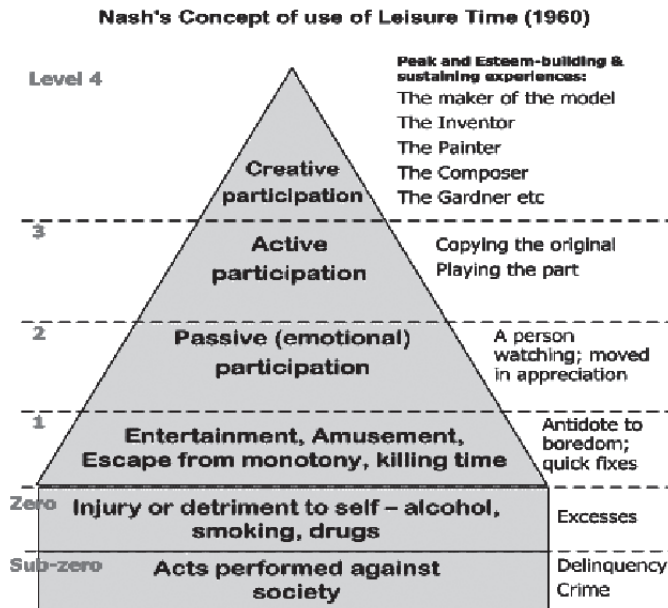


Figure 1. Nash's leisure time model
(source: M.L. Moiseichik & Co)

¹ K.A. Cordes, Applications in Recreation and Leisure for Today and the Future, p. 16, <https://www.sagamorepub.com/sites/default/files/2018-07/applicationsinrecli.pdf> (access: 22.12.2020); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nash%27s_Pyramid , (access: 22.12.2020)

If the concepts of M. Csikszentmihalyi, J. Koziellecki, V. Piazza, and J. Nash are compared, these leisure time behaviours can be divided into two general types:

1. Stagnant
2. Developmental

The above terms are derived from E.H. Erikson's concept of development, according to which in the seventh phase adequate for adulthood (students are on the threshold of adulthood) there is a tension between stagnation and generativity (Erikson, pp. 379–380). Stagnation is the result of not tackling problems or taking up challenges in the personal, professional, and interpersonal spheres, and prevents development. The opposite pole, generativity, is an attitude of meeting valuable challenges making it possible to create new qualities in the personal, professional, and interpersonal scope, resulting in development. The bipolar classification, i.e. stagnant activities and developmental activities, was used to organize the typologies contained in the presented theoretical concepts.

Table A. Classification of human leisure time activity

Types of leisure time behaviour	M. Csikszentmihalyi	J. Koziellecki	V. Piazza	J. Nash	
Stagnant	Passive	Adaptive	Homeostatic	Passive Passive emotional participation	Killing boredom
Developmental	Active	Transgressive	Allostatic	Active	Active participation in the action Creative action

Own study: Piotr Blajet

Method

The aim of the partial research results presented here (they are a fragment of a larger research project) was to diagnose changes in leisure time behaviour in the situation of the Covid-19 epidemic. The application objective of the research was equally important to us and consisted in gaining knowledge about changing leisure time behaviours, which will be used to develop programmes for promoting leisure time activity for students during and after the pandemic. We assume that the change in leisure time behaviours during the pandemic may consist in creating more valuable forms of activity, giving not so much pleasure as satisfaction, e.g.

pursuing interests, creative activity. We also assume that as a result of these changes a sense of spending time during the pandemic in a valuable and meaningful way (building health, feeling satisfied) will be created, which may result in the permanence of the behavioural changes that have occurred, which may become new health and leisure time habits.

In this part of the research, answers were sought to the following research questions: Whether and to what extent, in the event of an epidemic threat, there has been a change in students' leisure time behaviours in terms of behaviours related to stopping boredom; in terms of passive behaviours; in terms of active behaviours; in terms of creative behaviours? In particular, we asked ourselves the question whether there would be a shift towards developmental behaviours.

The research was planned in a quantitative strategy. It was of a diagnostic and verification nature. The description of the data collection methods was simultaneously the description of the operationalization procedure. All variables were measured using an original questionnaire, which is based on the theoretical findings concerning the described research perspectives.

Research results

1. Characteristics of the surveyed population

Students of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń constituted the general population (for epidemic, organizational, and application reasons – preparation of health activity promotion programmes for students of those years who were forced to conduct physical education classes remotely). 569 responses were obtained, which constitutes about 2.5% of the general population surveyed. Among the respondents there were 76.4% women and 23.6% men, 70% of whom live in cities. The surveys was conducted electronically, from April to the end of May 2020, during the lockdown and the subsequent easing of restrictions.

In the tables below, we have summarized the basic data on the given studied population in terms of sex and place of residence

Table 1. Subjects by sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Woman	435	76.4	76.4
Man	134	23.6	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Table 2. Subjects by place of residence

Place of residence	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
municipality	67	11.8	11.8
town/city with poviat rights	145	25.5	37.3
provincial city	182	32.0	69.2
villages	175	30.8	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

More women than men took part in the surveys. The subjects came mainly from cities, and a third came from the country.

2. Research results for the variable “Passive behaviours – neutralizing boredom”

Table 3. During the epidemic, I spend more time sleeping or lazing around

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	66	11.6	11.6
I rather disagree	116	20.4	32.0
I rather agree	181	31.8	63.8
I definitely agree	206	36.2	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Most of the respondents (68%) declared spending more time sleeping or lazing around during the pandemic. Slightly over 11 percent of the respondents gave a definitely negative answer.

Table 4. During the epidemic, I do just about anything to make the time pass quickly

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	184	32.3	32.3
I rather disagree	184	32.3	64.7
I rather agree	135	23.7	88.4
I definitely agree	66	11.6	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Nearly 65 percent of the respondents declared that they had not increased the time to undertake such activities as “make time pass quickly”.

Table 5. During the epidemic, I try to “kill time” by establishing online contacts with accidental people

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	464	81.5	81.5
I rather disagree	71	12.5	94.0
I rather agree	19	3.3	97.4
I definitely agree	15	2.6	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Over 90% of the respondents declared that they had not increased their time for making casual acquaintances on the Internet.

Summarizing the data on the passive behaviours aimed at killing the boredom of emotions, it can be noticed that the respondents declared that they spent more time sleeping or lazing around, while most of them do not waste time on irrelevant activities aimed at „killing” time.

3. Research results for the variable “Passive behaviours” – arousing positive emotions

Table 6. During the epidemic, I devote myself to looking for pleasant sensations (experiences of the senses: taste, sensory, visual, etc.) to a greater extent

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	82	14.4	14.4
I rather disagree	220	38.7	53.1
I rather agree	195	34.3	87.3
I definitely agree	72	12.7	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

About half of the respondents declared that they had increased the time spent searching for pleasant sensory experiences.

Table 7. During the epidemic, I try to undertake activities that will interest me even temporarily

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	42	7.4	7.4
I rather disagree	110	19.3	26.7
I rather agree	288	50.6	77.3
I definitely agree	129	22.7	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

73% of the respondents declared that they had increased the time spent undertaking interesting activities. About 1/3 of the respondents are not sure about it, or do not make efforts in the context of looking for new forms of spending leisure time.

Table 8. During the epidemic, I contact my friends to talk about “just about anything” to a greater extent

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	120	21.1	21.1
I rather disagree	216	38.0	59.1
I rather agree	156	27.4	86.5
I definitely agree	77	13.5	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Nearly 60% of the respondents declared that they had not increased the time spent contacting friends to talk „just about anything”.

Summarizing the data on the passive behaviours aimed at arousing positive emotions, it can be noted that the majority of the respondents declared that they spent more time building a positive mood by stimulating their senses, arousing curiosity, and chatting with friends. Activities of this type energize and stimulate (Łuria, pp. 33–44; Błajet, pp. 101–16) – and are generally conducive to development.

4. Research results for the variable “Active behaviours” – realization of interests

Table 9. During the epidemic, I devote more time to systematic physical activity and keeping fit

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	89	15.6	15.6
I rather disagree	176	30.9	46.6
I rather agree	170	29.9	76.4
I definitely agree	134	23.6	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Slightly over 50% of the respondents declared that they spent more time on systematic physical activity and keeping fit. About 15% did not increase the time spent keeping fit.

Table 10. During the epidemic, I devote more time to my mental activities (e.g. studying, interests, etc.)

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	17	3.0	3.0
I rather disagree	109	19.2	22.1
I rather agree	264	46.4	68.5
I definitely agree	179	31.5	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

The vast majority of the respondents declared that they spent more time on mental activities, such as studying or pursuing their interests. Only 3% declared that they did not spend any more time on these activities.

Table 11. During the epidemic, I am more devoted to maintaining good relations

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	28	4.9	4.9
I rather disagree	134	23.6	28.5
I rather agree	289	50.8	79.3
I definitely agree	118	20.7	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Slightly over 71% of the respondents declared that they were devoted to maintaining good relationships to a greater extent. Only less than 5% declared that they did not spend more time on these activities.

Summarizing the data on active behaviours, it can be noticed that most of the respondents declared an increase in time for purposeful activities, i.e. keeping fit, studying, caring for relationships.

5. Research results for the variable “Active behaviours” – creative actions

Table 12. During the epidemic, I devote myself to enriching the resource of motor skills and improving my physical fitness to a greater extent

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	94	16.5	16.5
I rather disagree	167	29.3	45.9
I rather agree	182	32.0	77.9
I definitely agree	126	22.1	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

54% of the respondents declared that they were devoted to enriching their repertoire and possibilities of motor skills to a greater extent.

Table 13. During the epidemic, I spend more time planning my development (career, further education, etc.) and pursuing my passions.

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	57	10.0	10.0
I rather disagree	158	27.8	37.8
I rather agree	247	43.4	81.2
I definitely agree	107	18.8	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Slightly more than half of the respondents declared that they spent more time on their own development and building their personal capital. 10% of the respondents did not increase the time for pro-developmental activities.

Table 14. During the epidemic, I am more devoted to creating good, valuable relationships with my relatives or friends

Response categories	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
I strongly disagree	34	6.0	6.0
I rather disagree	139	24.4	30.4
I rather agree	288	50.6	81.0
I definitely agree	108	19.0	100.0
Total	569	100.0	

Source: own study.

Slightly over 71% of the respondents declared that they were more devoted to building valuable relationships with relatives and friends. On the other hand, over 30% of the respondents did not declare a change in these activities.

Summarizing the data on creative behaviours, it can be noted that the majority of the respondents declared an increase in time for (self-)creative activities, i.e. developing new motor competences, pursuing passions, and building personal capital, studying, building relationships.

Discussion

The tool used was generally aimed at determining the increase (or absence of increase) in, or development of, a given type of activity during the pandemic. However, it did not provide an opportunity to check whether there was a reduction in the time spent on doing activities. However, it can be assumed that while the statement „I strongly disagree” could (but did not have to) indicate a reduction in the time devoted to specific activities, the statement „I rather disagree” does not suggest a reduction in the amount of time, and with high probability it can be assumed that it suggests *status quo* behaviour. Therefore, in the summary statement, we only take into account the percentages of positive responses such as „I definitely agree” and „I rather agree” and definitely negative responses („I strongly disagree”)

The data on passive leisure activities such as killing boredom show that although the respondents spend more time sleeping and „doing nothing”, they do not waste time on just any activities or making casual contacts on the Internet, „wasting” time. While sleeping and lazing around as forms of relaxation can serve development, „wasting” time takes away energy and serves stagnation. Data on the

activities aimed at seeking pleasant sensations do not indicate a clear tendency, apart from undertaking activities that will interest the respondents. This may indicate that the respondents are rather focused on the quality of their leisure time; a momentary curiosity about anything may be the beginning of the development of interests. The vast majority of the respondents (nearly 80%) declared that they spent more time on activities aimed at keeping physically and mentally fit and building relationships. Over 50% of the respondents declared that they had increased the time for creative activities in terms of motor skills, self-development, and building relationships.

Referring to the research questions, it should be stated that the respondents, on the verge of the spreading of the pandemic, declared a shift in leisure time activities (although some of them probably coincided with work, which studying undoubtedly is) towards developmental activities within all four levels of leisure time activity (levels according to Nash). Using the terms of the other authors cited in the introductory section, there has been a shift towards allostatic (P. Piazza) or transgressive (J. Koziielecki) behaviours. One could also describe this change using a mental short cut that the **pandemic is freeing young people from stagnation**. Following M. Csikszentmihalyi's way of thinking, it should be stated that the respondents showed a preference for complexity. Lockdown, i.e. the inability to interact with peers, the restriction of entertainment and of the possibility of spending leisure time „in the city” all meant sensory deprivation, and this may have triggered the activation energy and the desire to spend leisure time in a valuable way. The results obtained by us are also confirmed by other studies conducted at the same time. *Daily Life in the Pandemic* report showed that although immobilized everyday life is a life lived halfway, it does not mean that it is lazy, conducive to resting, and is less intense. „Many people today experience strong emotions and are often much more involved in other spheres of activity and obligations, such as raising children, working, or keeping the body in good condition” (Drozdowski R., et al., 2020, p. 30).

The authors of the report also state that, in the opinion of the respondents, leisure time becomes „excess” time because a significant part of it requires individual planning. It loses much of its relaxing casualness in this way. [...] The forced planning of this (non-)leisure time is, therefore, the foundation of survival for the respondents (ibidem, p. 10) – a kind of stagnation, but, as our research shows, also of development.

Summing up, it can be said that the surveyed students coped well with the so-called „excess leisure time”. In the pandemic reality, the issues of leisure time were located at the same time as the time of fulfilling educational obligations. In

this situation, it was difficult to separate leisure time spatially and treat it as an escape from duties and household members. The research has shown that it is a time of taking up and developing new hobbies. It is a time that has changed from being accidental to being planned, often limited to contacts with our nearest and dearest, and requiring us to be creative in its organization.

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