

MALGORZATA DUBIS¹**Computer as an active form of spending free time by children**

Nowadays free time is of great importance in the life of individuals. It is an intrinsic aspect of life, necessary for the proper functioning of a person. Modern civilization throws temptations of passive rest and sedentary entertainment especially the use of a computer. As reality suggests, one of the most popular forms of spending free time by teenagers is „meeting” in a virtual space. Spending free time by young people on social networking sites has become an integral part of their lives. Pilot studies are presented in this article, they concern different ways of spending free time of young people with the special consideration of using the computer and the internet. The diversity in ways of spending free time has been analysed in these studies according to the age ranges of young people and diverse territorial environments. The researches that served to collect the empirical material, were conducted in 3 big towns, 3 medium-sized towns, 3 small towns, and 3 rural districts. It was pointed out that irrational use of computer and internet by young people causes real danger for the health and the functioning of a child. Moreover, due to the lack of full social maturity, young people are easily influenced by others, also those impelling undesirable behaviours.

Introduction

The use of free time and its structure constitutes one of the most important tasks of a young person's lifestyle. Nowadays, free time is of great importance in life of individuals. It is an intrinsic aspect of life, necessary for the proper functioning of a man in the environment. It constitutes the valuable counterweight for more and more rapid pace of life and the accompanying haste, nervousness and often frustration.

The behaviour transformation being observed in our society quickly included also the sphere of free time. The main regulator within that process are the changing needs and intentions of a human being, which are characterized by the changing life conditions.

The modern civilization involves temptations of passive rest, sedentary entertainment especially with the use of a computer. As the observing reality suggests, one of the most popular forms of spending free time by teenagers are „meetings” in virtual space. Spending free time by young people on social networking sites has become the integral part of their life.

Many hours spent at the computer lead to the disorganization of every day routine, reduction of time that should be devoted to other activities.

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I. The concept and specification of free time

Defining free time, despite the fact that it is easy, causes lots of difficulties. There is a wide range of defining that space of individual's life both in the colloquial meaning and scientific literature. In the colloquial meaning, free time is the time without duties, associated with holidays, leave, relax, rest, idleness and also recreation, fun, entertainment or sport.

Whereas it is a lot more difficult to define the concept of free time on scientific grounds. It results from the fact that the problem of free time has been undertaken by representatives of different scientific disciplines, who point out the characteristic aspects connected with their scientific interests in definitions of free time (Czerepaniak–Walczak; 1997, Denek, 2002; Kwieciński, 1979; Mroczkowska, 2011; Narkiewicz–Niedbalec, 2011 et al.) .

The concept of free time has appeared and has been popularized at the moment of accepting it by the International Conference of UNESCO in June 1957. The definition of J. Dumazediera (1962: 22) was accepted as the basis, defining free time as any activities taken by the individual after completing of his/her duties that are directed at personal development, self-fulfillment and moreover they serve the leisure and entertainment according to its individual predilections. It results, from the above definition, that free time is a concept opposing to busy time, mostly filled by work, education, numerous duties or meeting biological needs.

Analyzing the interdisciplinary source literature one can find many definitions of free time emphasizing its different aspects. These definitions can be presented in three trends: instrumental, behavioral and spiritual. The first trend includes definitions defining free time as the natural element of individual's functioning involving and separating from the daily cycle of time budget. It is the time in which the individual does not perform any activities and duties (Danecki, 1974. pp. 11).

Free time is particularly important in pedagogical sciences. Wincenty Okoń (2004. pp. 68) defines free time as time which the individual possesses after fulfilling obligatory duties: professional work, learning at school and home and necessary household duties.

The analysis of literature concerning that issue shows that free time is a wide and complex concept. All authors unanimously claim that it creates the most convenient conditions for: resting, rejuvenation, self-development and social activity. The definitions presented above, in spite of the fact that they are different in details, do not contravene but are complementary.

It should be underlined that free time is especially important in life of children and teenagers and it significantly differs from the adults' time. Adults tired by professional work, devote their free time mainly to rest and recreation. Whereas, young people fulfill it with fun, entertainment and development of their own interests.

II. Internet as a source of an entertainment in free time

Internet is a medium, of which the dynamic development and potential can be used mainly by young people. It is an intrinsic part of their social life, everyday activities and entertainment. The Internet phenomenon consists in the fact that from the social point of view it is currently something more important than only the communication technology. For many social groups it has become the natural environment of functioning, allowing to fulfill most social needs and motivations. It is used not only to search information but also to establish and maintain friendship and close relationships.

New technologies are widely available, almost everybody has a computer at home and access to the Internet. Whereas in 2007 in Poland slightly over half of the households with children under 16 had an access to the network, then in 2012 the percentage exceeded 91% , in 2013 – 93,1%, 2014 – 94% and in 2015 – 95% (Central Statistical Office 2012, 2014, 2015). Part of it has also the continuous access to the network on mobile devices.

Internet is currently an integral part of everyday life of children. Children start to use Internet from a younger age -the first contact with Internet falls at the age between 7 and 11 years old, in Poland the average age of first logging into network is 9 years old. At the earliest there are children from Sweden and Denmark logging into the Internet- 7 years old and several other northern European countries- 8 years. Taking into consideration all countries, one third of (33%) 9-10-years old using the Internet is logging into the network every day. The rate has been increasing up to 80% in a group of 15–16-years old. Using the Internet is currently an intrinsic part of everyday life of children: on average in Europe 93% of young Internet users use the network at least once a week, and 60% log on every day or almost every day. In Poland, these rates are even higher: 98% log on at least once a week, and 74% every day, 24% 1-2 times a week (Kirwil, 2011).

The dynamic development of new technologies fascinates and involves teenagers. That is why quite accurate is to describe the youngest users of Internet as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) or an internet generation (Tapscott, 2010). Therefore it is not surprising that for

children the border between the real world and a virtual one does not exist. Everyday activities of young generation go on in parallel online and offline. Developing their interests, talks with peers or doing homework, are the activities that are completed easily on-line. The Internet access and a computer, smartphone or tablet is sufficient for teenagers to fulfill their needs in various areas of their lives.

A computer and internet are not only the source of information, but for many people the main way of spending free time and provide entertainment. There are lots of social networks surpassing in ideas for a good time in the internet. The main entertainment portal sites are those with online games. Nevertheless, the social networking sites give us pretty large pleasure. We can find friends, send photos or exchange our experience. That type of entertainment shall involve the most sceptical user. The computer with the internet connection will provide the way for a good fun for everybody, and its prevalence causes that we use that type of entertainment more often. Moreover, surfing the internet is treated by teenagers as a way of spending free time and entertainment.

Internet is also perceived as a mass mean of communication, these are many different areas, giving lots of possibilities of using it for entertainment or education. The most important area in the Internet is taken by different types of usenet newsgroups that were one of the first ways of mass asynchronous communication. At present the internet synchronous talks are popular and more common, interactive data and sound transmission allowing to see and hear our internet interlocutors. The offer of different servers has been still growing, which undoubtedly encourages to use the internet.

As highlighted by Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (2005), the Internet popularity has been connected with its features such as: imagination, interactivity, accessibility and anonymity. Imagination allows to free of physical defects of our daily life, real world and makes that cyberspace is more attractive. Interactivity gives the possibility of entering into relations with other users in a simple way and quicker than in reality, high accessibility and anonymity provide certainty and freedom— build unusual power of Internet attracting. Pointing out that the factor attracting people to the virtual world is the possibility of the completion of needs that in the real world undergo deprivation. Moreover, the typical needs and motives for the adolescence period are responsible for the power of the internet influence on young people.

The activities the adolescents will use in the Internet, which will be the most attractive to them depend on the level of meeting needs and ambitions in a real world.

It should be underlined that in many cases, young people often do not devote their whole attention to the Internet. Usually, attention has been divided into several activities, for

example between doing homework and checking news on the internet. That is the reason for multitasking— the feature that according to the researchers is typical for young generation. It is worth noting that the same applies to the way of surfing the Internet, where several different services are opening at the same time and incessantly switching over the tabs.

Young people spending time on the Internet do it to the detriment of other, often more valuable activities. For this reason it is necessary to monitor the activity of young people on the network in the context of threats, that medium provides.

III. The most common forms of spending free time by young people – own research

Pilot studies are presented in this article, they concern different ways of spending free time by young people with the special consideration of using a computer and Internet. The diversity in ways of spending free time has been analyzed in these studies due to the age ranges of young people and diversified territorial environments.

The following problems have been pointed out:

- Has the chosen group of the examined adolescents got free time during the day, and if yes, to what extent?
- Does the living environment diversify the amount of free time of the examined teenagers?
- What are the most common ways of spending free time among examined adolescents?
- Does and to what extent the age and sex of the examined teenagers diversify the preferred forms of spending free time?
- What place has the Internet among the leisure activities?
- How often and in what places do teenagers use the Internet?
- How much time do adolescents spend on surfing the Internet?
- Does the gender factor diversify the preferences within the use of Internet sources?

The researches that served to collect the empirical material, were conducted in podkarpackie voivodeship, in the following agglomerations: 3 big towns, 3 average towns, 3 small towns, and 3 rural environments. While conducting research the method of purposeful and random multi-stage selection of sampling has been adopted. The sampling has been adjusted with the

use of the following requirements: all tested were junior high school students; they were randomly qualified from one first grade, second grade and third grade from the particular school, in each place, doing at the same time multi-stage selection. A total of 283 junior high school students took part in research, grades I-III participating in the studies, including 135 girls and 148 boys, which allowed for collecting the same number of questionnaire forms that were analyzed. Due to the research actions of diagnostic nature, the leading method of collecting materials and organizing materials was a diagnostic survey. In order to gain knowledge about the assumed issues, as the original questionnaire form of leisure activities of adolescents has been applied. The conducted research were of a pilot nature. The repetition factor of the survey results was $r = 0,85$. That has created the basis to find out that there are huge chances to obtain sufficient information concerning the leisure behaviour of young people. That is why for the needs of the following article, the received research material has been analyzed which allowed to frame the leisure time activities of the tested. The received results are treated as the initial ones and will not be taken into consideration in the main research. The target research will include the research sample of 856 students.

The first phase of results analysis established the understanding of free time concept by junior high school students. For 48,7% of respondents, free time is mainly a rest from everyday duties. 26,1% of respondents equate free time with lack of school, learning or any other duties that they have to perform. Whereas 18,4% respondents declare that free time is mainly a good period for activities freely chosen that are pleasant and distraction from daily routine. More than 6% of junior high school students associate free time only with pastime that they define as time for „antics” and parties, when everything is allowed. The above concepts of free time are connected with the sense of freedom (from learning, duties, orders, and regulations) privacy (personal time) and feeling of pleasure and which should not be devoted to learning by young people.

Taking into account that free time is the element of time budget of a man, the number of free time hours held by young people during the day has been tried to be established.

A vast majority of respondents declared that they had enough free time (88,6%). Only 7,4% respondents declared its lack, and certain deficit within the range of free time was felt by 4% of respondents. People surveyed point out that they had 2-5 hours of free time every day, whereas the number of free time hours increases at weekends, free days of school and is from 6-10 hours. The age of respondents did not diversify them in respect of free time, since in all age categories (13-17 years old) the percentage of declaring such answers was from 77,9% to 85,3%. The variable differentiating appeared to have been the place of residence.

Young people living in different sized towns declared enough free time, comparing to their peers living in the countryside.

The most popular way of spending free time among young people surveyed, was using computer and internet (80,6%). Popularity of using the computer and Internet is connected with universality of the access and attraction resulting among others from quick finding of the interesting content - in Poland Access to the Internet at home has 98% youth (Central Statistical Office, 2014). All respondents are permanent users of Internet and have the unlimited access to the Internet. Given the above, it is not surprising that more than half of the respondents (57,2%) uses a computer every day, 13,7% uses it several times a week and 9,7% only once a week. None of the respondents declared less intensive usage of the computer.

The most common place of using the Internet is home (91,8%) and then public places (65,7%) and school (57,2%). Whereas in the last two studies, they use the mobile connections, mostly mobile phones. This may indicate that these type of services are spreading quickly, especially with low prices of using mobile communications or wide technical possibilities offered by different mobile brands. Using mobile connections increases together with the age of the respondents in first grades of junior high school 19,6%, in second grades 30,3% and in third grades 50,1% of the respondents. Taking into consideration the sex factor, boys use the internet mobile connections more often than girls.

Much time, in which young people use computers is connected with using the Internet. Young people surf the internet usually about 2–3 hours every day. This range of time devoted to using the Internet was declared by 74,9% boys and 67,8% girls. 7,7% of total respondents spend less than an hour in virtual reality. However it is alarming that in the group of respondents there were students who admit spending more time for their activity in the Internet, usually about 8-9 hours. It concerns 9,8% of total respondents including 6,8% boys and 3% girls. For 55,1% switching on and connecting to the Internet is the first activity they do after returning from school. These people stop using the Internet just before going to bed very often. Another 33,9% uses the Internet early in the morning, being yet in bed. It appears to be reasonable to treat such behaviors as risky ones, predisposing to the addiction. Similar results were achieved in CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center, 2013) research underlining the increase of free time amount spent in front of the computer screen.

As many as 49.1% admits using a computer without the parental control having full freedom for surfing the Internet, among enthusiasts of spending free time in front of a

computer. 30,4% of junior high school students have the limit defined by parents as for using the Internet. Only 1 person can use the Internet when one of the parents is at home.

The analysis of the research results allowed to answer the question what Internet resources are often used by young people. Internet mainly fulfils the role of entertainment source for young people. Most of young people search not only for information but company. That is why internet messengers are so popular among respondents (87,6%) and social services (78,8%) aiming at initiating and maintaining contacts among other people. That variable has been determined by the sex factor. Platforms connecting many forms of internet communication are more popular among girls. Most respondents have accounts on community portals (83,3%), and every fifth junior high student has several of them opened. The respondents consider that it helps them in an unlimited contact with others and present being on-line with possibility of sharing their own thoughts and uploading pictures. Young people are convinced that in a modern world „*the person without an account on a community portal-is not alive*”. The need and aim for gaining the biggest number of friends, undoubtedly associated with the popularity of that person is strongly visible among the users of portals, especially the young ones.

For 78,4% of the respondents, the Internet is used mainly for searching necessary information for learning, for looking the information of products and services (52,4) and listening to music (59,3%), watching films (45,9%).

On-line games are mostly popular among teenagers (43,6%). These are simple games aimed at one person (for example solitaire) but also multiperson games (fictional), strategic, where competition and fight are the main elements. It has been found out statistically that there is a huge relationship between the sex of the respondents and using games on own research. Boys most often play games (87,6%) and more frequently (more than half of the respondent boys use games every day).

The interest of games still increases, because they are attractive entertainment for young people which is not boring, and the other way round games draw and involve. Participating in a game has become a popular way of spending free time by children and young people (Izdebska–Sosnowski, 2005; Gajda, 2005; Guerreschi, 2006; Pyżalski, 2011; Andrzejewska, 2014 and others).

Summing-up the presented phenomenon one should state that using computers by young people is an essential activity that consumes their free time. The analysis of the research results allows to state that the Internet has becoming a peculiar tool of socializing. Young people deposit the space of fulfilling different needs (acceptance, closeness, contact with

other people) and also information, intellectual needs or finally participation in life of different social groups in the Internet. It should be pointed out that irrational use of computer and Internet by young people causes real danger for health and child's functioning. Moreover, due to the lack of full social maturity, young people are easily influenced by others, also those impelling to undesirable behaviors.

IV. Conclusion

Spending free time in front of a computer has becoming the sign of our times. Undoubtedly, new digital technologies influence that state of affairs. Participation of children and young people in these forms of activities at the expense of resigning from active leisure has becoming the significant social problem. Virtual world and attractions proposed by it are the competition for traditional forms of spending free time.

That is why it is important to shape the abilities of rational use and spending free time by a child, in such a way as the taken activities fulfill both personal needs of a child and at the same time are in accordance with the needed educational model in an optimal way.

Large scale educational activity aimed at young people, within managing free time has becoming the short-term necessity, the objective within that range should be shaping the abilities of rational resting and organization of rich forms of spending free time. Achieving by young people the high level of free time culture, and also shaping the conscious approach towards understood needs of the organism.

Developing the positive predilections and interests, developing abilities and habits within rational resting and organizing different forms of free time spending should be an integral task of family, school upbringing and also the area of extra-curricular and non-school work.

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