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SOCIAL AND MATERIAL DETERMINANTS OF LEISURE

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to discover the principal leisure activities of various groups defined by gender, education, age and family life cycle stage, how these groups evaluate their leisure time, what are the obstacles which prevent them from spending leisure time as they would like and if they would like to be engaged in any new activity/activities? The data has been obtained using the "Quality of life in Slovenia 1994" questionnaire on a representative sample of the adult population. The sample of 1717 persons aged from 18 to 75 years has been analysed with a variety of statistical methods, including the following: percentages, chi square, Cramer's V and multiple regression analysis.

The way of spending leisure time tend to be highly correlated with socio-economic status and the same applies to obstacles to leisure activities and the aspiration for new activities. The higher the socio-economic status of the respondent the more heterogeneous the pattern of activities appear and the more frequent the aspiration for new activities. Socio-economic determination of leisure activities is higher for women than for men. Leisure determinants are gender differentiated.

Keywords: leisure, quality of life, gender, social status, material resources, activity

INTRODUCTION

Leisure as a mass phenomenon is a product of the industrial society, which is characterised by the separation of the working and the residential environment, and by the separation of production, reproduction and consumption. The continuous reduction in working time as well as the growing number of days dedicated to rest and recreation have been observed from the end of the 19th century up to the present. However, this transformation is not merely a question of quantitative changes. Implementation of new technologies, increased knowledge and the changed valuation of different spheres of life brought about qualitative changes which offered the possibilities of individualizing the ways of life and consumption. Consequently, the boundaries between leisure and other spheres of life became relative and in many cases only subjectively constructed.

Leisure is defined as the simultaneousness of activities which are not related directly to an economic function and positive experiences of such activities after work is finished or other obligations fulfilled (Roberts, 1988). Although the possibility of free choice and self-expression is a constituent part of the conventional definition of leisure, the contents and amount of leisure are determined within an actual historical and social context. Leisure is also related to the issue of division of labour and to prevailing social and personal values. Each social group defines its leisure within a certain frame of reference, usually in relation to requirements of (an)other social group(s), whereas the extent of limits on leisure depends upon the status of the group and/or of its members. The better the socio-economic position is, the greater the possibility of choosing. The way of spending leisure time, however, is related not only to economic and social resources but also to the psychical and spiritual capabilities of the individual, his or her ability to interrupt the routine of everyday life and take time for himself/herself, come closer to him/herself and to the environment in which he/she lives. Leisure time is therefore extremely important for establishing psycho-physical equilibrium and for taking the necessary distance from everyday problems which offers the opportunity for positive change. During periods of radical changes in gainful employment or in family life, the world of leisure can be the only source of continuity. If we put this part of our life aside, we reduce the possibilities of coping with changes and for new life investments (Černigoj Sadar, 1991: 10).

Some researchers forecasted, and planners of a welfare state expected, that with increased social and economic development the differences in ways of spending leisure time which result from people's social and material position would diminish. Up until now, however empirical data indicates that this process has hardly begun and that it is limited merely to certain fields of activity (most often related to the mass media) and involves only certain social groups.

Research into leisure is important both in terms of the individual and of society.

- For every individual, availability of time when a relative free choice of activities is possible is a prerequisite for maintaining psycho-physical equilibrium and for satisfying social needs as well as the needs of self-realization.

- On the level of society, the quantity and quality of leisure time activities are indicators of social changes which could be influenced by social policy measures.

In this article we shall focus on the following questions:

- Which of leisure activities are the most frequent?
- To what extent are constitutive elements of leisure, such as personal choice and satisfaction, present within different social groups? What are the obstacles on the way to begin with new leisure time activities?
- What is the relationship between socio-economic position and the way of spending leisure time?

These questions will be answered on the basis of an analysis of empirical data obtained from interviewees, men and women from 18 to 75 years of age, concerning their behaviour during free time and subjective estimations of their free time. The analysis is for the most part limited to the data obtained from the "Quality of life in Slovenia 1994" questionnaire given to a representative sample of the adult population in Slovenia.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL CONTACTS

Social contacts with relatives (95.4 percent) and friends or acquaintances (94.4 percent) hold the first place among principal leisure activities. However, only one third of respondents visit their friends often and the number is about the same (33.8 percent) for relatives. Age and education appear to have no impact upon frequency of contacts with relatives, while gender differences are significant. Women, as compared to men, have much more frequent contacts with relatives. The higher the level of education and the lower the age, the more frequent are social contacts outside of the family circle. The ratio between the youngest and the oldest age groups, as regards contacts with friends or acquaintances is 50.4% : 25.6%.

Most people know their neighbours and talk to them at least occasionally. Indeed three-quarters of respondents have chosen their friends among their neighbours. Persons from groups with lower educational level as well as parents with children of school age and older tend to choose their friends among neighbours more often than other social groups.

As far as social contacts are concerned, the majority of respondents have well established relationships in their neighbourhood or they find company elsewhere. Nevertheless, the percentage of social isolation appears to be relatively high. People who reportedly never share leisure time with friends represent as much as 5.6 percent and 4.6 percent of respondents reported having no contact with their relatives. As much as 4 percent of respondents mention they have neither a relative nor anybody else they could turn to when they need company. Social isolation increases with age (from 2.6 percent in the group of up to 24 years of age to 6.3 percent in the group of 55 to 75 year old people). It is the hardest for the old and the less educated to find company. Of those who have less than elementary school education, about one in ten reported having no company.

CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Reading books as a leisure activity (69.6 percent) is significantly related to sex, age and education. Educational level has the greatest positive impact on this activity; the ratio between the lowest and the highest education level is 52.4% : 90.9%. Women are typically more often engaged in cultural activities such as reading books, visiting the theatre, museums or exhibitions, etc. than are men.

During the last twenty years, women have made a decisive step forward in educational and creative leisure activities. In the mid-seventies, these activities had mainly been the domains of men while, in the mid- nineties there is no gender difference as regards participation in study groups and creative activities such as painting, writing poems or prose, etc.

Table 1
CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

	Activities: Reading books	Art creativity(1)	Attend cultural events, art creativity, education(2)
	%	%	%
All respondents	69.6	10.6	32.3
Sex:			
Male	61.1	11.5	33.7
Female	77.6	9.8	31.2
Age :			
18 - 24 years	76.4	22.4	48.4
25 - 34 years	70.3	13.0	34.6
35 - 44 years	70.7	9.1	41.8
45 - 54 years	67.1	7.4	23.6
55 - 75 years	66.3	5.7	19.9
Educational level:			
Less than 8 years	52.4	4.7	11.0
Elementary school	66.2	6.5	17.7
Vocational school	64.8	7.6	25.1
Secondary school	78.9	17.1	49.8
High sch., university	90.9	21.1	76.2
Life cycle:			
- Young adults	72.5	14.5	48.9
- Parents with child- ren up to 5	68.8	16.2	32.3
- Parents with child- red from 6 to 15	68.3	6.9	37.0
- Parents with child- ren over 15	65.5	6.1	22.7
- People (45-65 years) with no ch. at home	64.3	10.1	27.3
- Older people (aged over 65)	66.2	6.8	15.4

(1) Rarely or often play musical instruments, write poems or prose, paint, artistic photography etc.

(2) Participation in at least one of the above mentioned activities.

SPORT, RECREATION AND HOBBIES

Most respondents (68.8 percent) participate in at least one of the following activities: fishing, hunting, outings or participation in sports. The differences among various social groups as determined by age and education are similar to those discussed with the above mentioned activities. Age seems to have a greater impact on recreational and sports activities than it does on cultural activities.

Although the recreation and sports activities are popular, people do not seem to participate in them on a regular basis. The culture of maintaining a good psycho-physical condition is not yet developed in Slovenia. Only the young and people with high school and university education have made a step forward in actively caring for their physical and mental health. However, people show almost no continuity in these activities from one life cycle to another. There are some exceptions among younger generations. The already low percentage (28.1 percent) of those who at any time during the last twenty years regularly practiced activities which help to maintain good psycho-physical condition fell by one half from 1974 to 1994. The interruption of such activities is greater in women than in men. The greatest fall was found among parents of pre-school children. Most women and a large number of men give up regular activities that help to maintain psycho-physical condition when they enter the period of parenthood and they rarely resume these activities when their children grow up. This applies chiefly to the older generation. The younger generation makes a greater effort to take up activities that help to maintain their psycho-physical condition when their children grow up, but only a small number actually resumes such activities on a regular basis.

More than half of the women respondents reported that they occupied themselves with handiwork such as knitting, needle work, etc. or other hobbies. Especially for women with preschool and school age children, handiwork is one of the few activities with which they can express their creativity and fantasy while making something useful for their families. In this specific area, there are less differences among groups with differing educational levels and ages than in other activities. However, the difference between men and women in this area is the largest. Hobbies are not less popular among men but their hobbies are different and therefore are categorized with other kinds of activities. Doing handiwork at home is a popular hobby of women and a relatively rare activity for men. Men tend to pursue leisure interests outside the home.

New activities, such as relaxation techniques, meditation and various spiritual activities, have also found a considerable popularity in Slovenia. These activities attract mainly women and young people. The percentage of the population taking part in such activities (5.5 percent) is virtually the same as the percentage (5.6 percent) which attends some type of study course. The percentage of persons practicing these activities has more than doubled since 1991.

Table 2
HOBBIES, RECREATION AND HOLIDAYS

	Hobbies (1)	Recreation (2)	Holidays outside home town in 1993
	%	%	%
All respondents	36.7	68.8	50.1
Sex			
Male	17.6	74.3	
Female	54.6	63.6	
Age:			
18 - 24 years	33.9	81.6	67.0
25 - 34 years	40.2	81.7	65.6
35 - 44 years	36.0	77.0	54.8
45 - 54 years	29.9	59.2	45.6
55 - 75 years	40.3	51.1	27.7
Education:			
Less than 8 years	29.1	43.7	22.5
Elementary school	36.1	53.1	32.4
Vocational school	34.9	72.0	52.5
Secondary school	41.5	87.0	72.4
High sch., university	40.6	92.0	74.0
Life cycle:			
- Young adults	32.2	87.2	71.6
- Parents with children up to 5	38.4	77.2	66.6
- Parents with children from 6 to 15	34.2	79.9	63.1
- Parents with children over 15	32.7	57.2	42.1
- People (45 -65 years) with no children at home	29.8	63.3	48.9
- Older people (aged over 65)	10.0	23.6	6.3

(1) Knitting, sewing, stamp collecting and similar activities

(2) Participation in at least one of the following activities: sports, hunting, fishing or outings.

HOLIDAYS

The majority of those who stay at home during holidays occupy themselves with various kinds of non-formal work, such as building their house, renovating their flat, working in the fields and the like (Černigoj Sadar, 1987). Holidays away from home provide an opportunity for a temporary break in the daily routine which increases the possibility of new behavioural patterns and positive experiences. In 1993, only half of the respondents had such an opportunity. It was mainly the young and those with higher educational level who left home for holidays. The majority spent their holidays in Slovenia; about two-fifths (38.7 percent of those who went on holidays) spent their holidays in one of the former Yugoslav republics (the most popular are seaside resorts in Croatia) and; nearly one-fifth (18.6 percent) spent their holidays in another European country. Holidays outside the former Yugoslavia began to attract interest in the late eighties and are becoming increasingly popular among young people and the upper middle classes.

EVALUATION OF LEISURE AND MOTIVATION FOR NEW ACTIVITIES

To have time for ourselves and for those we want to stay with is not only a human right but also a condition for maintaining our psycho-physical equilibrium and for successfully coping with the other spheres of our lives. More than one in ten respondents state that they hardly have any free time and over one-third state that they do not have enough free time. These estimates indicate that the daily life of about half of the respondents is organized in such a way that they do not know how to or cannot take any time for themselves. The differences between the groups of different age (chi sq. = 131.1, sign. = 0.000), education (chi sq. = 41.5, sign. = 0.000) and life cycle (chi sq. = 183.8, sign. = 0.000) are statistically significant. The majority of parents with preschool children (70.1 percent) and school age children (68.2 percent) report that they do not have enough free time or indeed none at all. Whereas it could be said that parents with pre-school children have justifiable difficulties in both coping with their workload and upbringing of their children and thus cannot always establish an appropriate method for distributing various obligations among family members, this cannot be said of parents with school age children. Evidently, it is the combination of paid work and family life which dominates the management of their lives. Lack of time is a problem not only for young and middle-aged parents. It is also a problem of young people without family obligations. In the case of the later, it may be said they lack the ability to organize their time or that there currently exists a culture of overburdening, perhaps one without an actual basis. The other extreme, that of too much free time, is relatively rare. It is mostly a problem of the generation over 55 years of age (almost one in ten state the problem), although as much as 6 percent of young people have the same problem.

The majority (about two-thirds) is satisfied with their way of spending free time; however, the percentage of satisfied persons decreases with age. More than ten percent of young persons and twenty percent of those over 25 years are not satisfied. Up to the age of 55 the number of dissatisfied persons does not change considerably. The relationship between lack of free time and satisfaction is almost linear: those who have no or not enough free time are the most dissatisfied ($\chi^2 = 314.6$, $\text{sign.} = 0.000$). On the other hand, those who are successful in organizing their life so that they have just as much free time as they want, are also the most satisfied. The relationship between practising some type of activity which maintains psycho-physical condition and being satisfied with one's leisure time is also positive. Participation in some type of cultural or educational activity only occasionally has no effect on the evaluation of leisure.

Over half the respondents mention one or more obstacles blocking their desired way of spending leisure time. The number of obstacles increases mainly between 25 and 55 years of age. The percentage of those who mention obstacles increases with a higher level of education. Because there is a relationship between a person's perception of obstacles and his/her aspirations, the lowest percentage of those who mention obstacles is found among persons over 55 years of age. The most frequently mentioned obstacles are lack of money, lack of time and family obligations, the latter being mentioned by nearly half the women. Poor health is also named as an obstacle to the desired fulfilment of leisure time by almost one-quarter of the respondents and is an obstacle reported mainly by women. On average, women come across a greater number of constraints in their enjoyment of free time than do men. In addition to the above-mentioned obstacles, women also mention the lack of appropriate skills and knowledge as well as suitable company more frequently than men. From these results, it is clear that women are considerably more deprived in this area than are men. However, this does not restrict them to the extent that their aspiration for new activities is reduced. Aspirations for something new are strongly related to one's age and education. Only a minority of middle-aged persons continue to seek new activities, such aspirations tend to weaken after 34 years of age.

If the fact that a person is satisfied with his/her way of spending free time is taken as an indicator showing relative satisfaction of one's needs in this sphere of life, and his/her aspiration for one or more new activities is taken as the motivational potential for change, we discover various types of motivation. Almost half of the respondents (48.0 percent) between 18 and 75 years of age are satisfied and want no change, 15.2 percent demonstrate so-called growth motivation (they are satisfied but nevertheless are interested in new activities) (Maslow, 1954) and the deficiency motivation is evident in only 8.2 percent of the respondents. However, more than a quarter of respondents are very discouraged in their leisure time. The above mentioned analysis indicates that the organization of free time and its contents is a problem for over one-third of population, the most deprived group being between 25 and 54 years of age with children.

Table 3
OBSTACLES TO LEISURE AND ASPIRATIONS FOR NEW ACTIVITIES

	One or more obstacles are mentioned %	Have aspirations for a new activity: %
All respondents	52.1	28.9
Sex:		
Males	53.1	29.9
Females	51.3	28.0
Age:		
18 - 24 years	50.1	42.6
25 - 34 years	59.7	37.1
35 - 44 years	60.5	31.9
45 - 54 years	58.0	23.5
55 - 75 years	36.6	12.5
Education:		
Less than 8 years	45.5	16.3
Elementary school	49.2	18.0
Vocational school	53.4	30.2
Secondary school	56.2	40.9
High sch., university	55.8	43.1
Life cycle:		
- Young adults	46.6	42.9
- Parents with child ren up to 5	62.2	38.2
- Parents with children from 6 to 15	65.4	31.1
- Parents with child ren over 15	48.4	22.3
- People (aged 45-65), with no children at home	45.2	18.1
- Older people (aged over 65)	38.3	8.8

SOCIAL, MATERIAL AND HEALTH DETERMINANTS OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES

As already mentioned by men and women in our sample there are many social, material and psycho-physical obstacles to the desired use of leisure time. However, these are subjectively perceived obstacles. In addition to information related to these leisure indicators, we also want to find out the impact of the descriptive quality of life measures on the number of leisure activities that our respondents already participate in. The multiple regres-

sion analysis has been applied to discover which factors among the demographic, social, economic, formal and informal work and health status factors have the most significant impact⁽¹⁾ on the number (heterogeneity) of leisure activities (Table 4). Age, followed by education and average household income per capita exert the largest influence on the number of leisure activities. While the place of residence, the number of formal working hours and health status also play a significant role in determining leisure activities, it is to a lesser extent than key demographic dimensions. Age, education and financial resources provide the main path to leisure while the urban-rural dimension, the extent of work obligations and health status create additional options to leisure. The above-mentioned factors determine to a different degree women's and men's use of leisure time; they explain 44% of the variance of leisure activities in the women's group and only 24% in the men's group.

The way of spending free time is more influenced by level of education in women than in men. In women, age tends to have a greater relevance and average household income per capita tends to have less. Children also play a significant role: particularly whether they stay at home and how many children there are. In men, the presence of children at home does not determine the number of their leisure activities pursued, whereas in women children are an important factor. In women, the influence of education and of the current family situation is thus greater than in men. Women seem to adapt their free time to the ongoing social situation and secondary socialization tends to have a greater impact on their behaviour. On the other hand, men depend more on material resources, such as the household income per capita and possibilities offered by the physical environment when determining their way of spending free time than do women. The principal determinants of how one utilizes free time are the same in both men and women. However, considering the weight of principal determinants and differences of other determinants, we may say that men depend more on material resources and women more on secondary sources of socialization and on the presence of children in the family. The survey results demonstrate that the possibility of individual choice is essentially more restricted for women than for men.

The frequent practice of certain activities requires an established and selective behavioural pattern. In such cases, the explanatory value of socio-economic factors is less important. As regards the number of frequently practised activities, the eight stated indicators of socio-economic position and health status explain 15 percent of its variability in women and 12 percent of its variability in men. However, even in established behavioural patterns the number of factors and the degree of their influence are different in women and men due to the differences in the types of activities in which they are often involved.

Table 4
DETERMINANTS OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Results of regression analysis

Independent variables	Groups	B	Beta	T-test
Years spent in school	Males	0.11	0.23	7.13 ***
	Females	0.36	0.38	11.27***
	All	0.15	0.25	10.90***
Age	Males	-0.06	-0.29	- 8.1 ***
	Females	-0.06	-0.31	- 9.31***
	All	-0.06	-0.34	-13.80***
Average income per capita in household	Males	0.03	0.19	5.6 ***
	Females	0.02	0.13	4.47***
	All	0.03	0.20	8.73***
Place of residence	Males	0.49	0.12	3.7 ***
	Females	0.24	0.06	2.18
	All	0.44	0.11	5.23***
No. of hours of formal work	Males	-0.02	-0.13	-3.8 ***
	Females	-0.01	-0.05	1.78
	All	- 0.01	-0.10	-4.31***
No. of children at home	Males	-0.01	-0.01	-0.07
	Females	-0.27	-0.08	-2.70**
	All	-0.13	-0.04	-1.69
No. of hours of non-formal work	Males	0.01	0.03	0.90
	Females	-0.01	-0.04	-1.27
	All	0.01	0.02	1.11
Health status	Males	-0.12	-0.10	-2.73**
	Females	-0.10	-0.10	-3.26***
	All	-0.11	-0.10	-4.31***
Constant	Males	8.36		
	Females	6.93		
	All	8.37		
R2	Males	0.28		
	Females	0.44		
	All	0.33		
F - test	Males	35.82***		
	Females	76.71***		
	All	94.89***		

Males N= 726

Females N= 770

All N=1497

CONCLUSION

The inhabitants of Slovenia, both men and women, spend their leisure time mostly at home, at homes of their relatives or friends. They obtain information about the surrounding world mainly through the mass media and from the people they know. Socializing in public places is especially characteristic of some groups among the younger generations. The attendance of cultural events remains predominantly in the domain of the younger generation and of people with higher levels of education.

The majority of people communicate with their neighbours and also find friends among them. The greatest number of socially- isolated persons are found among the old and among less educated people. Besides watching television, the most frequently mentioned leisure activities are social contacts with friends and relatives, gardening, handiwork and hobbies as well as different kinds of recreational activities. With the exception of watching television, gardening and socializing however, these activities are not performed very often. The culture of maintaining good psycho-physical condition hardly exists in Slovenia. For almost half the respondents in our sample, we could conclude that the quality of spending their free time is inadequate or that they have no free time at all. These respondents have very limited material or social opportunities or they are unable to organize their lives in such a way that they would have enough time for themselves and for those activities which they would like to do. A significant portion of respondents fails to merge the two basic dimensions of leisure: that is the feeling of pleasure and freedom of choice.

The ways of spending leisure time are significantly related to the socio-economic position and life stage. These determinants also applies to obstacles to leisure and motivation for new activities. Among the most decisive factors are sex, age, education and average household income per capita. The higher the socio-economic position, the more diversified the way of spending free time and the more frequent the aspiration for new activities. Sex and education do not affect the evaluation of the way how free time is spent whereas the evaluations of different age groups differ significantly: namely young people and those over 54 years of age seem to be the most satisfied. Satisfaction with one's way of spending free time is influenced mainly by the estimation of the quantity of free time and by one's aspirations.

The differences among various groups in respect to age and education are the most significant as regards those leisure activities which require a greater mental effort. The more frequently leisure patterns of behaviour are undertaken, the less likely they are affected by the socio-economic position. Consequently, when a pattern of activities is firmly established the impact of factors from both the wider and narrower social environment becomes weaker.

Women's patterns of leisure activities are more influenced by socio-economic position than are those of men. The impact of individual factors also vary by gender: women depend more on the resources of secondary socialization and on the actual family situation while men depend more on

available material resources. Unlike gender-related differences in the way of spending leisure, the differences in educational and artistic creative activities, which were still evident in the mid seventies, no longer figure in the mid nineties. For the time being, the decreased differences in the educational levels of men and women, have a positive effect only on certain leisure activities. However, gender-related differences in prevailing activity patterns and in the popularity of various activities for men and women persist.

The extraordinary high explanatory value of demographic indicators and indicators of socio-economic position demonstrate that the possibilities of individual choice in spending leisure time are restricted. However, we do not have at our disposal any directly comparable figures from previous investigations into leisure time. Consequently, we cannot accurately judge whether the degree of influence of socio-economic factors on spending leisure time has increased or decreased. Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that the basic determinants of leisure activities (Černigoj Sadar, 1991; Klinar, 1989) remain unchanged and do not differ substantially from the determinants reported in other countries (Tahlin, 1986; Gershuny & Jones, 1987; Murdock, 1994).

NOTES

(1) The following independent variables have been included in the multiple regression analysis (method enter):

- Demographic indicators: age, place of residence, number of children.
- Socio-economic status: years of schooling, average household income per capita.
- Formal work: average working hours per week spent.
- Non-formal work: average hours per week spent doing household tasks and caring for children.
- Health status: the number and intensity of symptoms of illness.

Dependent variable: number of leisure activities.

(2) The following groups of leisure activities have been included in the study: hunting and fishing; gardening; going to the cinema; going to the theatre, concerts or museums; reading; watching television; going to restaurants; dancing; going on outings; travelling outside of Slovenia; visiting relatives and having relatives for a visit; visiting friends and acquaintances, having friends and acquaintances for a visit; playing a musical instrument, writing poems or prose, painting; participating in study courses or study groups; sports; walks; hobbies (knitting, sewing, woodwork, stamp-collecting and the like; meditation or other spiritual activities, relaxation techniques; other activities.

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