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Urban Youth Leisure, Time Use Research and Quality of Life: The Comparison of Leisure Preferences of University Students in Athens and Larissa, Greece

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Abstract

The role of youth leisure in cities is of special interest and university students (as young and generally more active individuals) occupy an important place. The time that students have available, excluding the usual factors that generally influence leisure (age, sex, work, social class, spatio-temporal constraints), is mainly affected by the subject they choose to study (and by their relevant obligations) and by their perception of the city in which their educational institution is located. There are few relevant international studies and even fewer Greek studies in this field. The aim of this paper is to compare the leisure preferences of students in the capital of Greece (Athens) and those of students in a medium-sized city in central Greece (Larissa), as well as the impact that leisure has on their quality of life.

A questionnaire-based survey was used for the data collection. A sample of 440 students in both cities (400 of them in Athens and 40 in Larissa) participated in the research. Important inequalities exist in the most popular activities, according to the place of study. One major contradiction (which can be pinpointed to the time-space interrelationship) is that, although there is a greater plurality of resources in the

capital, there are also more constraints there, especially as far as transportation time is concerned.

1. Introduction: Theoretical framework and research

Leisure can be defined, negatively, as the spare time remaining after the time taken up by primary activities (e.g. sleep, food, bathing) and secondary activities (e.g. preparation to go out), transportation and employment (Deffner, 2002: 5). However, there can be a more positive approach: the definition of leisure through specific types of activities, the target of which is pleasure, regaining power, recreation, sociability, escape from every day life and physical or mental recreation (Glyptis, 1993: 3-4). But the negative definition, by its very nature, raises a number of problems. That's why groups of people such as the unemployed and the retired have plenty of time to spare. But is all their time real leisure time?

Furthermore, the leisure of young people is of particular interest. Among this group, students hold an important place. Their available time, excluding the usual factors that generally affect leisure, is also affected by the subject they choose to study (including the obligations involved in that subject) and by the options they have according to the city in which they are studying.

The role of learning and leisure in the process of the development of university students has been extensively studied. Many streams of thought may be discerned in the literature on this topic. Mainly, this literature focuses on the role of learning. However, there are some papers on leisure alone. These papers have aimed their study at identifying the role of leisure in the carrier stage of the students (Weiner and Hunt, 1983; Munson and Widmer, 1997; Munson and Savickas, 1998). There is also some examination of the participation of students in leisure, and its relationship to their mental, physical and social health (Caldwell *et al.*, 1992). Recently, there was an attempt at establishing a framework for understanding the role of leisure in the lives of Hong Kong's university students (Sivan, 2003).

Despite the fact that in international literature there are many studies dealing with the leisure of young people - especially university students, a very small amount is known about the reality in Greece. From the previous studies, the one by the National Center of Social Research is the most familiar. It took place in 1983 and its results were published in 1985 (Gardiki *et al.*, 1987/1999 and 1988/1999). This

research concerned the findings from the activities, and interests of young people, the isolation of factors that affect the choice of those activities, and also the correlation that possibly forms a way of life. The research consisted of a survey of 450 areas in Greece and covered two age groups that mostly focused on the 15-19 year olds and the 20-24 year olds. With a sample of 3,080 people, this is considered to be the most extensive piece of research of youth leisure.

The analysis of the research data presents the patterns of the participation of young people in recreational activities. It concludes that the majority of these people most often visited confectioners, coffee shops and fast food outlets as compared to other entertainment places. With regard to the participation of young people in sports activities, the results show that the most popular hobby for boys is sports related to other personal and joint activities they deal with. On the other hand, girls dedicate most of their time to studying, activities related to their studies and their artistic activities. More specifically, as the urbanisation of the area is increasing, so the percents of those that like football increases, whereas with the other sports the opposite occurs. For girls in particular, greater participation is seen in gymnastics. There is also a differentiation between the frequency of participation in sports *vis a vis* gender. The participation of boys is higher than that of girls.

An important subsequent work (Kollias, 2002) refers to research into problems related to the quality of life that students of peripheral universities face. The research was completed by the filling in of a structural questionnaire by the students of 8 peripheral universities, who were divided up in 18 cities. 2,049 students participated in the research, representing 5% of the student population at the place of research. According to this research, 60% of those who answered the questionnaire were women; 44.2% of the total was aged 18-20. The majority (96.4%) were unmarried, and (90.2%) didn't come from the city they were studying in. The majority used transportation facilities (62.1%) for their journey to the university, while 10.6% used a car or a motorcycle and 27.1% either went on foot or by bicycle. 60.7 stated that they went out 1-3 times a week, and 21.9% said they went out 4-7 times. For 8.8%, a restaurant, and for 12.1%, the cinema was their first option. Lastly, it is postulated that time management is a very important factor which affects the quality of life for students (Kollias, 2002: 439).

2. Methods

The study sites were Athens (the capital of Greece) and the city of Larissa. In population terms, Larissa (its urban agglomeration) is the fourth biggest city in Greece. It is located in central Greece, between Athens and Thessaloniki. Its population has exhibited a steady upward trend and, on the basis of the 2001 census, it numbers over 125,000 citizens. It is located about one hour away from the sea and it is well known for its high incidence of pedestrian precincts in the inner city.

The research plan follows the methodology of Veal (1992/2006) and Roberts (1999/2006). Data were collected during the last week of October and the second week of December 2002. The questionnaire consisted of 5 variables of social interest (gender, age, education level, profession and dwelling area), 4 groups of variables concerning places of leisure activity (in total, 59 variables), 9 variables that determine the distribution of leisure time during an average week, and 7 variables, which also included leisure time per week, minimum and maximum time, distance either from home to work or from home to leisure activities. The transport facilities that citizens used in each case were also recorded.

A group of researchers visited randomly selected individuals at the 11 selected universities (9 in Athens and 2 in Larissa). An average interview lasted about twenty minutes. The selection was conducted through students who attended a class during the survey. All students agreed to participate in the research, so the reliable sample effectively consisted of the total of the questionnaires (n=440) - 40 of them in Larissa and 400 in Athens.

The sample was not stratified according to gender and spatial distribution. That was a problem of access to the records of universities. Respondents were asked to underline activities in which they often participated during both last year and last week.

Data analysis consisted of three stages. Firstly, we determined the amount of leisure time and the significant differences by gender, age and dwelling area in both cities. For this purpose, we use descriptive statistics and statistical tests (t-test, F-test). Secondly, we examined the trends of student participation in leisure activities according to the questionnaire. The aim was to designate empirically, through

participation in leisure activities, the most popular activities among students in the two cities. Finally, we also described the pattern followed by students in their leisure time. All statistical analysis performed in this paper was conducted using SPSS 10.11 for Windows.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic data

The average age of respondents was 20.99 years old. Over 45% of the sample belonged to the group between 18-20 years old, while 21% were over 22 years of age. The proportion of employed students was less than 1 per 3 in the sample (27.5%). Females (51%) and males (49%) were of almost equal percentage in the sample. The students who were inner city inhabitants formed the minority of our sample (29.7%), whereas those who lived in the suburbs formed the majority (70.3%).

3.2. Leisure time

The average mean leisure time derived from the sample is 39.62 hours per week. Leisure was not uniformly distributed for all students. Using the two samples t-test analysis for variables area and gender, we found that there is no significant statistical difference in the mean leisure between the students. An expected significant statistical difference was detected between students that are employed and those who are not. In addition, the mean leisure time of students in Athens is significantly greater than students in Larissa. That can be explained by the fact that most of the students in Larissa attend obligatory courses in the Technical Education Institute.

TABLE 1
Two samples t-test results for mean leisure time according to city, area, work and gender

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	Significance
CITY						
Larissa	40	31.97	9.68	1.53	4.39	0.000
Athens	400	40.39	23.08	1.15		
AREA						
Inner	131	39.63	22.05	1.93	0.01	1.000
Suburbs	309	39.62	22.47	1.28		
WORK						
Yes	121	29.06	15.55	1.41	-7.59	0.000
No	319	43.63	23,19	1.30		
GENDER						
Male	217	41.64	25.42	1.73	1.87	0.062
Female	223	37.66	18.68	1.25		

For the other variables, like the year of study and the transportation means used by students either for university or their leisure activities, where we have more than two subcategories, we applied one way ANOVA. The results showed that there is significant statistical difference according to the year of study, but we are in the limits of statistical significance for the second variable (Table 2). The role of the means of transportation must be more deeply examined, especially in the case of transportation for leisure activities.

TABLE 2
One way ANOVA results for mean leisure time according to year of study, transportation to university and transportation for leisure activities

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SE	F-value	Significance
YEAR OF STUDY						
1 st	100	41.68	22.95	2.30	2.867	0.015
2 nd	99	43.62	23.82	2.39		
3 rd	115	39.01	23.49	2.19		
4 th	109	36.79	19.06	1.83		
5 th	11	21.45	8.87	2.67		
6 th	6	32.83	14.13	5.87		
TRANSPORTATION FOR UNIVERSITY						
By car	100	39.68	23.36	2.34	1.427	0.224
By public means	230	41.56	24.03	1.58		
By moto	53	35.30	17.54	2.41		
By bike	5	40.40	23.36	10.45		
On foot	52	35.29	14.95	2.07		
TRANSPORTATION FOR LEISURE ACTIVITIES						
By car	197	39.69	23.12	1.65	2,350	0,054
By public means	141	41.80	23.59	1.99		
By moto	49	30.90	16.36	2.34		
By bike	4	42.50	21.55	10.77		
On foot	49	41.61	18.88	2.70		

TABLE 3
Mean time (in minutes) for transportation for studies and for leisure activities

TRANSPORTATION	IN LARISSA				IN ATHENS			
	For Studies		For Leisure Activities		For Studies		For Leisure Activities	
	N	Mean time	N	Mean time	N	Mean time	N	Mean time
By car	8	19.17	10	17.25	91	42.69	187	32.88
By public means	8	15.19	8	17.19	217	46.80	133	32.27
By moto	7	14.38	7	18.93	45	48.35	42	32.22
By bike	3	13.33	3	24.17	2	55.00	1	15.00
On foot	12	16.07	12	16.46	45	15.85	37	20.89
TOTAL	40	15.94	40	17.81	400	42.60	400	31.45

As can be seen from the data in Table 3, transportation for studies in Athens takes about 3 times as long as in Larissa. With particular regard to public transport in Athens, a student needs, on average, 42 minutes - almost 3 times as long as a student in Larissa (15 minutes). The only means that shows similarity in both cities is transportation on foot, which is probably used by students who live close to the universities. On the other hand, there is a convergence in the average time that students need in both cities to access leisure facilities.

3.3. Leisure activities participation

The most popular activities in participation terms were the home-based ones: watching TV and videos or DVD's, listening to the radio, computer gaming and relaxing were the leading activities in both cities (Table 4). This fact was observed both in Athens and in Larissa. Other popular activities were do-it-yourself construction in Larissa and telephone calls of longer than 15 minutes in Athens.

TABLE 4
Participation in leisure activities according to city and gender

ACTIVITIES	% PARTICIPATION IN		% PARTICIPATION IN		% PARTICIPATION IN	
	LARISSA	ATHENS	LARISSA	FEMALE	ATHENS	FEMALE
TV & video	32.50	74.50	20.00	45.00	69.54	79.31
Radio listening	75.00	72.75	70.00	80.00	66.50	78.82
Computer games	22.50	30.50	35.00	10.00	41.62	19.70
Gymnastics	12.50	25.75	20.00	5.00	27.41	24.14
Reading	10.00	25.25	10.00	10.00	19.80	30.54
Talking on phone	10.00	45.50	5.00	15.00	36.55	54.19
Relaxing	30.00	44.50	20.00	40.00	42.13	46.80
DVD	22.50	55.00	30.00	15.00	57.36	52.71
Do it Yourself	22.50	3.75	20.00	25.00	4.06	3.45
Board games	17.50	14.00	15.00	20.00	11.68	16.26
Gymnastic studio	35.00	39.25	35.00	35.00	40.10	38.42
Playing minifootball	27.50	20.25	55.00	0.00	39.59	1.48
Biking	7.50	5.50	10.00	5.00	6.09	4.93
Dancing	10.00	13.50	0.00	20.00	6.60	20.20
Playing basketball	32.50	13.50	65.00	0.00	22.34	4.93
Visiting friends	55.00	73.75	45.00	65.00	69.04	78.33
Dinner at a restaurant	5.00	35.00	0.00	10.00	30.46	39.41
Dinner at a tavern	25.00	44.25	20.00	30.00	44.67	43.84
Drinking in bar	17.50	61.00	20.00	15.00	62.94	59.11
Drinking in club	27.50	51.50	30.00	25.00	53.81	49.21
Clubbing	15.00	25.75	10.00	20.00	21.83	29.56
Cinema	30.00	52.50	25.00	35.00	43.65	61.08
Attending concert	2.50	23.25	5.00	0.00	16.24	30.05
Theatre	2.50	15.75	5.00	0.00	8.63	22.66
Visiting a library	5.00	4.75	5.00	5.00	3.05	6.40
Coffee in parks	40.00	41.75	55.00	25.00	40.61	42.86
Attending sports	22.50	21.00	45.00	0.00	29.95	12.32
Driving	10.00	33.50	10.00	10.00	38.58	28.57
Shopping	27.50	39.75	10.00	45.00	19.29	59.61
Volunteer service	7.50	5.25	5.00	10.00	2.54	7.88
Walking	42.50	39.75	10.00	75.00	33.50	45.81
Dog	10.00	9.00	0.00	20.00	8.12	9.85
Gymnastic	5.00	13.50	0.00	10.00	9.64	17.24
Jogging	20.00	18.25	35.00	5.00	19.29	17.24
Mountain	12.50	6.75	25.00	0.00	9.14	4.43
Returning home	40.00	16.50	25.00	55.00	14.21	18.72
Car driving excursions	20.00	31.50	20.00	20.00	31.47	31.53

Interesting results may be gleaned from Table 4, where the participation in leisure activities is registered. As is shown, students in Athens participate at a greater rate in home-based activities than students in Larissa do. For example, watching TV and video is twice as popular in Athens than in Larissa. Another observation, maybe due to the existence or not of the appropriate facilities in each city, is that students in Athens prefer to attend concerts (23.25%) and theatre performances (15.75%), while

the corresponding participation in Larissa is only 2.5% in both cases. On the other hand, playing basketball is a preferred activity amongst students in Larissa (32.50%), while in Athens only 13.50% of the students choose that activity.

The findings that arise from the data examination by gender are also important. From gender analysis by city we observed that male students in Larissa were in the majority (65%) for this activity, as compared to gymnastics in a studio (35%), where they were the minority.

There is a statistically significant difference in many activities (Table 4). Computer gaming in both cities seems to be an activity for males, while telephone calls of longer than 15 minutes are trendy amongst females. It can be claimed that the participation in leisure activities in the sample is generally independent of gender. There are also some changeless preferences by gender, like shopping for women and sports attendance for men.

The spatial pattern (Table 5) in leisure activity participation showed that there are no significant statistical differences in the case of Athens. The same pattern does not seem to exist in Larissa. In the case of Larissa, students in the inner city preferred do-it-yourself activities, visiting friends, car driving excursions and home-based computer games. In the case of the suburbs, when students live in Larissa, they preferred playing basketball and not going to the cinema. For Athens, they preferred jogging, shopping, driving, drinking coffee in parks and dining at a restaurant.

Independently from the city or the area of the city in which students lived, all of them enjoyed watching TV, listening to the radio and drinking coffee in the parks. Whether or not the student works during their studies is another factor that may influence the selection of leisure activities. The analysis according to this factor (Table 5) shows interesting results in relation to the behaviour of students in both cities. All students who are working preferred to go to gymnasiums and clubbing. On the other hand, students who only attended their studies and didn't also work liked shopping and walking.

There is much diversity between students who were working in the two cities. In Larissa for example, they also preferred playing computer games or and dining in tavernas, while in Athens talking on the phone and driving for recreation were more preferred. In the other group (not working), in Larissa they preferred going to the cinema, jogging and traveling home during weekends, while in Athens car driving excursions was the preferred activity.

TABLE 5
Participation in leisure activities according to area and work

ACTIVITIES	% PARTICIPATION IN LARISSA		% PARTICIPATION IN ATHENS		% PARTICIPATION IN LARISSA FOR		% PARTICIPATION IN ATHENS	
	inner	suburbs	inner	suburbs	employed	Not employed	employed	Not employed
TV & Video	35.00	30.00	73.87	74.74	20.00	36.67	70.27	76.12
Radio listening	70.00	80.00	68.47	74.39	70.00	76.67	65.77	75.43
Computer games	15.00	30.00	31.53	30.10	40.00	16.67	28.83	31.14
Gymnastics	15.00	10.00	22.52	26.99	10.00	13.33	29.73	24.22
Reading	15.00	5.00	26.13	24.91	10.00	10.00	27.03	24.57
Talking on phone	15.00	5.00	46.85	44.98	0.00	13.33	43.24	46.37
Relaxing	30.00	30.00	41.44	45.67	70.00	16.67	42.34	45.33
DVD	20.00	25.00	50.45	56.75	30.00	20.00	49.55	57.09
Do It Yourself	40.00	5.00	2.70	4.15	0.00	30.00	2.70	4.15
Board games	15.00	20.00	15.32	13.49	20.00	16.67	11.71	14.88
Gymnasium	35.00	35.00	38.74	39.45	50.00	30.00	45.05	37.02
Playing mini football	30.00	25.00	18.02	21.11	20.00	30.00	21.62	19.72
Biking	15.00	0.00	5.41	5.54	0.00	10.00	5.41	5.54
Dancing	15.00	5.00	12.61	13.84	10.00	10.00	18.92	11.42
Playing basketball	25.00	40.00	13.51	13.49	30.00	33.33	13.51	13.49
Visiting friends	70.00	40.00	74.77	73.36	20.00	66.67	72.07	74.39
Dinner at a restaurant	0.00	10.00	25.23	38.75	20.00	0.00	33.33	35.64
Dinner at a taverna	25.00	25.00	40.54	45.67	50.00	16.67	43.24	44.64
Drinking in bar	5.00	30.00	61.26	60.90	10.00	20.00	68.47	58.13
Drinking in club	20.00	35.00	50.45	51.90	30.00	26.67	55.86	49.83
Clubbing	15.00	15.00	28.83	24.57	30.00	10.00	28.83	24.57
Cinema	35.00	25.00	51.35	52.94	20.00	33.33	49.55	53.63
Attending concert	5.00	0.00	25.23	22.49	0.00	3.33	25.23	22.49
Theatre	0.00	5.00	14.41	16.26	0.00	3.33	18.92	14.53
Visiting a library	0.00	10.00	5.41	4.50	0.00	6.67	5.41	4.50
Coffee in parks	40.00	40.00	30.63	46.02	50.00	36.67	41.44	41.87
Attending sports	30.00	15.00	20.72	21.11	20.00	23.33	23.42	20.07
Driving	15.00	5.00	21.62	38.06	0.00	13.33	32.43	33.91
Shopping	50.00	5.00	36.94	40.83	20.00	30.00	32.43	42.56
Volunteer service	5.00	10.00	5.41	5.19	0.00	10.00	9.00	3.80
Walking	45.00	40.00	36.04	41.18	30.00	46.67	33.33	42.21
Dog	0.00	20.00	2.70	11.42	20.00	6.67	9.91	8.65
Gymnastics	10.00	0.00	13.51	13.49	0.00	6.67	16.22	12.46
Jogging	20.00	20.00	11.71	20.76	0.00	26.67	20.72	17.30
Mountain	10.00	15.00	4.50	7.61	20.00	10.00	4.50	7.60
Returning home	40.00	40.00	11.71	18.34	30.00	43.33	9.01	19.38
Car driving excursions	30.00	10.00	31.53	31.49	20.00	20.00	29.73	32.18

Overall, the analysis shows that convergence and divergence exist both between the cities and within them. The combined reading of preferred leisure activities together with factors such as gender, area of inhabitation, work and traffic conditions offer many topics for discussion.

4. Conclusion

This paper focused on the similarities and differences observed in the leisure patterns of university students in a metropolis and a peripheral urban agglomeration of Greece. One major contradiction is that, although there is a greater plurality of resources in the metropolis, there are also more constraints, especially as far as transportation time is concerned.

The great range of choices for leisure activities that the capital of Greece offers is reflected in the questionnaire results, which cover almost all of the social activities, in most cases on the part of the students of Athens, depending on gender or area of residence.

The students of Athens present a highly intense pattern of participation in activities at home, whilst they seem to excel in social activities. On the other hand, the students of Larissa are more inclined towards sports and entertainment activities, without being less inclined towards the previous categories. The fact that distances are greater in Athens as compared to Larissa could account for the high levels of participation in activities at home. Therefore, it can be assumed that university students will select activities for their leisure that do not involve a lot of transportation time, particularly as they need about an hour to get to their university.

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