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**UNIVERSITY YOUTH' LEISURE PRACTICES**

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***Abstract***

The paper presents the results of a pilot empirical sociological research. The leisure activities of the university youth in a small Arctic mono-industry Apatity town was studied. Leisure is considered as an important youth' resource of self-development, self-realization and relaxation. Empirical data were collected by the online survey method in the period from October 1 to November 20, 2018. The paper describes the types of students' leisure activities and the role of Internet technologies, town's leisure infrastructure in the organization of students' leisure. Results of the research demonstrated that passive and non-institutionalized leisure forms are dominated among university youth. They use computer technology and the Internet in their leisure practices as consumers, not creators. Opportunities for leisure infrastructure in town areas, as a rule, do not meet the needs of youth. Students do not know about some of existing leisure activities in the town. It have been found a statistically significant relationship between students' assessments of the town's leisure infrastructure and student's feelings about the town, their migration intentions. The conclusion contains recommendations on development of leisure activities for university students and on creating a unified information environment for the organized collective leisure in the town.

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**Keywords:** Leisure, free time, university youth, students.



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## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies (primarily the Internet) in modern society leads to structural changes in its various fields, including social. Due to the Internet people have access to various information and communication resources. Information media technologies, such as personal computers and smartphones with Internet, have become one of the most important agents of socializations. This technologies influence on people' social practices and lifestyle at all. Nowadays, researchers describe modern society using the term "information society". Leisure plays an important role in the information society. "In the information society, not only production will change, but the whole way of life, the system of values, the importance of cultural leisure in relation to material values will increase" (Luneva & Fomichev, 2014, p. 36). The study of leisure is interdisciplinary. Stebbins (2018) have described the ways that leisure is defined in philosophy and those social sciences that have a theoretic interest in free time (economics, political science, psychology, sociology, geography and history). He showed that the common definition of leisure as not work is not enough. This definition requires clarification. In this sociological study leisure is defined as part of free time that is associated with the satisfaction of spiritual, physical and emotional needs, types of leisure activities serve both leisure and personal development, meeting the needs for entertainment and communication (Voronin, 2009). It is also important to note that "one of the defining elements of leisure is that it is characterized by free choice and self-determination. That is, in leisure, adolescents make choices to engage in activities they enjoy and give them meaning" (Caldwell & Witt, 2011, p. 18). The leisure time preferably needs to be managed. In this case leisure will have a positive impact on other important aspects of student youth' lives: academic success and quality of life at all. The results of scientific research have shown that different social groups manage their free time differently (Serdar, Demirel, Demirel, & Çakır, 2017; Kharadze, Gulua, & Dugladze, 2017; Opic & Duranovic, 2014).

Today, researchers are studying various aspects of youth leisure. Among them: regional aspects (youth leisure in various regions), the impact of information technology on leisure practices, youth leisure culture, the role of state youth policy in the sphere of leisure, leisure of youth in provinces and others. A number of researchers have studied the innovative forms of student's youth leisure. Sharkovskaya (2015) have defined the following functions of youth leisure: adaptive, cognitive, informational, recreational, cultural and creative. Researchers also emphasized the important function of innovative forms of leisure. Innovative forms of leisure "not only reflect the innovative processes taking place in society, but becomes a" conductor " of innovations" (Kulichkina & Melnikova, 2014, p. 136). This paper presents the results of sociological research of the modern university youth leisure in a small Arctic mono-industry town (Apatity, Murmansk region). Students (university youth) are a social group that has a lot of free time compared to working people. It is also a period of secondary socialization associated with self-determination. "The family's controlling and regulating function is weakened, there are no professional duties and burdensome worries about their family. Thus, youth leisure is a peculiar form of realization of such freedom and a field for self-realization" (Babaeva, Ganshina, & Muravyova, 2017, p. 18).

## **2. Problem Statement**

University students is a social group with significant free time resources. Young people can spend this time in order to satisfy their needs and interests, self-realization and development, leisure. However, the leisure infrastructure of a small town is significantly limited in comparison with large cities. The information and communication Internet capabilities can partially offset these limitations. But leisure practices through Internet technologies carry the risks of lowering the quality of life of young people. Among these risks, one can note: Internet addiction, passive consumption of information, the indirect and disruptive nature of social communications, etc. According to the survey results of Public Opinion Foundation (Anonymous, 2016) young people use the Internet mainly for spending time on social networks, to searching for information and to reading news. The positive and negative impact of social networks on youth is described in the works of such authors as Yakoba (2011), Avdeeva (2016), Temnova and Mednikova (2017), Grimley (2012), McGillivray, McPherson, Jones, and McCandlish (2015), Morimoto and Friedland, (2011).

## **3. Research Questions**

In the organization of student leisure, an important role belongs to both subjective and objective factors. On the one hand, students' leisure practices are influenced by student values and interests. On the other hand, leisure activities are limited by the objective opportunities that the environment provides. What kind of technologies and social institutions play an important role in the organization of leisure activities of the university students? It is necessary to understand the conditions of student youth' socialization through leisure activity in which the system of values and life orientations of youth is formed and fixed.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to consider the forms of leisure activities of student youth in a small town.

- How is student leisure activities organized?
- What character are they: active or passive, organized or spontaneous?
- To what extent do the objectively existing leisure infrastructure of the town (recreational areas, socio-cultural, sports, entertainment organizations) satisfy the needs of students?
- What are the functions of Internet technology in the leisure activities of the university youth?

## **5. Research Methods**

The theoretical and methodological basis of this study was the structural and functional paradigm in sociological science. The specialized sociological theories and concepts of free time and leisure were used. Within these sociological theories the structure, types and functions of student youth' leisure practices were studied from the sociological point of view.

The empirical basis of the study are the results of our own empirical research. In the period from October 1 to November 20, 2018, a pilot sociological research was conducted. The purpose of the research was to study the students leisure practices in the Apatity town, Murmansk region. The object of the study was full-time university youth of the Apatity branch of the Murmansk Arctic State University. The sample is represented by 103 full-time students of various departments (business informatics, biology geology, state and municipal administration, mining, information systems and technologies, social work, sociology, applied physics, tourism, economy, electric power and electrical engineering, nuclear power and thermophysics) and levels of education (bachelor's, specialist's and master's degrees). Among them, 43% are male and 57% are female. The average age of the respondents is 20 years. The subject of the study was the student youth' assessments in the leisure area of Apatity town. Data collection method is a questionnaire online survey. The questionnaire included both open and closed forms of questions. The main data processing and analysis procedures were computer-assisted statistical data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics Base 22.0 software as well as methods of description and typology.

## 6. Findings

One of the empirical indicators used in the study of students leisure activity was presented in the form of an open question "How do you usually spend your free time?". It should be noted the variety of leisure activities of students. As a rule, respondents gave several answers. The distribution of answers to the open-form question "How do you usually spend your free time?" showed that the most preferred free time activities are: watching videos, movies and TV shows (83 %), listening to music (75 %), spending time online (74 %). This results demonstrated that most students are characterized by passive forms of leisure within their own home. Students leisure is mainly related to information technology and the Internet and organized primarily by "gadgets". Also a third of respondents play computer games (31 %). Only half of the surveyed students have such active forms of leisure as: walking (55 %), "I go to visit / receive guests" (48 %), doing sports (48 %). Student leisure is more of an entertaining nature with a tendency to consume. In addition to all of the above they also go to bars, cafes, night clubs, entertainment centres (44 %), go to the cinema (40 %), watch TV (19 %). Among developing leisure there are such activities as: reading (52 %), additional education, self-education (28 %), going in for tourism (24 %), handicrafting (16 %) and social activities (16). It is noteworthy that according to the results of the study, 41% of students noted lack of free time among their current problems. Perhaps in this regard, they noted that in their spare time they do domestic chores (67 %) and go to the job (24 %). One in five of the students indicated problems with organizing and spending leisure time (21%). So we can conclude that leisure practices of university youth are represented in non-institutionalized forms.

Then we have studied where students like to spend their free time within the town Apatity and their subjective estimates of institutionalized leisure infrastructure of the town. Student opinions about interesting leisure places in Apatity are divided. Only half of the students have favourite places in Apatity. Among them, the most popular are: cafes (29 %), the cinema (17 %), the shopping centre (17%), park (17%). For 17% of students favourite places are outside the town in nature (walking in the woods and near the lake).

We have compiled two rankings of institutionalized leisure activities in the town. The first of them is the rating of knowledge about leisure organizations and events in the town. And the second rating is the frequency of visits to these organizations and events. We have calculated the index of student involvement in institutionalized forms of leisure in the town based on these two ratings. This index is calculated as the percentage of the number of visitors to the number of people who know about them. The knowledge rating showed that none of the students are aware of all the leisure organizations and activities in the city. But it is necessary to pay attention to such institutionalized forms of leisure in the city as the cinema "Polar" and sports infrastructure. The cinema "Polar" is the most recognizable by students (almost all students know about it - 91%), as well as sports stadiums and playgrounds (71 %). It is worth noting the high degree of involvement of students in these town leisure institutions. Among those students who know about the cinema "Polar" 70 % visit it often. And among those who know about sports grounds and events 90 % visit them often. Only nearly half of the students know about such institutionalized forms of leisure in town as libraries (59 %) and town exhibitions and holidays (50 %). And about a third of the students know about Palace of Culture (39 %), museums (38 %), hobby groups (30 %), Youth Social Centre (28 %). Thus, we can conclude about the low awareness of students about the institutionalized forms of leisure in the town Apatity. The rating of the visit frequency demonstrated a high degree of involvement in such institutionalized forms of leisure as: town exhibitions and holidays, Youth Social Centre. Most of those who know about them visit them often (90 % and 80 % respectively). The medium degree of involvement at the Palace of Culture (50 %).

And the low degree of involvement in such forms of leisure as: museums (30 %), hobby groups (30 %). The main reason for the medium and low degree of student involvement in such organized forms of town leisure activities as museums, libraries, and the Palace of Culture were called "I'm not interested". The Youth Social Centre has the potential to involve young people in their activities. Among those who know about it, the majority are involved in its activities. However, only about 30% of students know that such a centre exists in town. The same can be noted about town exhibitions, holidays.

The students opinions about the number of leisure activities and facilities in Apatity were divided. Almost half of the respondents (46 %) said that there were enough of them, and the other half (54 %) said that the town lacked parks and places for walking and recreation, as well as nightclubs, cafes, bars and other places of rest for adults, not for children. It was noted the poor quality of infrastructure, lack of modern approach and innovations in the organization, as well as in the design of town objects (they are outdated, look bad, worn out). Thus, it can be concluded that the leisure infrastructure of the town to a small extent meets the needs of students. The problem of lack of information about institutionalized leisure activities was also identified.

Because of low attractiveness of town leisure infrastructure the non-institutionalized forms of collective leisure forms are predominate among university youth. As an indicator of the study of student collective non-institutionalized leisure forms was used the open form of question "Where do you usually spend free time with friends in the town Apatity?". A third part of students did not answer this question or said that they had no friends. It is also important to note that a quarter of students noted that they feel lonely (24 %). Most students spend free time with friends in town cafes (26%) and bars (17%), at home or in a student dormitory (26%).

We found no statistically significant relationship between socio-demographic characteristics, direction and level of education of the students and their leisure activities, satisfaction with leisure infrastructure of the town. As well as the material status of students. But we found a statistically significant relationship between students' assessments of the town's leisure infrastructure and feelings about the town. Students' assessments regarding the availability of interesting activities in the town that contribute to the development and self-realization of students were divided (38 % of students think that there are no such opportunities in the city, 39 % think that they are. And 20 % found it difficult to answer this question unequivocally). Among those who answered that there are no interesting activities for them in the Apatity town, the majority (47 %) replied that they do not feel any feelings towards the town. Conversely, among those who responded that the Apatity town has interesting activities for them, the majority (66 %) replied that they are generally happy to live in this town (Pearson's Chi square 25, degrees of freedom 10, significance level 0.006). Also among those who answered that there are no interesting activities for them in the Apatity town, the majority (57,5 %) replied that they are feeling anxiety, uncertainty about the future and a sense of hopelessness when they thinking about the town's future. Conversely, among those who responded that the Apatity town has interesting activities for them, the majority (60 %) replied that they are feeling calmness, confidence in the future, optimism and hope for the best about the town's future. (Pearson's Chi square 28, degrees of freedom 8, significance level 0.000). There was also a statistically significant relationship between student assessments of the town's leisure infrastructure and student migration intentions. Among those who answered that there are no interesting activities for them in the Apatity town, all students (100 %) responded that they plan to leave Apatity town (mainly for another region of Russia or for another country). Among those who responded that the Apatity town has interesting activities for them, the third part of them (31 %) plan to stay in Apatity (Pearson's Chi square 13, degrees of freedom 6, significance level 0.043). However, it is alarming that even among those who are satisfied with the leisure environment of the town, many young people want to go to another region of Russia (38 %) and even to another country (17%). We have already described the negative dynamics of the migration situation in the Murmansk region in another article (Popova & Vicentiy, 2019). In this case, we found another one confirmation. However, on the basis of the relationship described above, we can assume that the development of leisure infrastructure of the city can restrain the migration decline of young people from the Murmansk region.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that unorganized free time of students predominates in their leisure activities. Leisure infrastructure of the town is used little. Leisure has a spontaneous, entertaining nature, it is realized mainly in virtual reality with a tendency to consume, rather than development and creation, outside the system of social connections and social interactions. The university youth mostly spend free time at home. Leisure infrastructure of the town does not meet the needs of students, does not provide opportunities for the realization of students interests and has low rates of youth involvement. There is an even greater lack of opportunities in the organization of leisure activities when it comes to forms of collective pastime of students. All this creates risks for loneliness, lack of proper rest and deviant forms of youth behaviour. We recommend to develop organized leisure activities for students in the town in

accordance with their interests. First of all, leisure activities for young people over school age. It is necessary to develop youth and sports organizations and events as the most interesting for students (both in the University and in the town). Also, due to the low awareness of students about events and leisure opportunities in the town, it is necessary to create an information site about all events and leisure institutions of the town. On the informational site it is necessary to list all kinds of organized leisure: creative, cognitive, sports and fitness, indicating the age of the participants and cost. It is also necessary updating of such information. These recommendations are important not only for improving the quality of leisure of students, the development of students' skills, their self-determination and self-realization. They will also help prevent the young people (including students) from leaving the North.

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