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FREE TIME AND ITS ALTERATION TENDENCIES

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ABSTRACT

For the last three decades, due to social changes which have been taking place globally, free time has become a very important issue. Political, ecological and economic reasons have affected people's personal and professional life and thus consequently their free time activities. Two basic theories of free time have been developed. The complimentary theory states that free time is a supplementary value in a worker's life. The contradictory theory, on the other hand, considers free time to be a self-determining time in contrast to the working hours. Furthermore, there are many determining factors affecting a person's behavior and preferences in his or her free time activities, such as increased life expectancy, education and financial situation, age, etc. Scientific development and technological achievements can influence a person's choices as well. All these factors can be of great help to researchers who wish to define variations in the area of free time.

INTRODUCTION

For the last three decades major social change have taken place worldwide. Political, ecological and economic factors have tremendously affected people's business environment, lifestyles and free time.

From a historical point of view, free time, as we experience it today, is a social phenomenon formed during the Industrial Revolution. Work became then a means to find a meaning in one's life, and the concept of leisure became a necessary complement. The limited and flexible working hours on a weekly basis gave people possibilities to spend their free time during working days and Saturdays. The decrease of the working period in a people's life span, for example, due to the early retirement, led to the extension of their free time, even in the elderly population [11].

Nowadays, people put a great emphasis on the relationship between their work and their free time. Along with increasing prosperity, leisure time becomes highly appreciated. It has also become an important element of the quality of people's life [1].

DEFINING FREE TIME

In modern literature there is no agreement as far as the definition of the free time is concerned. Agricola [1] defines free time according to the following theoretical concepts:

- a. Free time as a work substitute;
- b. Free time as an ideological and operational part of the every day life, which is very dynamic and closely connected with the working environment;

- c. Free time as a separate part of the social-cultural area of the post-industrial society;
- d. Free time as an important component of life and as a time that is over-appreciated and subject to analysis [1].

Following the theoretical approaches to free time, different conclusions can be provided. None of the theories above, however, provides a complete explanation of the term. This is because the term “free time” is related to the idea of work, since it is the only description of the term as “non-work” [9].

Freyer [4], too, confirms that people consider “free time” the opposite of work. This negative definition is mostly appropriate for the description of free time of fully employed people. For this large category of people, free time is actually the opposite of work. Therefore, elements related to the working people’s free time are usually explained as a general extension of their free time. This close relation between the idea of free time and fully employed people provides useful conclusions. Problems appear when the examination refers to such social groups as housewives, artists or free-lancers and independent workers, because these groups of people have flexible working hours. Students, training personnel, the unemployed and pensioners do not work on a regular, fixed-time basis. By definition these groups do not comply with this free time model.

Justified then is the opinion of Freyer [4], who states that the definition of free time as the opposite of work describes only a part of time, and it does not provide for any idea as far as the context of the referred time is concerned. One more reason for criticism is that the definition of free time as non-working time ignores the increased time devoted to one’s responsibilities as the commuting time, looking after children, social and family obligations, etc., which restrict the the length of available free time. For these reasons, a more subjective consideration of the term would be more useful because everyone has subjective criteria as far as his or her own free time is concerned. The subjective consideration of free time is supported by many writers. Tokarski believes that free time is *individually experienced*. For Andreae free time is *the feeling that one has free time*. Neulinger believes that free time is *a state of mind*, and for Iso Ahola it is *a subjective perception* (all referred to in Opaschowski [6]). The importance of this subjective idea of free time was confirmed by a study carried out by the Institute of Free Time Research B.A.T in 1989. According to this research

53% of subjects mentioned that despite the decrease of working hours they had the feeling that they did not have enough free time [6].

BASIC THEORIES OF FREE TIME

Freyer [4] refers to two basic theories of free time established in leisure research: the so-called supplementary theory and the contradiction theory. The supplementary theory refers to work as a correction principal occupying a central role in a person’s life, while free time has a supplementary function. These theories have their origins in the 16th century Calvinist work ethics and they were very influential until the end of the industrial period. Work used to be an instrument for religious purification, while free time was considered unwanted. Later these theories were further developed by the capitalist and Marxist ideologues. In capitalism work is considered a fundamental idea because it is the only way leading to the accumulation of wealth. Free time is underestimated in relation to the settlement of the working force. In the Marxist theory *alienation in work* is enforced by the division of labor. This alienation prevents self-realization. The opposition theories refer to free time as an autonomic area of action; free time is considered to be a self-defined time which is in opposition to dependable work. The increase of free time, decrease of physical involvement in work and the emphasis on free time instead of work are considered positive. The models of morality in work such as performance and competition are not related to free time. The opposition theories are considered to be of higher importance in highly industrial societies. They contributed to the renaissance of the ideal of Greek Humanity and to reorganization of work. Work as a means to reach a goal lost its value. The increased division of labor and alienation of work in modern economies has created a greater desire for free time. A working person participates only partially in the entire production process. He lacks his co-identity with the product and experience of its success; does not take part in the entire process of its production or create his own products. During working hours the worker’s self-realization is nonexistent so he is trying to find it in his free time. Opaschowski [6] confirms the above observations in his studies carried out between 1988 and 1989. The area of free time becomes a separate and independent part in people’s life during which they find pleasure, joy

and fun. For this reason free time is considered to be worth striving for, claims Franke [4]. In that sense, today we can speak about the increased importance of free time in modern society. Jütting talks about the free time society, which developed from the industrialized society. Characteristic of this society is the affluence of goods, energy, and time and the continuous improvement of people's living conditions and economy in general. It is widely believed that the amount of free time has increased nowadays. For example, it is estimated that one-third of the increase in free time comes from a decrease in family time, and two-thirds from the decrease in professional time [9]. The evolution of free time depends on work time. Any future development in the area of free time has to be examined in relation to the development of work time, and the latter has shortened in many parts of the world. Studies have shown that the annual work time provides for reduction of the weekly working hours and increasing demands of free time in relation to the past [3]. Weekly working time is restricted in comparison to free time, which is gradually extending. It took only about one century to reduce the number of 60 working hours within six working days a week in 1900, to 35 hours within five working days a week in 1996 in the metalworking industry [6]. In general, as far as the relation of free time to working time is concerned, an even further extension of free time in comparison with the working time is expected. This is due to the reduction of working time in person's life span (longer education and early retirement with a longer life expectancy), reduction of the annual working time (longer holidays and flexible working hours) and reduction of the weekly and annual working time. In 1964 the relation between the annual free time and working time was 1:1 [9]. Only 20 years later, in the mid-1980, this relation changed to 3:2 in favor of free time [10], [1]. This speedy extension of free time led Opaschowski [6] to talk about the 'free time century'. He believes that the reason for this is the increased market productivity, which is thoroughly supported with technological development, and the limited working time, which is adapted as a means to cope with the unemployment rate. But people viewing it subjectively are unable to realize the increase in their free time. Objectively speaking – never before any generation had so much free time as it has today. For the last forty years, free time during working days has increased from 1.2 hour (Allensbach 1952) to 4.1 hours (Institute of Free

Time Research B.A.T.). Weekend free time has increased from 1.5 days to 2 days and the duration of holidays has increased from 9 to 31 days. However, this observed extension of free time is not subjectively experienced by workers [6]. Opaschowski's [6] point of view is confirmed by the result of the survey carried out by the Institute of Free Time Research B.A.T. in 1989. The majority of the subjects (53%) were complaining that despite the significant decrease in their working time they suffered from lack of free time. Rittner [8] also reports increasing complains about nervousness, stress and overpopulation. According to Rittner [8] the need for free time and the lack of it are apparent despite the extension of free time. Freyer [4] claims that the cause of it is the prosperity and the consumer's demands which increase rapidly in comparison with the available free time. Consequently, free time becomes limited. Due to the fact that free time is subjectively experienced, it seems to be limited and it is highly appreciated. It is considered valuable. Working people are trying to take advantage of every aspect of their free time for fear of losing it [6]. Consequently, this attitude creates free time anxiety experienced by many people today.

DETERMINING FACTORS AFFECTING FREE TIME BEHAVIOR

The determining factors which affect the increased appreciation of free time are demographic changes. The increased life expectancy has, for example, a great influence on demography. The expected life span of men and women during the last 125 years has doubled. In 1871 it was only 37 years, while, according to the latest figures of the Statistical Federation Service of Wiesbaden/Germany, it has increased today to 82 years for women and to 79 years for men (Federation of Statistical Service 1997). In reality, it means that more and more elderly people have the opportunity to use actively their free time. This demographic change is reflected in the quality of leisure-time activities of the elder generation because this group of people wants to spend their free time differently than the young people [6]. The increase in the number of people living alone has also a strong influence. People who are still studying, without a permanent relationship, and aged people who have lost their spouses belong to this category. Their lonely nature leads them to individualistic choices as far as their

free time is concerned, because they do not live permanently with somebody any more. People, who live alone, use a part of their free time to maintain their social relationships or to create new ones due to the lack of partner. Many lonely people devote their free time activities to seeking a partner. Another factor which affects free time behaviour is better education [8]. About 50% of the population hold now a High School Diploma. The percentage of manual workers is decreasing, while the percentage of salaried employees is constantly on the rise. Also more women are working now than in the past. The extension of free time after the Second World War goes accompanies the increasing economic production. With the limited working hours, salaries have also increased. The average hour wage in Germany in 1950 was 1.29 Deutsch marks, while in 1990 it was 20 Deutsch marks. Even if we consider the real price increase, this means that the actual payment has increased over five times [6]. This economic prosperity causes re-organization of the expenses within the family budgets. Less money need to be spent for the basic goods. Instead, more money is spent on “free” or “added” needs [4].

The better the economic situation is, the higher the need for free time activities. According to Tokarski/Schmitz-Scherzer [9] the focus on free time activities is where there is more money available for leisure. The high economic level changes not only the frequency of the activities but also their quality. Wachenfeld [10] observes that there is an important restriction in the frequency of activities such as walking, watching television or resting. On the contrary, activities such as reading, traveling and athletic activities are preferred by people in a good economic situation. Studies have shown that the available part of income has increased to 39%.

The consumption of maintenance, meaning the demand for goods, does not increase according to the economic level. On the contrary, there is a proportional demand for luxury goods. This kind of consumption is not crucial for our survival, but it makes our life “more pleasant, more beautiful and richer in experiences”. As the income and salaries increase and the prices rise, consumption for biological reasons rises faster than consumption for maintenance. Free time activities influence biotic consumption because in case of emergency one will be able to ignore these needs, if he or she needs money and time in order to fulfill more important needs for his or her life. Opaschowski [6]

states that at any economic level people spend approximately two salaries a year to cover their free time expenses. People’s behavior during their free time activities is also affected by science and technology. Because only with the increased use of technologically advanced and productive activities a higher income and a decrease in the needed time could be achieved. Technical achievements have conducted to new forms of free time activities such as television, video, computers, mountain bikes, surfing boards, etc. Due to the impact of the mass media large parts of population participate in this free time revolution. Especially, television technology in our homes has strengthened changes in free time activities [4]. Domestic appliances such as washing machines, dryers, microwave ovens, etc. are used in a large number of households today. They make housework easier and help people gain more free time. Physical involvement in working places is generally decreasing by the use of machines, and professions demanding great physical strength become gradually extinct [6]. Without economic development economic prosperity and, consequently, free time are not possible. Economy is a crucial factor which influences leisure behavior and its formation. For this reason free time plays a supplementary role in modern societies. Free time evolution and the reduction in the number of working hours needed for the acquisition of necessary goods cannot exist without economic development. As a social free space, free time needs private and public security with the provision of means, time and innovative possibilities [1]. Furthermore, free time has become an economic factor itself. Wachenfeld [10] considers economic time as a commodity because it fulfills the prerequisite of shortage, utility and desire. How important the economic benefit of free time will be in the future depends on the current economic impact, and it cannot be predicted for the time being. The increased consumption of free time has led for the last 20 years to the seven-time increase of the amount of money spent on free time activities. The importance of free time, consumption and work differ according to age. About 88% of young people aged 14-17 believe that free time is very important, while 65% believe that consumption is important, too. Work is considered to be important only for 44% of the same age group. For people aged 30-49 the figures are 74% and 53%, respectively. For people over 65 years the figure for free time is 49%, 40% for work and 39% for consumption [6]. From these results we can deduce

that young people can use consumption offers in their free time according to their income. Adults are more critical and they believe that free time is important but not dominant in their life. They can benefit from more expensive offers of spending their leisure time. For the elderly, free time is not highly appreciated, but that does not mean that they do not benefit from offers suitable for their age.

CONCLUSION

An important segment on the free time market are the athletes. Alterations of the athletic system, as a sub-system of the free time market, resulted in the extension of free time athletic services. The reasons for this are not only to be seen in the new free time awareness among the population. Other reasons, such as the general increase of free time and desire to spend more money on organized leisure [5] must be also taken into account. We can conclude as well that the increase of athletic services is due to the general ongoing social changes. Yet, the individual demands of athletic consumers are important as well as athletic consumers prefer high-quality products and individualistic services in comfortable facilities under “professional “supervision. In conclusion we can say that the tendencies in the area of free time which have been examined in this paper offer a good basis for the upgrading of free time sports activities. Essential requirements for this purpose are the adequate amount of time and efficient financial resources.

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