

HOBBY POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING¹

Summary: The paper studies the potential of pursuing a hobby in leisure time for a positive youth development and well-being. A hobby refers to voluntary, intrinsically motivated, mainly individual activities pursued in leisure time. These activities differ in their capacity for mental activation; they can be more or less creative, private or public. They are activities that an individual chooses in accordance with their interest, abilities, knowledge and resources and pursues them continually, thereby investing time and energy. A hobby can fulfill different functions: relaxation and entertainment, research and interest, ability, talent or skill development, knowledge acquisition, identity building, self-expression, personality development and so on. A hobby can be an introduction and preparation for formal studies and practices, and it can be formalized, structured and led to a certain degree. Nevertheless, hobby is a neglected research topic despite all the developmentally motivating characteristics for children and youth (and adults too); even when it is studied, specific hobbies are selected and observed in isolated manner disconnected from other variables. Empiric studies tell us that a small number of young people in Serbia have a hobby and that they devote very little time to them. This paper studies the findings related to the connection of hobbies pursued by young people in Serbia with: typical patterns of young people's behaviour in their leisure time, idol type preferences, problems that concern them, risk behaviors and in particular life satisfaction and their experience of well-being.

Key words: hobby, leisure time, positive youth development, well-being.

During leisure young people can engage in different types of activities that may have different functions. The function of some leisure activities is, above all, rest and leisure, while some activities, in addition to being fun and relaxing, can also be intellectually challenging and developmentally stimulating. In this respect Stebbins makes a clear distinction between passive casual entertainment and relatively simple activities (such as party games, for example) and active entertainment involving hobbies or amateur activities (Stebbins, 1997). Unlike relatively simple mental engagement activities, some activities may require a certain level of knowledge and skills that by practicing could be developed and refined.

The paper studies the potential that pursuing a hobby in leisure time has for a positive youth development and well-being. Hobby activities have not been sufficiently discussed in the literature, and have been neglected even in empirical studies although they may have a developmentally stimulating role.

Positive youth development and well-being

Contemporary approaches consider the well-being of children and youth from a number of different theoretical frameworks, such as: ecological theories of child development, the normative concept of child rights, and the new sociology of childhood (for

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example: Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønesand & Korbin, 2014). The broader frame of reference in which the well-being or well-being of children and youth is considered in this paper is the psychology of positive development and the positive approach to adolescence (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This approach focuses on the strengths and positive attributes of adolescence, on competencies, creativity, and desirable and possible developmental trajectories.

A positive social context and adult competencies are critical to providing the conditions for positive youth development (Larson, 2000; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). It is not enough to focus on reducing the negative effects and consequences but on making a quality life and positive development. Therefore, it is necessary to provide conditions for positive development of children and young people and to work on building and improving the quality of life, competences and creativity.

Young peoples' well-being is complex multifaceted concept that includes: objective measures of children's and adolescents' wellbeing and their living conditions; children's and adolescents' subjective well-being (perceptions, views, evaluations and aspirations); the perceptions, evaluations and aspirations of other relevant social agents (e.g. parents, teachers and professionals) regarding children's and adolescent's wellbeing (Ben Arieh et al., 2014).

Subjective well-being refers to what people think and how they feel about their lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This experience is also important from the point of view of mental and physical health, life satisfaction (enjoyment as well), support for the development of competence, creativity, wisdom and excellence. Therefore, it is important, especially when it comes to young people, to explore their experience of life satisfaction, everyday life and leisure time activities.

The formational effects of leisure activities for the cognitive, psychological and social development of young people are widely recognized in most modern societies. These activities take place using a variety of cultural tools which, starting from the socio-cultural-historical theory of L.S. Vygotsky (Plut, 2003; Vigotski, 2005; Vygotsky, 1983), have a significant formative role for the development of higher mental functions and personality, giftedness and talent (Ivić, 2005; Krnjaić, 2002).

The importance of interest during leisure time is evidenced also by the data which was obtained on the basis of follow up of the first large group of gifted children. Specifically, subjects from the Terman's Group in childhood and adolescence expressed interest in many fields. As adults they continued to cultivate a wide range of leisure interests and activities, that were not directly related to their professional activities, such as hobbies, leisure, engaging in various activities related to the community in which they live through membership in various organized groups and participation to a significant degree in civic, educational, cultural and other programs of value to society and the community (Oden, 1968). More recent research empirically confirms that interests are linked, among other things, to learning and developing talents and creativity (Maksić, 2018).

Young people choose hobbies as well as other extracurricular activities, and enjoy them based on their interests, not school requirements, achievements or external gratifications such as grades and meeting various formal conditions and obligations. Adolescents' leisure time activities is an area of activities rich in context, ranging from the participation of young people in different cultural activities, hobbies, entertainment, sport activities and a part of extra-curriculum educational activities. The quality of mentioned leisure time activities is a matter of special consideration (concerning context and age).

Young people's leisure time activities could be (very) intellectually challenging, such as computer programming and design activities, software problem solving, designing

scientific experiments, and composing. Besides, these activities could be valid predictors of young people's (later) talented achievements in adulthood (Milgram & Hong, 1993).

Three major categories of youth activities during leisure time are most often distinguished (Pešić et al., 2014; Zick, 2010): out-of-school work which includes learning, home affairs and income-generating work; leisure activities that can be structured (organized extracurricular activities and sports trainings) and unstructured activities (leisure).

A special category of activities that should also be distinguished and to which the hobby would belong is category related to the activities that have the features of active leisure, which are mentally demanding and/or creative to some extent, and which young people structure themselves. In relation to other leisure time activities that young people engage in, hobby has some specifics, first of all, in terms of structuring, because it is not an externally driven, organized and structured activity, nor is it passive unstructured spending time, but an activity that young people structure themselves as it suits them not in terms of timing and timetable and guided, as is the case with sports training, for example.

A hobby refers to voluntary, intrinsically motivated, autotelic, mainly individual activities pursued in leisure time. These activities differ in their capacity for mental activation; they can be more or less creative, private or public. An individual chooses hobby activities in accordance with their interests, abilities, knowledge and resources and pursues them continually, thereby investing time and energy. A hobby can fulfill different functions: relaxation and entertainment, enabling research and interest, ability, talent or skill development, knowledge acquisition, identity building, self-expression and personality development.

A hobby can be an introduction and preparation for formal studies and practices, and can, in itself, be formalized, structured and led to a certain degree (in some way or in a segment), but it is primarily young person's independent and individual organization and structuring of activities. When we talk about hobbies, we mean individual, self-structured activities, mostly related to creative manifestations, first of all, in the arts (e. g. composing, poetry writing and jewelry making) or in some fields of science and technology (e.g. modeling and programming).

What do empirical findings tell us?

Despite all mentioned supportive characteristics of hobby activities for young peoples' development, empirical data show that passive and receptive ("consuming") type of leisure activities dominate among young people (Cvetičanin, 2007; De Bruyn & Cillessen, 2008; Krnjaić, Stepanović & Pavlović Babić, 2011; Pešić et al., 2014; Stanojević, 2012; Stepanovic, Videnovic & Plut, 2009;).

The research into everyday life of young people within the project of the Institute of Psychology was conducted on a sample of high school students from 10 cities in Serbia (2007, N = 2500; 2015, N = 1404; 2018, N = 1358). The research was carried out in the form of a questionnaire designed for this purpose and completed by the students during regular school class. The questionnaire, within the leisure segment, also examined hobbies young people are engaged in. Hobbies are determined through creative activities that relate to engaging in: writing, painting, music, designing, artwork, technique. The questionnaire in the latest survey (conducted in 2018) also includes hobbies that were not highlighted in previous research because of the new technical possibilities and resources used by young people. More precisely, the questionnaire covered the following hobbies: blog writing; creative writing (prose and poetry); drawing / painting; graphic design; composing music and playing instruments; making jewelry, clothing and decorative objects; programming; collecting

(postcards, stamps, etc.); artistic photography. Students assessed how often they engaged in these hobbies (never, occasionally, regularly).

Several research questions have been asked regarding hobbies in these studies, some of which are: How much do adolescents engage in particular hobbies (creative activities) during their leisure time? How are hobbies related to typical patterns of youth behavior during leisure? Is there a relationship between adolescents' hobbies and idol preferences? What is the relationship between hobbies and the subjective experience of adolescent well-being?

How do young people in Serbia usually spend their leisure time? Results show that young people mostly spend their free time hanging out with friends and peers, watching TV, with computer / internet, and with mobile phone and listening to music with a boyfriend / girlfriend or alone. High school students are less involved in sports and spend less time reading books and creatively engaging in hobbies (Krnjaić et al., 2011; Pešić et al., 2014).

Only a small number of adolescents regularly take part in creative activities and when they do so according to data from a survey conducted in 2007 and in 2015 they mostly engage in: music, playing and composing (6.3%; 6.9), creative writing (5.7%; 2.6%), drawing and painting (5.6%; 8.8%), programming (3.0%; 4.3%) graphic design (2.8%; 3.1%) and making jewelry and clothing (1.8%; 1.3%) (Davidović, Vuletić & Krnjaić, 2016; Krnjaić & Stepanović Ilić, 2013). Among other hobbies, hobbies represented in the latest research (in 2018) deal with art photography 5.8% and blogging 4.9%.

Typical patterns of young people's behaviour in their leisure time identified by factor analysis (Stepanović, Videnović & Plut, 2009) are: academic orientation, orientation towards sports, orientation towards entertainment, orientation towards spending time going out and orientation towards music and computers. As very rare creative activities were not included in empirical set of data for identification of leisure behaviour patterns. So, for each identified behaviour pattern two groups of respondents were compared in terms of engaging in creative activities: the upper 25 percentiles and the lower 25 percentiles (Krnjaic & Stepanovic Ilic, 2012; 2013).

Results show that adolescents engaged in creative activities, no matter which, incline more towards academic leisure pattern. On the other hand adolescents not engaged in creative activities (except in arts and crafts), spend more time in entertainment. Regarding engagement in creative activities adolescents differ in leisure pattern (active, intellectual vs. passive, consuming). The most strongly correlated demographic variables with creative activities are family variables - socio-economic status and cultural-pedagogical family level. Results confirm relevance of cultural tools and knowledge in supporting academic, intellectual leisure behavior pattern and creative activities.

Hobby and idol type preferences. Based on the respondents' answers, 6 types of idols that young people admire were classified. Classified idol types are within different domains: show business (actors, musicians, TV personalities -TV presenters, fashion models, reality stars, bloggers and You tubers); sport; politics (politicians and rulers); science and art; entrepreneurship and fiction (Stepanović Ilić, Blažanin & Mojović, 2017). The relationship between idol types and hobbies was tested by crosstabs and one way ANOVA. This research has revealed the connection between hobby practicing and admiring particular idol types (Krnjaić & Stepanović Ilić, 2017). Adolescents engaged in hobbies differ from those who do not practice hobbies regarding type of idol preferences and there are differences in number of hobbies regarding idol type preferences and differences in idol type preferences regarding how often adolescents practice hobbies. The most salient finding shows that adolescents admiring sportsmen do not incline to hobby practicing. Unlike those who love sportsmen,

youngsters appreciating show business celebrities or scientist/artists usually practice several such activities.

These results need to be further explored but they can be associated with the fact that girls prefer show business individuals over sportsmen and that they are more often engaged in hobby activities (Davidović, Vuletić & Krnjaić, 2016). The differences point to the importance of adolescents' interests, especially in sports and show business, and have significant practical implications when it comes to youth education and the role of the media (and messages sent through the media).

Wellbeing and hobby practicing. Concerning wellbeing The EPOCH scale was applied (Measure of Adolescent Well - being, Kern, Benson, Steinberg & Steinberg, 2016). The EPOCH scale (Likert scale, 1-5) consists of five different positive characteristics that support higher levels of well-being:

- Engagement (the capacity to become absorbed in and focused on what one is doing, as well as involvement and interest in life activities and tasks);
- Perseverance (refers to the ability to pursue one's goals to completion, persistence)
- Optimism (confidence and hopefulness about the future, a tendency to take a favorable view of things, and evaluating negative events as temporary, external and specific to situation);
- Connectedness (sense that one has satisfying relationships with others, believing that one is cared for and valued, and providing support to others);
- Happiness (steady states of positive mood and feeling content with life, rather than momentary emotion).

Results confirm that the more adolescents are engaged in different hobbies the more positive wellbeing aspects are expressed (Vuletić & Krnjaić, 2019). Also, in a qualitative analysis of high school students' time diary, extracurricular activities and hobbies, as expected, are significantly more often described as mentally demanding and important for the development of competencies and identity, compared to passive leisure activities (Pešić et al., 2014).

Concerning wellbeing and hobby practicing (Vuletić & Krnjaić, 2019), results also show that engagement is the most dominant aspect of well-being in all hobbies. Different well-being experiences are established among adolescents who practice different hobbies. Engaging in painting and writing could be estimated as positive developmental coping strategy in overcoming socio-economic family limitations and difficulties in peer relations. On the other side, programming and graphic design are connected only with positive well-being aspects and other aspects concerning relations to important others.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the hobby stands out as a special type of activity among the activities that young people engage in in their leisure time. Hobby refers to primarily individual activities and young people's active leisure time organizing and structuring. Hobby can fulfill various functions in the life of young people: provide rest and leisure, enable research and development of interests and talents, improve a knowledge and skills, creative expression, identity development, and have a protective mental hygienic role. There are grounds for further study of particular hobbies and their specific potentials to support youth development.

The findings of the presented research on youth in Serbia confirm the importance of the role of supportive context, particularly cultural tools and significant adults in supporting

young people's academic, intellectual behavior patterns and creative activities in leisure time. It is important for young people, particularly adolescents, to be exposed to cultural and supportive tools in the family. Therefore, young people from the disadvantaged groups need much more socio-cultural support for developmentally enriching way of spending time in the form of organized activities at school and in the community.

Practical implications are that hobbies need to be nurtured. It is important for parents and other significant adults to expose children to a wide range of experiences and to strive to develop their interests.

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