

Contemporary conditions of recreational activity

Współczesne uwarunkowania aktywności rekreacyjnej

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Abstract

Active human recreational behaviour is a result of both internal, subjective as well as external, situational factors. The need for emotional stimulation is a significant factor determining the form of recreational activity. It inspires man to engage in risky behaviour to have new, strong emotional experiences. This need is best explained by Zuckerman's concept. The search for experiences is biologically conditioned. Promoting a trend for recreational activity to the society is the result of perceiving its positive impact on man's health. On the other hand, the progressing commercialisation of all spheres of social life has contributed to the promotion of recreational activity as a product for sale. For people, recreational activity is an embodiment of free choice and allows for full creation, which corresponds to the fact that in post-industrial societies it removes work from the centre of social systems. The best effects for man are brought by recreational activity carried out as an expression of the internal needs of an individual.

Keywords: recreation, free time, motivation

Introduction

Consumerism has become a peculiar sign of our times. Everything has become a commodity, everything is for sale. A classic example of this is the organization of commercial expeditions to Mount Everest. Therefore, the question arises, what are the mental determinants determining the individual's preferences regarding selection of active forms of recreation from the rich offer available on the market? What human needs do these offers refer to? Are there any noticeable characteristic trends?

There is no doubt that human behaviour is conditioned by subjective factors related to the personality of the individual and situational factors, i.e. the conditions in which he/she currently functions [1]. It follows that the recreational activity undertaken by a person depends on the internal conditions of behaviour, in particular the structure of his/her personality and situational excitement.

When considering the factors conditioning recreational activities, we should also remember that currently a significant part of the world's population lives in cities. Unlike the natural environment, they are an artificial environment that does not meet basic human needs, guaranteeing harmonious functioning.

The need for emotional stimulation and recreational activity

Following various offers related to recreational activity, we notice that they often relate to the personality traits of individuals. For example, information about numerous newly established ropes courses indicates that they relate to brave and fit people [2]. Published a few years ago, the book *Travels with adrenaline* is largely addressed to people who are looking for strong sensations, sometimes on the verge of risk. After entering *Extreme sports* in Google's search engine, it displays an unbelievable number of 883 million results (data as of 19 October 2018).

A feature of contemporary times is, it seems, a constant search for new, strong emotional impressions. According to J. Szczeński technical civilization, *producing entertainment at an accelerated pace, also breeds exponentially growing boredom and dissatisfaction. The consumption civilisation creates feedback and mechanisms that create a desire for the extraordinary* [3].

Every living being must be active. This applies to both muscles and the brain. Man deprived of any occupation is looking for a goal on his/her own. By undertaking various forms of activity, including recreational, we strive to find a balance between low and high levels of activation. Therefore, we are looking for a level that is optimal to us, according to Donald Hebb's concept

[4]. It is easy to see that there are significant individual differences associated with the optimal level of stimulation. This can be seen by observing the emotional reactions of tourists in the mountains. In some, the exposure causes fear and even terror, while others are in a state of excitement.

Marvin Zuckerman called this tendency to seek or avoid strong stimulation sensation seeking. We therefore strive to experience new, intense sensations and to this end we are willing to take risks, even exposing ourselves to life-threatening situations [5]. Zuckerman's concept draws attention to the biological background of the phenomenon of sensation seeking. People looking for exciting sensations are characterised by low levels of activation, i.e. a low degree of central nervous system stimulation. On the other hand, people who avoid strong emotional sensations have a high level of activation, i.e. a strong degree of stimulation of the central nervous system.

Four factors shaping the need for emotional stimulation are distinguished: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition and boredom susceptibility [5]. Thrill and adventure seeking is most strongly associated with a passion for physically risky activity in the fresh air, exploration, hiking in undisturbed areas, jungles, deserts, and conquering mountain peaks. An example of this type of activity is the feat of Mateusz Waligóra, who traversed the Gobi Desert on his own. It is worth mentioning that these exploits, widely popularised by the media, are an inspiration to others. A number of recent extreme sports or tourist disciplines, such as: skateboarding, canyoning, kitesurfing, alpine skiing, meet the need to seek for sensations.

Experience seeking is expressed through the search for a non-conformist lifestyle, unplanned trips with a one-way ticket, abandoning daily routine. Disinhibition is characterised by a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, a tendency to seek relaxation through alcohol abuse, sex, and gambling. Boredom susceptibility means a reluctance to any monotony, to perform the same activities, reacting with anxiety to repetitive stereotypical situations. We want to break away from monotonous and therefore boring activities, or the company of people whose presence is troublesome to us. Regular recreational activity may thus be viewed by the individual as a counterweight to the uniform current of daily duties.

It would be difficult to explicitly subordinate certain forms of recreational behaviour to specific factors identified by Zuckerman. However, one can see that emerging recreational centres, such as the aforementioned ropes courses, aqua parks, amusement parks, ski resorts, are focused on providing clients with a wide range of sensations and preventing monotony by systematically enriching and diversifying their offer. For this reason, it is assumed that clients will not show their own inventions, so they are presented with an offer of various attractive activities. We classify a number of leisure activities as forms of disinhibition. By that I mean excessive alcohol consumption during holidays, sexual freedom and even sexual tourism [6]. Being outside

the place of permanent residence we feel free from the restrictions that restrain us. We live a different rhythm, in a different reality, our behaviour is regulated by tourist culture [7].

People with a high level of activation, i.e. a strong degree of stimulation of the central nervous system, will look for forms of recreation that allow for internal peace, which is facilitated by contact with the natural environment. Summer villages, located in an ecologically clean environment are intended for people seeking a break from the hustle and bustle of modern civilisation. This is particularly important in the context of the aging European societies. The leisure offer for people after the age of 50 years old available on the tourist market is proof of the importance of the problem. For those who want to party, have fun, there are loud resorts with all available forms of entertainment and constantly enriched attractions.

The discussed Zuckerman research allowed to formulate some generalisations regarding the process of sensation seeking. It has been documented that men seek sensations more than women. However, Waszyńska's research shows that the number of girls with a psychological gender defined as androgynous increases, which means that their personality is a mixture of male and female elements [8]. As one can see, women already play sports considered to be typically for men: boxing, judo, weightlifting, bodybuilding. The dramatic increase in the number of androgynous girls seems to be an expression of gender emancipation and the desire to change traditional gender stereotypes. It can therefore be assumed that Zuckerman's thesis will lose its validity over the years. In turn, young people outweigh the level of sensation seeking of elderly. In the opinion of Zuckerman, people looking for strong emotional stimulation are characterised by a rich imagination, they are original and innovative.

External and internal motivation in recreational activity

At the beginning of the article it was stated that taking up recreational activity by a person depends on the internal conditions of behaviour and external situational excitement. This means that recreational activity can be initiated due to both internal and external motivation. *Internal motivation is usually understood as the tendency of the individual to undertake and continue an action because of the very content of this activity* [9]. Ryan and Deci define internal motivation as *an innate tendency to look for novelties and challenges, to develop and improve one's own abilities, explore and learn* [10].

Leisure activities, hiking, cycling, canoeing are generally internally motivated. This type of motivation has its origins in the individual's internal qualities, personality traits or interests. Internal motivation is characterised by autonomy and a sense of competence occurring in the individual. Leisure time activity becomes a factor that creates identity of the individual in a greater degree than professional work. Referring to Neulinger's the-

ory, it can be stated that recreation gives the individual freedom of choice and the opportunity to be in harmony with oneself. We do what we want to do, no one imposes anything on us [11].

Observation of a child who practices roller-skating for a long time, despite frequent falls, leads to the conclusion that it performs this activity as a result of its own desire and not of someone's command, i.e. the child's action will be considered autonomous. Despite the falls, the child continues to exercise, which proves its belief that it is able to master roller-skating. In this case, we are talking about its competence.

According to the self-determination theory, the aforementioned sense of autonomy and competence is the key to understanding the essence of internal motivation. People have an innate tendency to explore unknown stimuli or take on challenges to prove their skills or competences. They are then capable of long-term effort, working at the limit of their capabilities [12].

External motivation is the result of external influences, for example an advert. Therefore, external motivation includes behaviours focused on external effects, gaining recognition of others, keeping up with current trends and not on the elimination of internal stress [13]. In activating social recreational activity, we use various stimuli as a temptation to act. If we watch a colourful commercial of an amusement park, we receive a signal about the potential for experiencing strong emotions. Due to the commercialisation of recreational activities, we often encounter these types of advertising incentives to encourage us to a given form of recreational activity. They refer, among others, to the already mentioned emotions or prevailing trend or to interpersonal competition by including the slogan *Your neighbours have not been here yet*.

Jacek Gracz made an attempt to determine the psychosocial dimensions of recreation, i.e. the factors determining participation in this form of activity. He distinguished five basic dimensions:

- Dimension of rest – associated with the desire to comply with principles of health, the desire to improve the efficiency of the body, a specific figure.
- Dimension of entertainment and fun – combined with experiencing positive emotions resulting from a given form of activity, giving the opportunity to remove oneself from the problems of everyday life.
- Dimension of leisure time – giving the opportunity to act beyond responsibilities, make decisions as a result of one's free choice.
- Dimension of self-improvement – stimulating the ability to act in accordance with interests and to strive for their development.
- Dimension of motor activity – activating motor involvement, related to capability, referring to the natural need for movement [14].

The sport engagement model created by Tara Scanlan and her colleagues is useful for explaining the problem of recreational

behaviour motivation [15]. The theoretical basis of the model is, among others, a concept that the individual performs an activity because he/she so desires (internal motivation) or should (external motivation). In the case of the former, we identify the activity because it is interesting and attractive to us, in the latter we do it because of social pressure. We may assume that some people play golf for reputational reasons, just like playing tennis is in good taste.

By modifying Scanlan's model for the needs of recreational activity, we can assume that the most important factors of involvement in this activity are:

- Satisfaction with participation in a given form of recreation. It is expressed by the intensity of positive emotional states accompanying recreational activities.
- Favourable circumstances, for example, the proximity of a lake, where we do water sports, an attractive company with which we participate in a given form of recreation.
- Social trend. People don't want to stay outside the mainstream events. If any form of recreational activity gains social recognition, becomes popular, our commitment is strengthened further. This way, for example, recreational running has become trendy.

According to Poldichak, *people choose forms of recreation that complement their daily lifestyle primarily to deconstruct social and biographical inequalities, and thus create new relationships and bonds based on equality between different people*. Country people feeling attracted to a city is just one kind of this deconstruction. Also participation in large mass events, such as street marathon runs, blurs the differences between people who become a certain unity [16].

Another explanation of human recreational preferences is given in the theory of personal contacts [16]. It shows that recreational activity depends on the social environment in which we operate, i.e. families, friends and acquaintances. If in childhood we and our parents participated in skiing trips, then it is very likely that in the future we will continue this form of activity on our own.

Forms of recreation, e.g. fitness, have become very popular in our country. Their attractiveness, aesthetic and health values were the causes of it [17]. Their promotion was a response to social expectations of, above all, women striving to achieve a slim figure, to gain the ability to move effectively, as well as obtain internal satisfaction and joy.

A factor that weakens the interest in active forms of recreation can be competitive alternatives, for example, computer games, which especially distract children and youth from physical activities. For some time, we have been observing the tendency of city residents to spend their free time in large shopping centres, which have become a kind of walking promenade. It was mentioned at the outset that a significant proportion of societies live in cities. Typical features of large cities include: population density, noise, heavy traffic, high pace of inhabitants' life, envi-

ronmental pollution, lack of green areas [18].

At the turn of the 1950s, the awareness of ecological threats related to life in large urban agglomerations began to spread, especially in American society. The relationship between human behaviour and diseases of modern civilisation was recognised. People became interested in lifestyle and its quality. We will assume that the indicators of the quality of life are components that are: physical, mental, social, interpersonal [19].

The measure of physical components can be the general state of physical well-being, associated with the level of body efficiency, human fitness, and health. Engaging reasonably in physical activity improves the mechanisms responsible for transporting oxygen in the body, stimulates tissue regeneration processes, shifts the fatigue threshold towards higher intensity of effort, slows down the aging process of the body [20]. Physical activity, e.g. mountain tourism, plays an important role in the course of a stressful transaction. Physical effort occurring when climbing the summit can help reduce emotional tension, reduce anxiety or anger. When we finally reach the top and watch the panorama, we feel content and satisfied even after returning from the trip. We feel physical fatigue, but we are mentally relaxed [21].

Mental components of the quality of life include the general human mood, relaxation and self-control, a sense of energy and contentment, optimism, and the ability to enjoy life. We are filled with joy and satisfaction after a successful downhill skiing, during which skis are like an extension of our limbs and we feel a sense of full control over our own activities. This state of satisfaction Csikszentmihalyi calls a flow state. Social components are determined by the possibility of achieving satisfaction from work or one's own business activity, having enough free time and the ability to use it in accordance with one's own expectations. Interpersonal components of the quality of life are associated with having an appropriate number and quality of social contacts in relation to our needs or the possibility of obtaining social support in various social situations. Please note that the participants of our recreational activity are people with whom we willingly spend time and have emotional ties.

The change in lifestyle observed today is expressed, among other things, by a change in human attitudes towards work and leisure. In post-industrial societies, we see a tendency to push out work from the centre of social systems. Its place is taken by leisure and entertainment [22]. Leisure time activity becomes a factor that defines identity of the individual in a greater degree than professional work. The high rate of people per unit area in cities, for example in Warsaw, it significantly exceeds 3 000 people per km², may cause a person to feel uncomfortable due to the crowd, negative emotional states, and an increase in aggressive tendencies [23].

Saint-Marc [24] in his book *Przyroda dla człowieka* (Socialisation of nature) (wrote about the desires of the inhabitants of large agglomerations to be outside the city, in the countryside, in the woods, by the water. This tendency can be explained by

referring to Wilson's concept of biophilia [25]. According to this concept, man has innate, derived from phylogenesis, tendencies to reside in the natural environment. There he/she can relax, reducing urban tension, stress, and anxiety. Secondly, the natural scenery attracts involuntary human attention, which also promotes relaxation and regeneration. The original natural landscape increases the individual's sense of competence and control. The tendency observed for a number of years of citizens owning summer houses in the countryside or locating settlements on the outskirts of cities is this desire to be closer to the natural environment.

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Streszczenie

Aktywne zachowania rekreacyjne człowieka są efektem zarówno czynników wewnętrznych, podmiotowych, jak również czynników zewnętrznych, sytuacyjnych. Istotnym czynnikiem determinującym formę aktywności rekreacyjnej jest potrzeba stymulacji emocjonalnej. Skłania ona człowieka do podejmowania ryzykownych zachowań, aby przeżywać nowe, silne doznania emocjonalne. Potrzebę tę najpełniej wyjaśnia koncepcja Zuckermana. Poszukiwanie doznań jest uwarunkowane biologicznie. Propagowanie w społeczeństwie mody na aktywność rekreacyjną jest efektem dostrzegania jej pozytywnego wpływu na zdrowie człowieka. Z drugiej strony postępująca komercjalizacja wszelkich sfer życia społecznego przyczyniła się do propagowania aktywności rekreacyjnej jako produktu na sprzedaż. Aktywność rekreacyjna jest dla człowieka ucieleśnieniem wolnego wyboru i pozwala na pełną kreację, co koresponduje z faktem, iż w społeczeństwach postindustrialnych wypiera ona pracę z centrum społecznych układów. Najlepsze efekty dla człowieka przynosi aktywność rekreacyjna uprawiana jako wyraz wewnętrznych potrzeb jednostki.

Słowa kluczowe: rekreacja, czas wolny, motywacja
